IDENTITY IN TRANSITIONAL CONTEXT:
OPEN-ENDED LOCAL ARCHITECTURE IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the experience of change in Saudi contemporary architecture with special emphasis on the ways that people have used to adopt new forms in their home environment. The aim is to understand the general reactions of people towards the change over time. Identity is a social system, and unless we view it from this perspective we cannot understand how people realize it in their home environment. In this sense, we are looking for the relationship between people and their architecture rather than explaining the reasons behind any changes identified.

Keywords:
Identity; local architecture; home environment; social change.

Introduction

Identity as a concept has social and physical connotations. It constitutes a collection of cues recognised by a group of people at a specific time and place. People and places, however, are exposed to change over time. In that sense, identity may change and people may resist this change because they want to feel that they maintain a certain level of continuity. However, continuity of identity is a very debatable concept. Every society faces a real challenge to maintain its identity for any length of time, especially under conditions of rapid economic and technological change.

It is important to understand how the concept of identity is perceived by people, designers, and authors in Saudi Arabia today. A lack of identity in contemporary architecture in Saudi Arabia is indicated by many authors (Konash, 1980, Boon, 1982, Mofti, 1989 and Abu-Ghazzeh, 1997). This raises the following questions: What do we mean by identity? How do people express their personal and social identities? Is there any action we need to take to maintain individual and social identity? This paper aims to

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answer these questions. However, the purpose here is to understand why the search for an identity has become an important social and intellectual issue in Saudi Arabia.

We see identity in architecture as a dynamic phenomenon. It can change and reform over time within the frame of the cultural core of society. This paper tries to use this concept to conduct a general critique for the experience of change in Saudi architecture.

Historically Saudi Arabia has experienced drastic urban changes since the late 1930s until the present day. For that reason this review is limited to this period. The author has tried to trace people's physical reactions towards urban change, and investigate how these reactions have shaped their identity over time. Unfortunately, there is very little literature about

identity Saudi Arabian architecture (Alangari, 1996). This meant the author had to make several visits to some of the main cities in Saudi Arabia (Riyadh, Jeddah, Makkah, Dammam, Khobar, and Hofuf) to carry out a diachronic visual survey. This survey aimed to trace some of the external physical characteristics that people tried to express in their homes to maintain their personal and social identities.

The Experience of Early Change (1938-60)

'The relative importance of other people and physical forms in shaping place identity implies that distinctions made between self, others and physical environments continually serve to define bodily experiences and consciousness of the unique persons. It would seem that the home, in terms of the kind of opportunities it affords people for personal and social action and how these enable self impression and expression is one profound centre of significance to a sense of place identity.' (Sixsmith, 1986).


a. b.
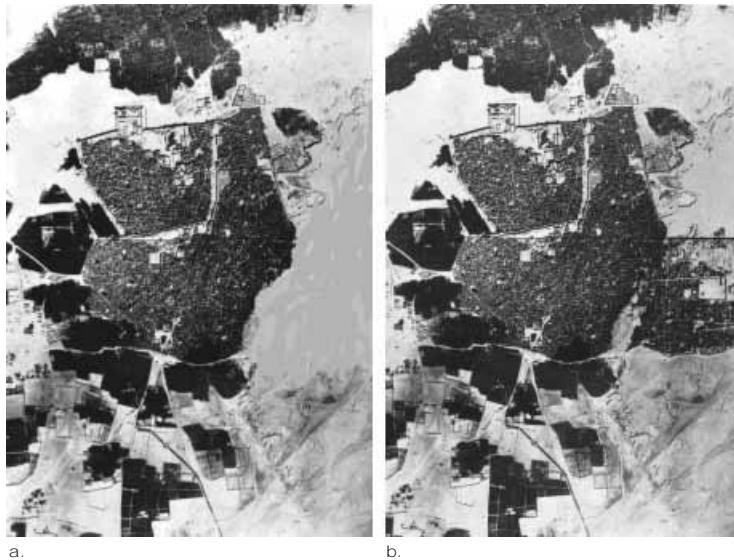
Figure 1-1: Hofuf between 1904 and 1935. a) Hofuf before 1904 (Assalhiyyah not yet developed). b) Hofuf in 1935 (The core part of Assalhiyyah already completed). (Source: Aerial photograph 1935 Aramco).

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Originally, Saudi Arabia consisted of several traditional societies. Despite the fact that these societies shared the same source of values, which is the Arabic-Islamic culture, each region still had specific social and physical characteristics (Talib, 1983 and King, 1998). The socio-cultural values and physical environment of each society have been disturbed by the introduction of western urban concepts in the last four decades. However, the first interaction with the new urban concept is very important in building up a spatio-temporal path for the relationship between people and their architecture in Saudi Arabia over time.

The experience of urban and architectural change in the area can be traced very early. For example, in 1904 a new neighbourhood was planed in Hofuf (Eastern Saudi Arabia) in a gridiron pattern. This first planned neighbourhood in the Arabian peninsula called Assalhiyya (was influenced by Assalhiyya neighbourhood in Damascus) (Figure 1) and was created outside the walled city by the permission of the Ottoman Sultan Abdulahmeed (Al-Naim, 1994). In fact, there are also signs of architectural change in Jeddah prior to the oil discovery when King Abdulaziz built his palace Khuzam between 1928 and 1932 and he used reinforced concrete in the construction (Andijani, 2008). However, those early experiences were disconnected, discontinued, and isolated.

