

Portraits in the Background of “Nothingness” Sheikh Jabber Burnt House, an Object of Persian Gulf War

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ABSTRACT

War is a common heritage of Middle East, the experience of war was changed to a dramatic propaganda in Iran while the southern neighbor of Iran experienced it in another way: oblivion. In such a context, both states attempt to change the facts of the war, one to a process of sanctification and one to the portraits of nothingness. We, as archaeologists, were accidentally encountered with a heritage of Persian Gulf War during a contemporary archaeology project. Our curiosity made us to take a look at Jabber house, a forgotten building, a domestic architecture destroyed by a racket during the war. What was recorded in our frames was actually an artistic work, out of its original context. Our subjectivity as archaeologists made us to think about the other objects fossilized in museums, they are out of their painful context and structure, they are only beautiful, the portraits in the background of nothingness, in a burnt gallery. Persian Gulf War is treated in Kuwait as a negative heritage, what is discussed in this article as the main theme...a negative heritage lost its original context and meaning: Sheikh Jabber house.

Résumé: La guerre est un héritage commun au Moyen-Orient, l'expérience de la guerre a pris la forme d'une propagande dramatique en Iran alors que le Koweït, voisin méridional de l'Iran, en a fait l'expérience d'une autre manière : l'oubli. Dans un tel contexte, les deux états se sont efforcés de modifier les faits de la guerre, l'un en faveur d'un processus de sanctification et l'autre pour en dresser le portrait dans un décor du néant. En notre qualité d'archéologues, nous avons par hasard découvert un héritage de la Guerre du Golfe persique durant un projet contemporain d'archéologie. Notre curiosité nous a poussés à examiner la demeure Jabber, une bâtisse oubliée, une architecture locale détruite par un raid pendant la guerre. Ce que nous avons capturé sur nos clichés était en fait

une œuvre d'art, extraite de son contexte original. Notre subjectivité d'archéologues nous a conduit à penser aux autres objets fossilisés dans les musées, ils sont en dehors de leur contexte douloureux et de leur structure, ils ne sont que beaux, des portraits dans un décor du néant, dans une galerie incendiée. La Guerre du Golfe persique est traitée au Koweït comme un héritage négatif, quel est donc le thème principal discuté dans cet article ? un héritage négatif ayant perdu son contexte et sa signification d'origine : la Demeure du Sheikh Jabber.

Resumen: La guerra es un patrimonio común de Oriente Medio, la experiencia de la guerra fue convertida en una propaganda dramática en Irán, mientras que el vecino del sur de Irán, Kuwait, lo experimentó de otra forma: olvido. En un contexto así, ambos estados intentan cambiar los hechos de la guerra, uno hacia un proceso de santificación y el otro hacia los retratos al fondo de la nada. Nosotros, como arqueólogos, nos topamos accidentalmente con un patrimonio de la Guerra del Golfo Pérsico durante un proyecto de arqueología contemporáneo. Nuestra curiosidad nos hizo echar un vistazo a la casa Jabber, un edificio olvidado, una arquitectura doméstica destruida por unos disturbios durante la guerra. Lo que fue registrado en nuestros fotogramas era realmente un trabajo artístico, fuera de su contexto original. Nuestra subjetividad como arqueólogos nos hizo pensar en los otros objetos fosilizados en los museos, están fuera de su penoso contexto y estructura, son solamente bellos, los retratos al fondo de la nada, en una galería quemada. La Guerra del Golfo Pérsico es tratada en Kuwait como un patrimonio negativo, ¿qué se debate en este artículo como el tema principal? Un patrimonio negativo perdido su contexto y significado originales: la Casa del Jeque Jabber.

KEY WORDS

Negative heritage, Persian Gulf War, Subjectivity, Museum objects, Decontextualized

Introduction

I still remember my father in his green military uniform, and my mother seeing him off in a cloud of smoke produced by burning rue.¹ My father put his hands on my shoulder and said he's going to rescue our country from the enemy; that I should learn that when I grew up, I should also fight for my country; that I should always be the soldier of my country.

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He said it is our blood surviving the borders of this land.... My father left, forever. During a longtime process, he was finished off in the generation of war, and my generation is passing by the inheritance of war to the next one: in my country, Iran, war is a holy object whose pains are going to be forgotten passing through just one generation.