The Early Physical and Spatial Conflict

The origin of contemporary residential settlements in Saudi Arabia stems from the early part of this century when Aramco (Arabian-American Oil Company) built its housing projects in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia between 1938 and 1944 (Figure 2) (Shiber, 1967). These projects introduced for the first time a new concept of space and a new home image. It is possible to say that this early intervention has had a deep but not immediate effect on the native people. It made them question what

Juma'a Mosque

Hota: a plot surrounded by fence from all sides.
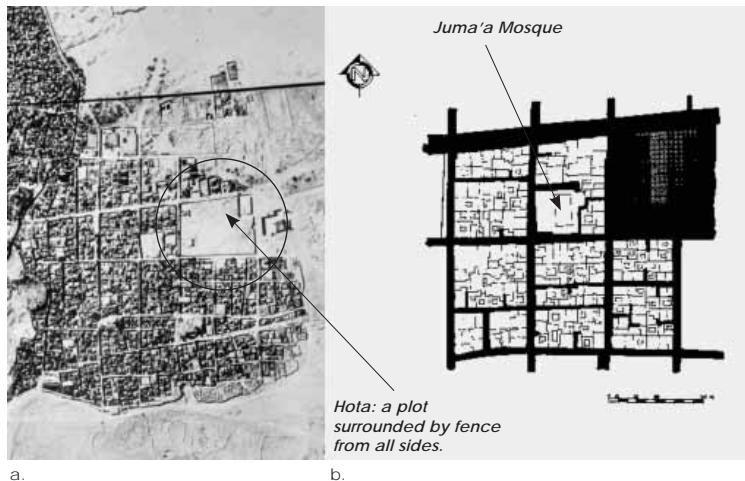
Figure 1-2: a) Assalhiyyah Neighbourhood in 1935 (Grid-iron pattern with a traditional system inside the blocks). (Source: Aerial Photograph 1935, Aramco). b) The first blocks in Assalhiyyah. (Source: Developed from Aerial Map1985 , Municipality of Al-Hasa).

a.

b.

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they know and how they should behave. In the other words, this early change can be seen as the first motive for the social resistance to the new forms and images in the contemporary Saudi home environment.

The significant impact of this experience presented itself in conflicts between old and new in local society. The threat from interfering outside elements to the social and physical identity created for the first time a social reaction towards physical environment. Resistance to the new is expected in the early stages of change, but we need to know how people reacted to the changes and how deeply the people's image was influenced by them.

The conflict between traditional cultural values and the introduced western physical images was very limited at the beginning of modernization; the native people followed what they knew and tried to implement it in their daily lives, including their homes. However, the contrast between traditional images and the new images in the minds of local people can be considered the beginning of physical and social changes in Saudi architecture.

The first indication of a conflict between the local culture and western culture can be ascribed to

Solon T. Kimball, who visited Aramco (Arabian-American Oil Company) headquarters in 1956. He described how the senior staff (American) camp in Dhahran was completely imported from United States. He said:

'No one westerner would have difficulty in identifying the senior staff "camp" as a settlement built by Americans in our south western tradition of town planning. It is an area of single-story dwellings for employees and their families. Each house is surrounded by a small grassed yard usually enclosed by a hedge.' (Kimball, 1956: 472).

This American camp, which introduced new spatial concepts, contrasted strongly with the surrounding home environments in the old cities in the region, Hofuf and Qatif. The native people still persisted with their own spatial concepts and images and resisted the imported ones. They considered them as strange things. Therefore, when Saudi workers and their relatives 'moved in, they took over any empty land available and erected basic shelters and fences of locally available material, separated from each other by narrow irregular footpaths'. This created 'a community of mud-brick and timber houses built in a traditional and comfortable way'. (Figure 3) (Shiber, 1967: 430).

a. b. c.
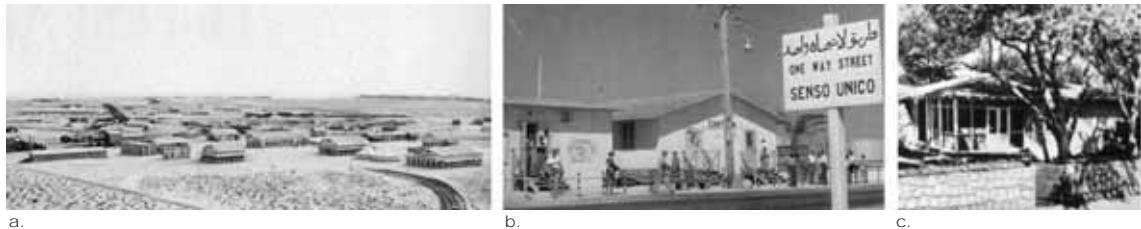
Figure.2: The new housing image of Aramco in the 1930s and 40s. a) The early American camp in Dhahran (1930's). b) American camp in Ras Tanunurah (1950's). (Source: Facy, 1994: 92 & 96. c) One of the early houses in the American Camp in Dhahran. (Source: Lebkicher et al. (1960: p. 196).

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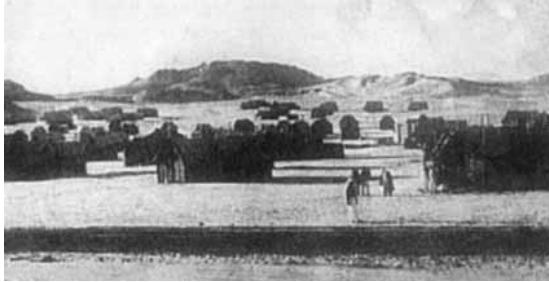
Figure. 3: Saudi camp in Dhahran in the 30's and 40's.
(Source: Al-Youm (Local Newspaper No. 9016, 20-2-1998).

Kimball noticed this community and described the Saudi camp which was built adjacent to the senior staff camp as 'neither planned nor welcomed'. He added that 'these settlements represent the attempt by Arabs to establish a type of community life with which they are familiar. Here the employees were mostly Saudis ...' Kimball recognized the insistence of the native people on their own identity through his description of the Saudi camp as 'an emerging indigenous community life' (Kimball, 1956: p.472).

We need to mention here that in the first two decades of change several alterations appeared in local people's attitudes towards the new architecture. What Kimball described is the position of native people from the first direct contact with western culture. People, at this stage, refused the change and stuck with what they knew. This is not to say that the new images had not influenced people; however, they were in the process of developing a new attitude towards their homes. This attitude was not yet fully formed to reflect how deeply the new images broke the old idea of physical environment.

The government and Aramco were not happy with the growth of these traditional settlements. Therefore, by 1947, the government had asked Aramco, who employed American engineers and surveyors, to control the growth around the oil areas. This created the first planned cities in Saudi Arabia, which followed a gridiron pattern, Dammam and Khobar (Figure 4) (Al-Hathloul, 1981). The spatial concepts and house images that were introduced into these two cities accelerated the impact of the new housing image on the local people, not only in these two new developments, but also in surrounding old cities.
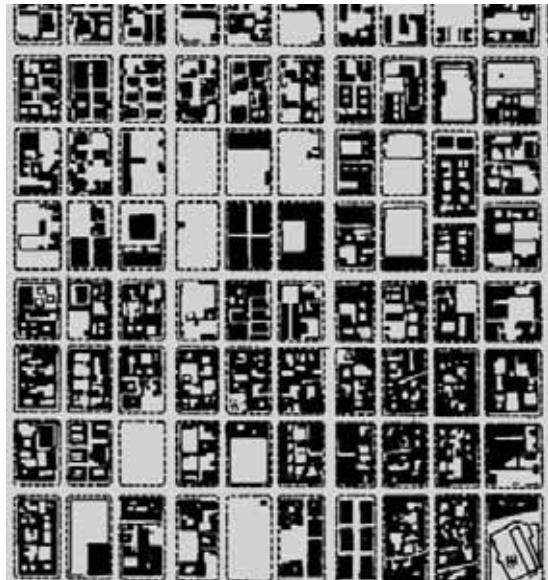

Figure 4: Planning System of Al-Khobar. We noticed that native people were still influenced by what they know. Traditional patterns were used in the large blocks and a traditional house form was used. (Source: Candilis, Draft Master Plan, Al-Khobar, 1976, p. 45).

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For example, in Hofuf, local people developed a new term called Bayt Arabi (Arabic house). This meant that people had realized that there was a difference in material, form, and spatial concepts between the Arabic house, which is the house they had known all their lives, and another type of house which had no definition except 'new house' (Al-Naim, 1993). Before the introduction of the new concepts of home to the area, people did not need to define their home because there was only one type of home, and every member in the society knew and used it. Therefore, the appearance of this term in Hofuf is considered by the author to be the first indication given by local people that they felt any kind of threat to their identity.

Early Conflicts and the Search for Identity

As we discussed earlier, this new type of house, which later became known as a villa, was imported originally in the 1930s, but it was developed in the 1950s when the Aramco Home Ownership Program forced people to submit a design for their houses in order to qualify for a loan (Lebkicher, et al. 1960). People relied upon Aramco architects and engineers to design their new houses, because there were few architects in Saudi Arabia at that time. In order to speed up the process, Aramco architects and engineers developed several design alternatives for their employees to choose from. However, all these designs adopted a style known as the 'international Mediterranean' detached house (Figure 5) (Al-Hathloul & Anis-ur-Rahmaam, 1985).