Less than one generation after my father and his friends—heroes of war against Iraq—their letters, equipments, bones and clothes are displayed in shiny firm show cases. We can go to the museums to see them; we can read the letters and watch their belongings... My father and the keen pain of our family and all same families are fossilized in this objects; the pain from which we are no longer suffering.

Objects in museums have no context. Even if observers of “how they have been made” and “how they are being thrown away” still breathe, the things exhibited in museums hide human pains inside them in an objectified way; “the objection which misses the point of dwelling” (Ingold 2000:510). Objects set in the show cases of museums are now simply beautiful and at best, they indicate a temporal, non human, process. In this case, the subject’s nature transforms to an object (see Shanks and Tilley 1992:111). They indicate the time technology was high enough to produce such an object. It materializes the very skills and techniques shaping it (Edgeworth 2006:11).

Is it possible that negativity of a heritage and gradual extinguishment of its context change it to an artistic piece of work without any human aspects? Is it possible that a museum object or an ancient monument lacks the aspects of events took place during the process of its construction? Is it possible that omitting or formalizing a painful human process lead to changes in the meaning of the object? ...Is it possible that a keen pain is being hidden behind the beauty of an object exhibited in the museum? “it seems that it is the time of Archaeology for both Iran–Iraq and Persian Gulf war, the data which should be deployed by archaeology which preserves thingliness of the thing without being trapped in verbal discourse.” (González-Ruibal 2008) These are what have come into question 2 years after our visit to a monument ruined in Persian Gulf War in Kuwait and consulting about it. Just 2 years after our visit, we remembered that there is some amount of pain hidden behind the monument; a kind of pain which, in the process of time is no longer a cry: it is only an object.

Heritage of the Persian Gulf War: a Negative Heritage

Al-Kuwait was attacked and completely ruined within just 2 days by Iraq army from north and US army from south and north-east. It was terribly demolished and its buildings were completely destroyed (see Congressional

Record 2002). No detail has been released about the number of Kuwaitis killed and injured, but researches on American soldiers participating in this war, shows that some wounds had not healed by the middle of 1990s (Zwerling et al. 2000) as a result of using weapons which could certainly have the same effect on Kuwaitis. They seem to have imagined that Iraq would never invade (Halliday 1991). Interviews with witnesses show that residents and especially foreigners living in Kuwait had immediately left the city and run away to Saudi Arabia. “In the mid-1990 the government of Kuwait reports that the country’s pre-invasion population was approximately 2,142,600 persons of whom 1,316,014 were expatriate workers and their dependants. In the months following the invasion Kuwait population has estimated to have decreased to nearly 492000, 50% Kuwaiti nationals and 90% of expatriate population leaving the country” (Lauterpacht and Greenwood 2004). The question is, in spite of relatively widespread damage of war to the land, why Kuwait government has not established a museum concentrating on destroyed buildings yet?

Iraq army, during Saddam Hussein presidency, invaded Kuwait about 2 years after finishing the war against Iran and signing the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598 (August 20, 1988) (Clark Arend 1990) and calling the ceasefire. However, the policies adopted by both invaded countries on war heritage are completely different.

In Iran, fighting against Iraq is called as a holy defense. According to the UN, Iraq was the one who declared war on Iran, so that this war is known as fighting against world imperialism or a holy defense by Iran government. Also the victims in this war are known as martyrs.² “The fact that Iran is a Shiite and Persian country, made for a range of colorful symbols and fervent war propaganda” (Rajaei 1997). Although Iranians and Iraqis believe to have same religion, the propaganda of Iran government introduced the war as the one in which the truth or Islam fights against the lie or heresy. Thirty years after the war began and 20 years after the ceasefire, the symbols of war are still considered as the religious ones, and are used in religious ceremonies and in rites the government conducts. Cotton, checkered cloths which are called *Chafieh* and had been used by Iranian soldiers, plaques of their identity and etc are still utilized by the propaganda (see Peterson 2010). “Iran–Iraq war is an example of such conflicts living on as history and propaganda—shaping attitudes, behavior and material culture even in time of peace” (Saunders 2002:101). Twenty years after the war stopped, institutions dealing with issues of victims of war have still survived. “There is a ready-made constituency to support continuing the war” (Pelletiere 1992:58).

Despite of lasting two generations from the end of the war, discussions about the reasons of the start and end of the war is a taboo (for censorship,

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see Noorani 1991) this taboo has been broken only by migrants whom have been away from the sanctifier atmosphere of war.

In different cities of Iran symbols of war are designed as wall paintings and large posters of war are put up as banners. Physical data of war is recorded in the Iranian memory as chosen symbols (see Lillios 1999:258) the mentioned findings with their new governmental meaning results in new social relationships and meanings (Johnson 1999:128). Although two generations have gone by, any discussions about the reasons of the outbreak of war, its continuity and the ceasefire is strictly taboo in Iran. Up to now, it was broken only by a few observers who have immigrated and have gone a long way from the atmosphere sacralizing the war. Iran–Iraq war made Iran break up its relationship with neighbor countries, and it was just after Iraqi's invasion of Kuwait that Iran made diplomatic efforts to improve its relationship with countries which had helped Saddam Hussein in war. "The Gulf Crisis and the ensuing second Gulf war in 1990–1991, gave Tehran the opportunity to prove its commitment to improving relations. Throughout the Crisis and the war, Iran remained militarily neutral and called for the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait" (Marshall 2003:204).

In spite of relative improvements in relationship with Muslim countries of the region, state media of Iran is still arguing about their aids to the former government of Iraq.

In Kuwait, there is a totally different point of view on war against Iraq. It seems that, contrary to Iran, in Kuwait the heritage of war is not a matter of propaganda because of lingual and ethnic similarities between Kuwaitis and Iraqis. In spite of pushing Iraq out of Kuwait (of course, by the means of International helps) and certain defeat of Saddam (Heradstveit and Bonham 1996:272), there is no especial symbol of Kuwait war in the city, and even it is forgotten how the houses were destroyed during the war. The generation who was then in his childhood has no memory but escaping or short-time difficulties of war, and this fact is seemingly because these memories have not been repeated by media propaganda. There is even no certain statistical data published by media about data and sites destroyed during the war (Pollock and Lutz 1994). We launched an interview with residents of the town Kuwait to find out how the monument known as Diwanieh³ was destroyed, but we didn't come to any conclusion: no one could remember the bombardment of Diwanieh. Some said it was ruined before the war, and even some people assumed that it was because of not being used for a long time; the assumption which is totally rejected, taking the center of gravity of the monument and symmetry of destruction into account. . However, memories are easily forgotten, and the retrieval of memories, through the act of remembering, is inexact and faulty

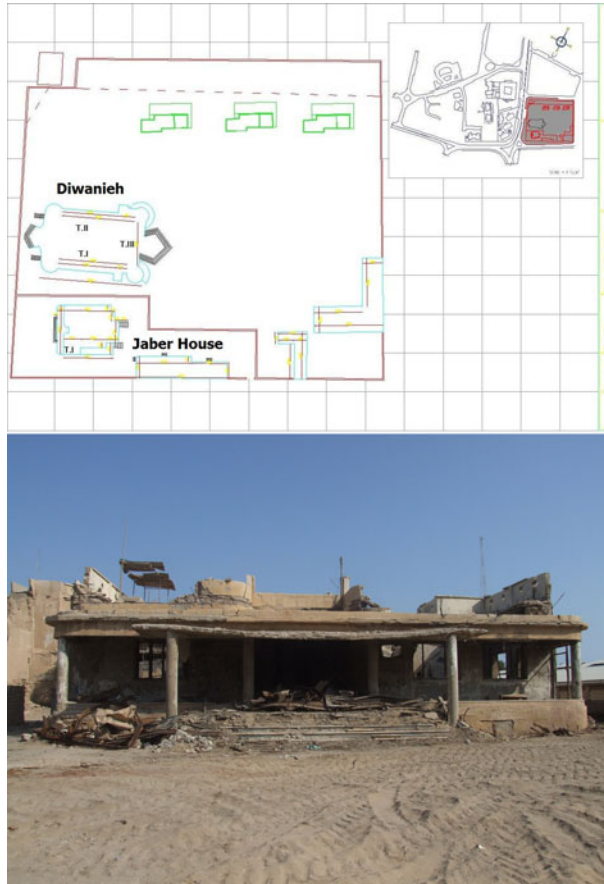


Figure 1. Map of Diwanieh and Jaber's house. Jaber's house (northern view)

(Jones 2007). Excavation revealed the truth; the lower part of the bomb destroying Diwanieh was identified in trench 2!! (Figure 1).