Compared to what happened in the Eastern region, few changes occurred in Riyadh in the 1930s and 1940s. However, an indication of social change can be found in those suburbs constructed at that time. For example, for the first time in the city, the new neighbourhoods were classified according to economical and social status (Facy, 1982). Still the construction methods and style were completely traditional. Facey described the changes in Riyadh in 1940s as:

'Despite the mushrooming development of the city outside the walls, traditional methods of construction continued to be employed. The local architecture had to be adapted to the creation of buildings for government and the royal family on a scale hitherto unimagined by local craftsmen.' (Facy, 1982: 302).

a.   b.   c.
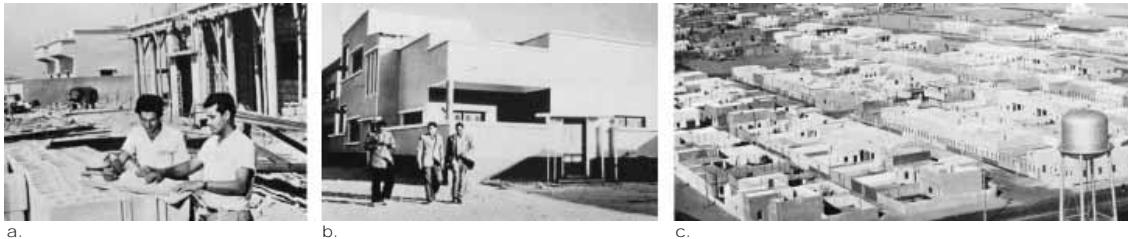
Figure 5: Villa type in Dammam (1950s). a) Aramco architects and engineers in 1950's. b) Villa-type in Dammam in 1950's. c) A neighbourhood in Dammam in 1950's emerged as a result of Aramco Home Ownership Program. (Source: Lebkicher et al. 1960: 212-14).

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However, Riyadh had experienced an important experience to develop mud architecture in the first half of the twentieth century. Most of the buildings including Al-Muraba' (King Abdulziz Palace, located in the north of old city) which was completely new concept in term of size and form to the old city of Riyadh. In fact, development of mud architecture at that time was spontaneous and comprehensive; people used all new materials and merged them with local construction technology which ended up with real local built environment (Figure 6).

The aforementioned situation completely changed in the 1950s because King Saud succeeded his father in 1953 and decided to modernize Riyadh. This was manifested by two other relevant events that took place in Riyadh. The government built the royal residential district, known as Annasriyyah, in 1957, through which reinforced concrete was introduced to Riyadh for the first time (Abercrombie, 1966). Annasriyyah started, in fact, in 1951 but it was not finished yet even when Al-hamra Palace was constructed in the 1954 to host the Crown Prince (Figure 7). The conflict between new and old in the minds of local people became an important issue in Riyadh because it was facing radical physical and social change. This was manifested in the construction of Al-Malaz neighbourhood which was also completed in the late 1950s (Figure 8) (Fadan, 1983).

The urban concepts that were implemented in Riyadh were similar to those in Dammam and Khobar. Nevertheless, there was an initial difference between the two experiences. In the case of Annasriyyah and Al-Malaz, the whole projects, including planning, designing and construction, were completed by governmental

agencies. People who used the residential units were given no chance to express their opinion about the houses they would use. Generally, with Aramco and Riyadh housing projects:

Figure 6: Mud architecture in Riyadh, first half of the twentieth century. (Source: Turath).

Figure 7: Alhamra Palace, different form of technology in the city of Riyadh, 1954. (Source: King Fahad National Library).

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Figure 8: New images in Riyadh (50s/ 60s). a) Annasriyyah in 1957. (Source: Facy, 1992: 321). b) Al-Malaz planning system. (Source: Al-Hathloul, 1981: 164).

'… a completely different conception of a house, cluster, and neighbourhood has been introduced. It starts from the tiny details of the house construction, and spreads to the internal spatial organisation of the rooms and finally to the external appearance and the relationship of the house to those in the neighbourhood.' (Fadan, 1983: 97).

The imposing of the new house image was still limited to governmental and Aramco employees many of whom had experienced different cultures, either because they were not natives of Saudi Arabia or because they had studied abroad. However, these two major changes in Riyadh raised questions about the meaning of the home and disturbed the previous mental images of the local people. This can be observed by the way first Annasriyyah, and then Al-Malaz, were called New Riyadh (Al-Hathloul, 1981).

The increasingly obvious contrast between old and new made people start to think about their options. Their identity was under threat by the new and continuing urban change. Several questions appeared in their minds. Should they preserve their own traditional identity or adapt to change? Should they stick with what they knew or make use of the new concepts and technology? Certainly, people are usually more enthusiastic about experiencing the new, especially if it is associated with a distinguished social class, such as governmental employees, who appeared as highly educated elite in an illiterate society (Alangari, 1996).

Similar to what happened in the eastern region, many people who lived in the traditional areas in Riyadh kept their traditions in buildings and remained in their traditional houses right until the late 1960s. The impact of the new images was very clear but society was not yet ready to step towards the social and physical changes. Nevertheless, people in the traditional areas did make a few changes to imitate these images

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introduced by the new houses in Al-Malaz (Al-Naim, 2008).

The mud surfaces of the traditional houses were plastered with cement and the edges of the house parapets were topped with a thin layer of cement to reflect the sharp and neat edges of the concrete. These changes extended to the old style wooden external gates which were replaced by steel ones with shades similar to those in the Al-Malaz houses. It is apparent, then, that concrete structures with their neatness and sharp edges became a very common symbol used by people in Saudi Arabia to communicate modernity (Figure 9) (Al-Naim, 1996).