Kuwaiti children, contrary to the Iranian, do not remember the war. Iranian children steadily repeat the memory of 8 years of Iran–Iraq war in their childish songs, school books, and TV programs. Heads of war are represented as great heroes to the children and they review this memory in museums and site-museums. Kuwaitis children do not have any memory of the war since the image which their parents represent is a terrible short-lived crisis which was difficult, but finally it was over. Politically, Iraq is a friend of today Kuwait and the problems were caused by a man who is not here anymore: Saddam. The Iran government, meanwhile, considers him as just one of its enemies in this war; Iran was fighting against the totality of

the concept of Imperialism!!! In contrary to Iran, Kuwait received the war compensatory payment from Iraq and then restarted common diplomatic relationships.

Unlike in Iran, in Kuwait the heritage of Persian Gulf War is a negative one since political after-war circumstances led to forgetting or totally destroying the heritage of war. Today, Al-Kuwait is a completely modern city with no signs of war. Although, there are still few icons of war mutilated and abandoned (see Chadha 2006) especially in material culture such as Jaber house there is; but...scattered and pale. It is unbelievable that it is the city which had been destroyed in a very short time. No hero, and no symbol... it seems that Al-Kuwait has never faced such a war.

Sheikh Jaber's House; the Only Persian Gulf War remnant

Persian Gulf War broke out in 1991. Al-Kuwait came under heavy bombardment by unguided rockets (Van Riper 2007) of Iraq army which destroyed the city along with American ones fired from Persian Gulf waters (Houlahan 1999). Today, 20 years after Persian Gulf War, there are just two building destroyed in the war: Diwanieh and Sheikh Jaber's house.

We went to Al-Kuwait at the invitation of the ministry of culture of Kuwait for doing research on Diwanieh monument. Curiosity of being the archaeologists of recent past pushed us into investigating the small ruined building in south of Diwanieh—a forgotten building. It was traced to just a general and not detailed map sketched from an aerial photo. Our Kuwaiti friends reminded us that we would not come to a conclusion by curiously investigating that building... It was *nothing* from their point of view. Their reasoning failed to convince our curiosity. First of all, Maryam went into the ruined building.

...

-What is that house there?

- Nothing .that's nothing.

-But there's a destroyed house there, may I look at it?

-You may, but factually there's nothing.

...

-How is that Maryam?

-Beautiful!

Sheikh Jaber's house is a building made of modern materials; a concrete house with a steel structure. The house is totally 300 m² in area including three rooms, one kitchen and an entrance, all gathered around a corridor. The bomb seemingly dropped onto the far west of the house roof and then

the house burst into flames. Considering the condition and the form of destruction, we can assume that Diwanieh and Sheikh Jaber's house were both destroyed simultaneously and impacting of the bomb to one of them caused the other to be impacted by its pieces. In this way, the façade of Sheikh Jaber's house has not survived from impacting pieces of the bomb and has been destroyed.

Sheikh Jaber's building can be attributed to 1970s, considering its modern style and its concrete construction. According to the interviews we've conducted, it seems that the building has belonged to one of the four wives of rich Sheikh Jaber and after its destruction, has never been used by any of her family members. During our survey, the outer part of the house was used as a building material store.

Sheikh Jaber's House: Curiosity of Two Archaeologists

A 3×3 trench was the result of curiosity of us, as archaeologists. We excavate the trench in the most western room of Sheikh's house (Figure 2). We cut out about 20 cm of concrete layers of the ceiling and just under that we faced finds in the main background showing that the room had been under painting. Color vessels, brush and a rasp were the objects identified in the trench, right on the yellow high quality carpet of the room.

Beside the color vessels, a newspaper was identified (Figure 3): Al-Vatan, it was burned but the date was readable: exactly 2 days before the war. People living there had bought newspaper even 2 days before the war broke out!!!



Figure 2. Jaber house, Trench I, Jaber's house



Figure 3. News paper, Trench I, Jaber's house

What is the matter with me? It's a newspaper like any other. July 29th. I'm shivering... What is the matter with me? It's midsummer.

Sheikh Jaber's House; Subjectivity of a Photographer

Our endeavor to persuade the culture ministry of Kuwait to converting Sheikh Jaber's house to war museum was pointless. It seems that Kuwait government's interest in having usual relations with the present government of Iraq resulted in beginning of a process through which reminiscent elements of Persian Gulf War are exposed to paling. Kuwait war must be forgotten in Al-Kuwait just as Sheikh Jabber's house has been. It has been forgotten but existence of the finds narrates the story. "Material culture as a study is based upon the obvious fact that the existence of a man-made object is concrete evidence of the presence of a human intelligence operating at the time of fabrication" (Prown 1982:1)

Our living experience in a country ruled by state structure somehow similar to the one of Kuwait reminded us that in this structure whatever the government wants will certainly happen, so that we tried to picture Sheikh Jaber building in frames of our cameras and in archeological documentation. Sheikh Jaber building was a heritage of war; moreover, it was *beautiful*.

Frames of Sheikh Jaber's house can be generally divided into two groups; frames related to the trench excavated in the most western room, and the ones related to the whole of the building. The former have no



Figure 4. An art workl, Jaber's house

artistic element and have been taken just for documentation of the process of excavation. But frames concerning the whole building can be seen from an artistic point of view (Figure 4).

Sheikh Jaber's house is placed next to Diwanieh (Figure 1). The building which belonged to Sheikh Khaz'al Al -e- Ka'ab (Lewcock 1978); the man who played a key role in the process of forming the country was named Kuwait (Karsh 2002; Karsh and Karsh 2001:139–140); the man whose influence on forming the country cannot be kept secret even by Kuwait government, and maybe that's why the two monuments attributed to him, Diwanieh and Alqanem palace, although placed in a strategic area,⁴ firmly stands and has not been ruined yet. Sheikh Jaber building does not belong to a historically effective man, and it is the concept of war that gives it a historical identity: Sheikh Jaber's house is a potentially noticeable subject because it was destroyed and abandoned during the war, because it is a sign of a metaphorical process related to the recent but condemned-to-be-forgotten past (see Schnapp et al. 2004:12). Being separated from the context of other destroyed houses and unwillingness of present govt. of Kuwait to investigating, reconstructing and converting it to a museum will cause the meaning of the house pale through a temporal process; cultural materials identified in the trench will change to objects separated from context which have lost their structural and functional meaning (Chapman 2000; Johnson and Olsen 1992): they are merely an object (Figure 5), frozen in the form of the photographer's subject and without any human identity. Here, objects are apart from the archaeologist's subject, "Objects do lead

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Figure 5. Objects just as objects, Jaber's house

away from subjects" (Loren 2009:111), not necessarily reminding of the pain their human subject or their owner had felt in the process of leaving his/her home and running away.

Selfish? This is my land they're occupying; my home. How do they dare?
Damn that greasy stink blackness. It's all about you .I'm not sure anymore
what color you are: black? Red? What I'm sure about is that we soon will be
in black. I can smell blackness, redness

Sheikh Jaber's house was destroyed in Persian Gulf War. Apparently it's constructed according to the modern structure without any especial characteristic. Its cultural materials are common data which had been in use by the time it was abandoned, and style, method of construction and data related to the building does not generally provide us with any new information. So what makes Sheikh Jaber's house different from its contemporary buildings? The answer is the photographer subjectivity. The photographer chooses his especial frames and in this way chooses a section of the context and gives a new meaning to the work; "the context which is not only conceptual but pragmatic and non-arbitrary" (Alberione dos Reis 2005:47) It's just like a piece of pottery exhibited in the window of a museum which has lost its context or "decontextualised" (Knell 2007); an attracting beautiful eye-catching object which may had been placed in an archeological context and its process of taphonomy may had been started because of a natural disaster or a human one such as war. But being exposed in a museum enforces a new life on the object. (How beautiful!!!) "The object may possess beauty" (Shanks 1992:80). Nevertheless, it is an object which can remind of a catastrophe; an object which can be the reminder of a tragic disaster and non-human 'actants' in which it is enmeshed. In this sense, both action and meaning do not reside in the human 'subject' but are distributed in relation to a variety of people and things (Yarrow 2008).

I'm scared. I have nowhere to go; Hunger, war, hunger, war. I know... some of these days... This war will end up soon; I know...