The agreement amongst people in the traditional

areas of Riyadh about the meaning of modernity is a clear indication of their ability to create and develop new meanings within their home environment. Also, the manner in which they expressed this meaning was a very important step in absorbing the new images. This meaning of modernity was also found in other regions of Saudi Arabia. For example, many people in Hofuf changed their traditional house gates to imitate the gates in the new houses. The interesting point here is that even if the change does not lead to better conditions, people will still pursue it in order to imitate what carries status in society. This is what happened in Hofuf when people substituted their beautiful decorative gates for abstract forms because they were symbols of modernity (Figure 10).

Figure 9: The mud surfaces in the traditional houses in Riyadh plastered by cement and the traditional house gate was replaced by a concrete one because it reflects modernity. (Source:Author 1995).

Figure 10: Traditional house gateways transformed to imitate the new house types in 50's and 60's in Hofuf. (Source: Author, 1995).

Another important phenomenon found throughout the kingdom can also be associated with the early conflict between old and new. When old cities expanded outside their old boundaries, the new houses which were constructed in the new areas carried both local and imported images. This produced unique house forms in each region which still distinguished them from other regions. Moreover, the use of imported images was controlled by their ability to communicate the local meanings that people associated with them.

For example, in the cities visually surveyed by the author, hybrid forms were found in neighbourhoods constructed adjacent to the traditional areas. These forms were similar to the local traditional forms, but they also contained new images which had already been localized symbolically to communicate modernity, such as the concrete gate, sharp lines and edges, etc (Figure11) (Al-Harbi, 1989).

This hybrid form existed also in the two new cities in the eastern region, Dammam and Khobar,

especially in those neighbourhoods which constituted the original settlements (Figure 12) (Al-Said, 1992). For example, Al-Said studied the growth of the original settlement in Dammam, Al-Dawaser neighbourhood. He found that, between 1930 and 1970, this neighbourhood grew from 56 to 250 residential units 'mostly typical courtyard residential units as a result of contentious house subdivision and room addition'. (Figure 13) (Al-Said, 1992: 234). The situation was similar in Khobar, where the house style was influenced by the prevailing traditional styles in the region. Even though several modern settlements appeared in these two cities due to Aramco programs, people in the original settlements insisted on the traditional house form.

We can argue that people at that time were still influenced by their previous experience and were able to express this very easily since building regulations were not yet applied. This meant that people had maximum flexibility to decide the form of their houses. It is important to note here that most Saudi Arabians still had a strong connection with their social, physical and

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aesthetic traditions, all of which were strongly reflected in their home environment.

We propose here that this attitude towards the new images reflects the way in which they become important communication tools in the community. This raises important questions: Was it an internal mechanism developing to absorb the new? Did the localizing of these new images by associating understandable social meanings form the main step towards internalizing these images in the collective memory? If so, this internalization of the new images was the first stage towards generating a new identity in the home environment.

Figure 11: A number of homes in Makkah constructed in the 40's, 50's, and 60's contain traditional and modern elements. (Source: Visual survey 1995).

a.   b.
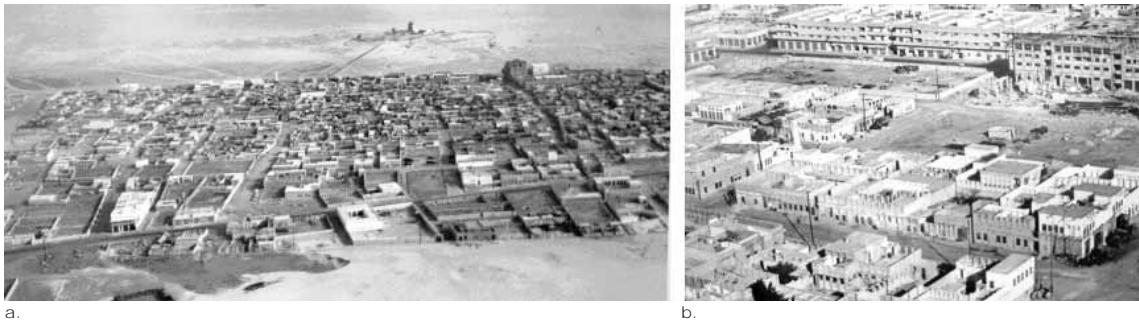
Figure 12: Dammam between 1940s and 1960s. a) Dammam (Al-Dawaser neighbourhood in the 1940's). b) Part of Al-Dawaser neighbourhood and the new development in 1960's (traditional area became denser and the traditional style continue). (Source: Aramco).