A photographer-archaeologist's subjectivity has kept an account of Sheikh Jaber's house by recording it in a certain part of the temporal process (Figure 6) through which it was going to be forgotten; the subjectivity which has shown its responsibility for the data in recording the photos, just as an archaeologist does. "As archaeology is the archeology of subject" (Ricoeur 2004:170). The unconscious of archaeologist feels a sense of responsibility toward the data exposed to risk of being forgotten and destruction, does his/her best to record it and although he himself is in motion, tries to record and document cultural elements of the mentioned monument, as if it is frozen in the same time and from the same angle of photographer subject. "Objects and people are continuously on motion, and the relationships between them are fluid and dynamic" (Geismar and Horst 2004:8). However, we are unaware whether the building is now



Figure 6. Taphanomy, Jaber's house

under destruction or protection. Apparently, these few frames recorded from our angle are the only existing information.

It's a racket, a crash and ...

It's a racket, a crash and... I have to go. Don't be selfish, think about your family. You are not alone.

Burnt Gallery

It is noticeable that Kuwait govt. has a negative attitude toward the data such as Sheikh Jaber's house, "because it is not treated as a heritage and has not occupied a positive and culturally elevated status" (Meskell 2002:558). But our attitude, as archaeologists, is not necessarily negative toward the mentioned data, particularly, because our archeological attitude toward this object is from the outside: Persian Gulf War did not cause the life of any of us to disintegrate!! Maybe that's why in our photos, Sheikh Jaber's house which could not be converted to a museum, is transformed to a burnt gallery. Detailed photos of burnt walls (Figure 7), a pile of bottles (Figure 5) used by workers, springs of beds, fallen pieces of concrete, are all cultural materials which are transformed to an object of archeological-artistic observation.

Our photos were taken from objects which have lost their meaning a long time, about two decades, ago and are reduced to mere artistic objects because of being far from and simultaneously near to the archaeologist-photographer's subject. The pain hidden in these objects is dead, just like its context of usage and human agents. "The objects are presented entirely



Figure 7. Burnt walls, artistic objects!!!, Jaber's house

out of their historical and cultural context” (Dyson 1998). We, the archaeologists, can just see mere beauty in an object which has recorded a symbol of pain, smoke and fire in its body.

We watch the photo frames of Gaza war (Figure 8)... Cluster bombs exploded upon Gaza like thunder and lightning, fiery pieces which lightens the darkness of night... How beautiful!!! Which one—the photo or the happening? Is Naramsin's stele⁵ also beautiful, when he is standing on tens of pieces of human body? Which one is beautiful—the conquer itself or cutting people into pieces? As the memory of violence goes spatially and temporally further, its cruelty lessens (see Alberione dos Reis 2005). The memoire of violence is less violent when its distant temporarily and spatially (see Mazz 2009). It will be less enough to be converted to a historical-archeological object, or to the program about violence we watch on TV while drinking coffee in the afternoon (Baudrillard 1974, 1996), without remembering how many people were mutilated before Naramsin stele or Bistoon (Bistun) inscription⁶ were shaped. And...nowadays is war occasionally something more a part of night NEWS in which Images of dead civilians and smashed houses may serve to quicken hatred of the foe, as

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Figure 8. Cluster bombs, Gaza

did the hourly reruns by Al Jazeera (Sontag 2003) BBC or CNN?. It's also about our experience in Kuwait... The violence forgotten by city has also reached to an end in objects. Has it really stopped? Is that how the type of violence against us differs from violence against the others in another epoch? Or perhaps the archaeologist's subject is itself a victim of structural violence through the process of growing academic (Bernbeck 2008) in a way that deals with the violence just as a mere object? Has such a process instantized violence in archaeologist subjectivity so much that violence is only her/his object? As these case studies show, it almost invariably goes to the heart, or more accurately, the painful nerves and tensions of experience that would disrupt and/or challenge the dominant voices

Structuring our experiences. That is why it is often the case that the archaeological act is an extremely delicate and painful operation which elicits considerable emotion and at times objection (Buchli and Lucas 2001).

I can't believe... My eyes cannot believe that it's sheikh Jaber's house: abandoned, ruined... We couldn't even finish painting the walls.

Now, our photo frames lack a contextual and structural meaning, and as it has been generally separated from its process texture, is a portrait of a moment the photographer has chosen; a portrait which has not frowned with pain and is pictured in front of us, the archaeologists, as a merely artistic object in a non-structured manner.

- It's beautiful...