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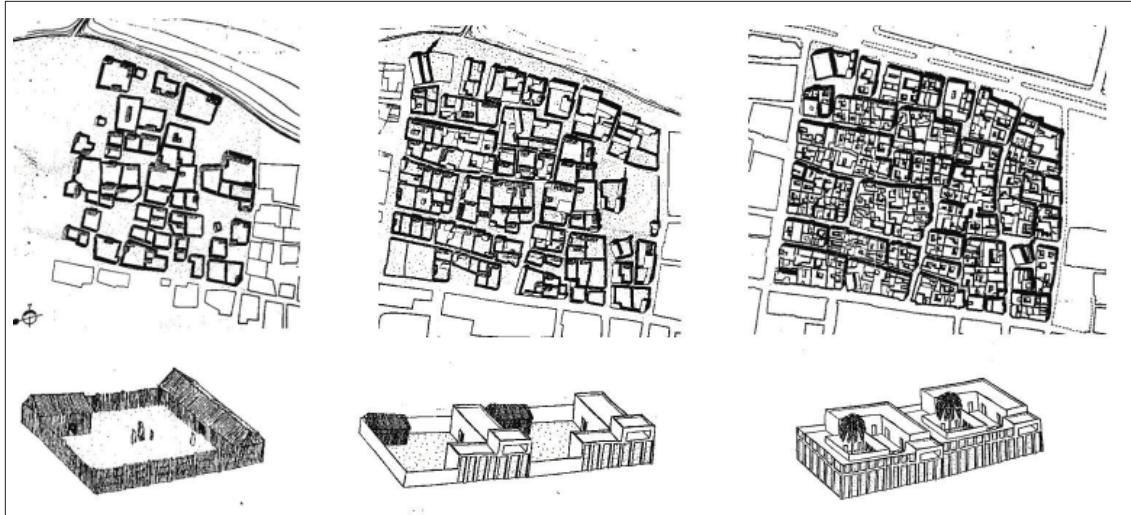
Figure 13: Growth of Al-Dawaser neighbourhood in Dammam (1935-73).
(Source: Developed from Al-Said, 1992: 228-235 and 246).

Generally, two main lessons can be derived from the early changes in the home environment. On one hand, there is the people's persistence in reserving their existing identity. This is reflected in their tendency to use certain physical elements in the architecture to communicate to each other. Replacing the old communicative elements by acceptable new ones, on the other hand, is an initial step in the acceptance of change in the home environment. This evaluation and selection of what is acceptable for reflecting social meanings is a very important step.

The above-mentioned mechanism can be seen as a process of absorbing and internalizing the new selected forms until eventually they become part of the collective memory. As we noticed, the new forms had been filtered at the personal and cultural levels. New local meanings had been associated with the new forms and in some cases they mixed with the traditional form to produce a new local form. We can argue that what happened was a process of identification where people strive to find for themselves a place in the modern era of the Saudi home environment.

Modernization and the Dilemma of "Rapid Architecture"

In the previous discussion we tried to demonstrate how people interact with changes in their home environment. We noticed the attempts by local people to evaluate the new in order to localize some elements that can convey social meanings. The desire by people to alter their existing identity and to adapt to changes can be considered as one of the social mechanisms by

which the society creates a balance between old and new. However, the modernization process in Saudi Arabia continued to drive people from their original physical environment, which created a new challenge for people who had already experienced some change and were ready to accept more.

A new situation occurred in the 1970s, manifested in the direct interference by the government in the physical environment. Up until this point, the change experienced had a limited impact on the people's collective mental image. Generally, we can attribute this situation to three factors represented by the changes in the economic, educational, and communication systems in Saudi Arabia and their impact on the Saudi family (Al-Suba'ee, 1987). Contemporary communication systems, coupled with economic and technological development, changed most of the local characteristics of traditional societies (Morely and Robin, 1995). The contemporary media in Saudi Arabia contributed to the introduction of a taste for modern housing to the Saudi family. The family, which was witnessing radical change in its economic status, was influenced by commercial advertisements.

Explaining the reactions of people towards the changes in the architecture is of utmost concern because this will lead us to the process which people followed to maintain their cultural core. The changes took different forms and influenced every aspect of life. Almost every citizen in Saudi Arabia was influenced by government policies that replaced traditional urban, economic, educational, and communication, etc. systems with modern ones (Babad, Birnbaum, & Benne, 1983). These changes resonated throughout

the home environment. How were personal and social identities modified to absorb the changes? What were the new meanings that occurred in the Saudi home environment? Why and how did they internalize their new identity in the home environment? These are some of questions this part will attempt to answer.

New Architectural Images (New Concept of Home)

The desire to create a modern country in a short period brought about total physical change to most Saudi cities (Lerner, 1958). As in the Middle Eastern countries, the process of modernization in Saudi Arabia 'is largely physical and heavily imitative of the western model's external departments and life styles' (Jarbawi, 1981: 21). This is manifested in the unified governmental planning policies throughout the kingdom. However, prior to 1960, most of the attempts to regulate and control the growth of Saudi cities were partial and had limited impact. By 1960, the first real building regulations were issued in the form of a circular by the Deputy Ministry of Interior for Municipalities (Al-Said, 1992). This circular as Al-Said mentions, is

'the turning point in [the] Saudi Arabian contemporary built environment physical pattern and regulations. It require [d] planning of the land, subdivision with cement poles, obtaining an approval for this from the municipality, prohibited further land subdivision, controlled the height of the buildings, the square ratio of the built [are] require set backs ...' (258-9).

Still, these regulations took fifteen years until they were regularly applied in all Saudi cities. This is clearly traced from the confirmation of the master plans that were initiated for all Saudi regions between 1968 and 1978 (Al-Hathloul, & Anis-Ur-Rahmaan, 1985). For example, the first

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master plan was executed by Doxiadis for Riyadh between 1968 and 1973.This plan confirmed the setback regulations and applied planning system similar to what had been used in Khobar. It presented the grid as the most desirable pattern to be followed in the planning of Riyadh as well as in other cities of the country.