Our photos are taken from data which is, in spite of a short temporal distance from us, fossilized and their use and the way they are ruined and

abandoned have been intentionally forgotten: They are negative heritage and are supposed not to be known as heritage at all. The ugliness of war has been reduced to the beauty of the way of burning and taphonomy...

What the hell I'm doing here? They have all left. I'm sick and tired of this war inside me. The sky is getting heavy I'm choking.

One Frame, One Meaning (Object in the show case)

An object in museum is separated from its context and structure. Its function has usually no meaning; it may appear just as an inscription explaining about the object. The object which has put in an archeological context because of structural violence such as war or escape, is surviving today by means of its beauty. It has lost its pain—its humane context.

Sheikh Jaber's house owes its beauty to being burnt in the fire of war bombs. Otherwise, His house was a common building which would probably be destroyed by bulldozers during reconstruction processes in the city. In absence of humane agent, we, the archeologists, see the house as an artistic object which can be converted to a museum to show that war has also another aspect. It is like transforming the life to an object in museums.

Each of the frames taken from Sheikh Jaber's house is an artwork made from a fossilized object in time which does not necessarily contain its context meaning anymore. Each of these objects has gone a long distance from the human agent by whom it was built and used; the subject which has transformed to an object in essence. The past is an object without a subject and on the other hand; it is a subject without an object (Kristiansen and Rowlands 1998:438), and now, having lost its context, it is represented as a mere artwork.

In Iran, time has helped the war objects to become museum objects. War materials separate from their context and find a new one; this is a process of manipulation in taphonomy process which makes it possible to reread the materials. This rereading is based on standardized criteria by the government with the purpose of ideological use of fossilized objects. In Kuwait, this process has occurred in reverse; war materials are so sparse that little by little, spatially and temporally, they became forgotten. The new meaning of these objects is an aesthetic one.

Jabber House: A Case of Negative Heritage

Today, Sheikh Jaber's house is a burnt building. Sheikh Jaber's house is beautiful... a burnt beautiful. Its paternal destruction evokes an aesthetic

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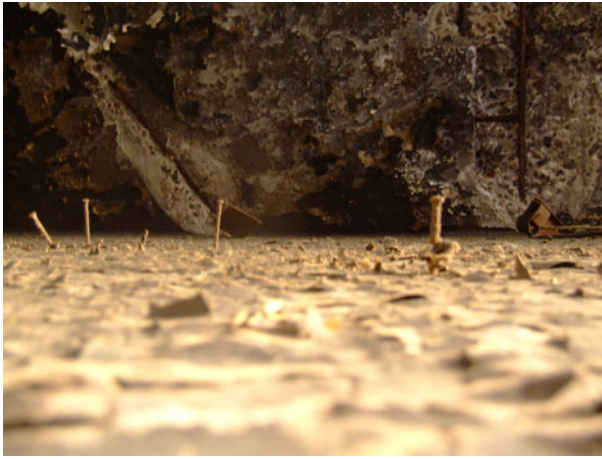


Figure 9. Walls, Jaber's house

sense in observer and encourages her/him to record it, take artistic pictures and keep an account of it in her/his visual-artistic memory, look at the light passing through the broken edge of its wall and walk around it for several times... The material object is posited as the vehicle through which to explore the object/subject relationship, a condition that hovers somewhere between the physical presence and the visual image, between the reality of the inherent properties of materials and the myth of fantasy, and between empirical materiality and theoretical representation (Attfield 2000).

Facing Sheikh Jaber's house, She/he may forget that people used to live in this place; that its burnt walls may had been covered with family photos, as the nails (Figure 9) and pins can still be seen on them; that little children of 3rd wife of Sheikh had been playing noisily in front of the entrance or perhaps had been swimming in the pool in central court in burning summers of Kuwait; that there were people made the walls be painted in the last room hoping that it would be more attractive. Even the double bed (Figure 10) in the middle of the bedroom is not a bed anymore. It is a set of tangled springs from which the one can take a photo. She/he forgot that in Muslims' traditional society it is a taboo to picture any part of love affairs of a couple: it's been a long time that the bed has seen no couple making love...