Despite the fact that Saudi architecture witnessed building regulations from the beginning of the change, however, their impact on the architecture at first influenced neither house form nor the surrounding spaces. This was because the government had not yet developed institutions to follow up these regulations. However, with the establishment of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Real Estate Development Fund (REDF) in 1975, the government became aware of the need to follow up the construction of private houses that had benefited from the loans. However, the strict application of these

regulations 'institutionalized' the villa as the only house type in Saudi Arabia.

It is important at this stage to consider the position of the people in relation to the rapid developments in the home environment. If we go back to the beginning of the period of change we can generalize that Aramco's developments were in the Eastern region, and Aramco's home ownership program in particular may be considered the origin of the physical contradiction that appeared later in Saudi architecture(Figure 14). The home style that was imposed by Aramco's program in the 1950s continued to have a powerful impact until the 1970s, especially since the building regulations supported and encouraged it. This could be seen very clearly since owning a new detached house (villa) in Saudi Arabia became a social symbol of personal and social identity (Gabbani, 1984).

Figure 14: A number of villas constructed in 1950's by the Aramco Home Ownership Program in Dammam. (Source: Author, 1995).

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Modern building materials, especially concrete, had a very strong image. We noticed in the previous section how people transformed their traditional facades with concrete gateways and cement plasters. Table.1 shows that the cement block became an important building material in the 1960s. The mud construction system which was common in the 1940s and 50s became less important. This indicates how deep the new images that were imported by Aramco influenced the Saudi home environment.

Type of Material	1962	1986
Cement Block	70.8	84.3
Mud Brick	15	9.1
Barasati (Palm Leaves)	5.1	3.4
Tent	1.2	---
Furush (Sea Rocks)	0.8	1.7
Company (Postrable)	0.4	---
Other (mostly wood)	6.7	1.5

Table 1: Construction Materials Used by Aramco's Employees (1962 and 1968) (Source: Shea, 1972).

We can attribute the emergence of a symbolic role for the villa-type house to the appearance of a middle class in the 1950s. This class included a mixed group of people from all over the kingdom, but mostly employees of Aramco and the government. These people were characterized by their literacy and experience of material culture. This class 'brought about cultural contact between Saudi society and the Western world' (Fadan, 1983: 74), and tended to express its status by residing in the new dwelling type, the villa. Due to their contact with the other cultures, the members of the middle class were strongly influenced by the villa type housing that spread throughout the Middle East in the colonial era and which was associated with people at high levels of administration (Boon, 1982).

The villa represented modernity and the people's attitude was based on 'the stylistic association that "modern", as expressed in the modern villa style, is "good", by virtue of being modern'. The villa's ability to present individual identity and originality through uniqueness of design may also have led to its rise in popularity since the conformist of the traditional society was beginning to be seen as 'backward' and individualism as 'modern' and therefore intrinsically 'good'. Jomah notes the sense of individualism that distinguished house design in the cities of Makkah, Jeddah, and Madina in the middle of this century. He considers these styles to be representative of a shift from a 'tradition-directed' to a 'self-directed' pattern of social organization. To him, 'the concept of home was … reduced from the traditional spiritual home to the modern physical and spatial one' (Jomah, 1992: 328).

Individuals always surround themselves with specific objects to communicate with other members of the community. The need to express a common meaning in architecture encouraged the villa type to become the device which enabled the Saudi family to express its new social status. In that sense, the home can be seen as a dynamic dialectic process between individuals and their community (Altman & Gauvain, 1981). While the Saudi family expressed its wealth and modernity by owning and living in a villa, they used the uniqueness of their villa form to represent their personalities.

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"Image" in Transition, Searching for New Home Identity

The desperation of families to achieve social status by owning a new villa, coupled with the interference from the government, through building regulations, created an unstable situation in the home environment. This manifested itself in the people's insistence on communicating their cultural core with their surrounding objects, especially in their homes. Therefore, external and internal alterations were made by people in their villas. These alterations created a contradictory image in the contemporary Saudi home environment (Bahammam, 1992).

For example, most of the villa-type dwellings in the Al-Malaz project were transformed to meet the local social values. This means that when the new model was imposed on the people, they tried later to adapt it to express themselves and satisfy their socio-cultural values. Al-Said studied the transformation that took place in Al-Malaz between 1960 and 1991 (Figure 15). He attributes the alterations in Al-Malaz villas to the existence of hidden rules amongst the residents; he named them as 'unwritten rules'. These rules stemmed from the 'traditional Arab-Muslim territory type' (Al-Said, 1992: 266).

Bahammam (1992) finds that most of the Saudi families in Riyadh made alterations to their private houses to meet their social needs. This phenomenon created an external physical contradiction in architecture because, in general, satisfaction of the cultural core is more important than the physical appearance of the house. This view is shared by Al-Hussayen when he attributes the alteration that people made to their houses to the ignorance of the role of the women in the society by the designers and decision makers (Al-Hussayen, 1996).