Today, Sheikh Jaber's house is an artwork which may finally make Kuwait government protect it as a Persian Gulf War remnant, but even in this way, the house would just be an artwork fossilized in a temporal process: Sheikh Jaber's house has no context!!! Cultural, mental and physical context of Jaber's house is destroyed. No one from the generation coming



Figure 10. Beds as coils!!!, Jaber's house

after the war could remember why and how his house burned, how the flames grew high up to the ceiling and how its occupants left all their desires granted in physical things: a doll which was one day a little girl's desire, a toy car or a necklace of Persian Gulf pearls which was a gift from Sheikh to his wife!! War changes the meaning of desires...

War is war. It doesn't make any difference whether you are Sheikh Jaber or someone else. A racket, a crash and that's it.

No... no... They won't dare it. It won't happen. This is Kuwait. They need us. Oil, oil... They won't let it happen.

A cultural element which is separated from its context would lose its human aspect. Human agency does not appear in it except as an active imagination of the archeologist. Cultural elements in museum change to objects without a humane image... Pain, suffering, hate and love belonging to people who have built, produced and thrown away the object in a temporal process are fossilized in it (Baudrillard 1996). A bronze dagger with an ivory haft from Iron Age, is a beautiful thing today exhibited in museum; but brochure of museums cannot and don't want to explain that how many people were killed by the mentioned dagger. Objects change to the symbols of nationalism (see Arnold and Hassman 1995:78), without reminding their hidden pain: Inscription of Darius in Iran is a symbol of Aryan nationalism, in which he talks about killing and torturing a thousand of people!!! It seems that the pain loses its bitterness as it goes further and further through time.

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- Everyone has left. This sound smells like blood.
- You are insane. Sounds don't smell.
- Yes they do. Just put your shoes in mine.
- Are you afraid? ... Me too.

War is a negative heritage in Kuwait. Kuwait government has destroyed the heritage of war, especially during the years after American invasion of Iraq, with an excuse of improving relations with Iraq. The generations who have experienced the Persian Gulf War are still alive; although there is no trace of war destruction or the ones killed. It is just contrary to the attitude of Kuwait's northern neighbor, Iran. In Iran, the war and the ones killed have been sacralized. Today generation of both countries has gradually forgotten the pain of war suffered by the previous generation, as if the reality of war is supposed to be changed in both countries; in one of them by heroising and in the other one by injecting a historical amnesia.

Sheikh Jaber's house is not his house anymore. It is a burnt gallery, exhibiting portraits of nothing... Only 20 years after its destruction, Sheikh Jaber's house evokes a sense of aesthetics rather than reminding us of human pain. Sheikh Jaber's house is a metaphor of any 'beautiful' object which can be observed in the showcases of museums; a metaphor of pain and suffering which is experiencing the process of becoming taphonomic.

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Notes

1. In Iran, this is a ritual, showing great care for someone, sending dangers away from him/her.
2. Shi'i 'martyr complex', in so far as it is anything more than a common human willingness to fight for one's beliefs, is in fact limited in modern Iran to a few political circumstances, most of which are tied to revolt or rebellion. In modern times the good-evil dichotomy usually comprises evil foreigners who oppress Iran and it is not always religious, as seen in the secular Mosa-deeq movement. Parallel to the good-evil dichotomy is that of justice and injustice, '*adl* and *zulm*, which has roots in Shi'i Mu'tazilite theology (Amirahmadi and Entessar 1992:17).

3. Diwanieh and Sheikh Jaber's house. Diwanieh is a building going back to the early 20th century, constructed by Sheikh Khaz'al Al -e- Ka'ab and used by him for administrative works. Diwanieh was converted to national museum (Figure 1) of Kuwait in 1960s (see Lewcock 1978:34), and it has been totally derelict since 1980s. Diwanieh was deserted during the war so that inside of the building lacks material data which may have been in use during those days; but Sheikh Jaber's house had been in use and it was war that result in its destruction and being abandoned.
4. Near the embassy of Great Britain.
5. Naramsin, Akkadian king, famous victory stele shows the conquer holding a 95 cm bow... the figure depicts him as a god-king (symbolized by his horned helmet) climbing a mountain above his soldiers, and his enemies (Hamblin 2006).
6. Carved in Bistoon mountain (western Iran, Near Kermanshah). The inscriptions, written in Old Persian, Akkadian and Elamite, Darius, the Achamenid King, relates how he seized the crown and defeated his various adversaries (Curtis 2000; Mianji 1997). The inscription is the descriptions of Darius conquer on Iranian Plateau tribes and also on the protesters.

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