It is clear, then, that the forces of change within a society cannot totally succeed in shifting its core values because they are strongly ingrained and have an innate ability to survive. Even the aggressive imposition of new values represented by sudden physical change is only partly accepted while the rest is resisted or adapted over time. The physical contradictions, which appear in the present Saudi home environment, can be attributed to the internal resistance by members of the society in order to preserve these values (Figure 16). It is necessary therefore to consider social dynamics as well as continuous core values as main factors in achieving an understanding of continuity and change of identity in the home environment.
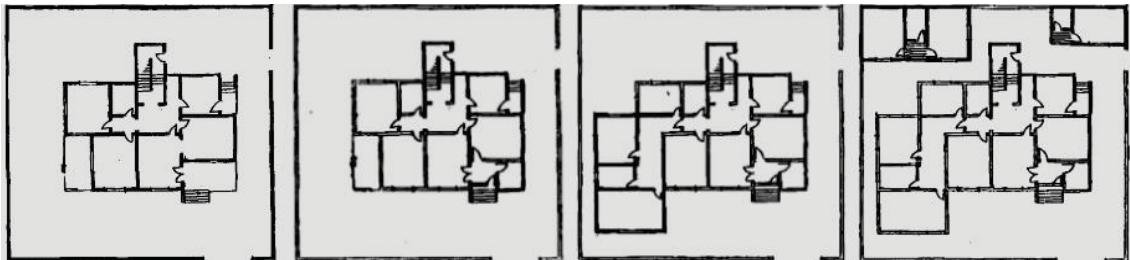

Figure 15: Transformation of Al-Malaz villa. (Source: Al-Said, 1992:267).

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The aforementioned situation completely contrasts with what happened in the early period of change, when the external form was used as a communicative tool conveying the symbol of modernity. This can be attributed to the fact that people in the early period of change still lived in their traditional houses, which were physically and socially compatible with life patterns at that time. Even when people moved out, they carried with them the traditional spatial concepts and organization and applied them in their new houses. The hybrid form that resulted from symbolizing modernity was a vital step to absorbing change. The situation was totally different for those citizens housed by Aramco and the government in villa type accommodation since they had no choice but to adopt new spatial concepts and organizations. The people's reaction to this situation was a very drastic alteration of those houses, which were constructed in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s throughout Saudi Arabia.

Attempts to Re-Localize House Form

Despite the fact that the form which was used as a symbol of modernity in the early period of change continued in the villa type, which they moved to later, people still made various alterations to the interior of their villas that contrasted with their outward appearance. This does not mean that individualism in the house form is no longer valid in present architecture in Saudi Arabia, simply that if the external appearance is not compatible with socio-cultural needs, people will tend to satisfy social norms even if they create a contradictory external form.

We can link the above-mentioned situation with the current prevailing trend in Saudi Arabia, which recalls the traditional external images in contemporary houses. By using traditional forms which have proven their suitability over many years, people express the desire to eliminate contradictions in the external appearance of their contemporary homes. In the author's opinion, this borrowing from the past will not solve the problem because the interior and exterior of the home should ideally express one entity, which is not so in this case.

Nowadays, re-circulating traditional images has become a phenomenon in most Saudi cities. The attempts by government to revive the traditional architecture of Riyadh in the 1980s influenced most people of Arabia. Therefore, many people are now enthusiastic about using local architecture as a resource for the design of their new homes. Furthermore, in some cities which have no deep roots, such as

Figure16: Two villas in Hofuf (people altered the facades of their houses to provide more privacy for the front setbacks by using metal sheets to increase the height of their house fences). (Source: Author, 1995).

Dammam, the people from different regions of Saudi Arabia who have settled in the city recall images from their region of origin (Figure 17). This reflects the desperation of designers to create a sense of continuity in the contemporary built environment in Saudi Arabia.

The desire to recreate traditional images is discussed by Rybcynski (1986). He states that 'this acute awareness of tradition is a modern phenomenon that reflects a desire for custom and routine in a world characterized by constant change and innovation'. The impact of external forms on people's image is a result of the strong connection between what the eye sees and the perceived environment. People tend to evaluate the visual quality of the surrounding environment according to their past experiences. In that sense, the sentimental reaction towards the traditional images in Saudi Arabia can be attributed to the sadness and emptiness felt by people at the loss of these images rather than an expression of their actual identity.

The direct use of the traditional image in present home design is criticized by many authors because as Al-Hathloul (1992) mentions we should look at the present from our own perspective because it is different from the past. As a Saudi academician states, 'our contemporary houses have no roots. What we have now is ornamentation in the facades rather than paying attention to the home interior and respecting the surrounding spaces' (Hariri, 1996).

Despite the cultural and sentimental messages that these contemporary hybrid forms express, the use of these images, as we said in the beginning, may reveal a sense of visual continuity, but it will not reflect the actual people's identity. Compared to the early hybrid form in the beginning of the period of change, which was congruent with the internal social mechanism, the contemporary hybrid form is considered a kind of architectural fashion not linked with internal social action; rather, it expresses the desire by architects to communicate visual cultural meanings.

In fact, identity is an issue which has no clear boundaries and can change from time to time. If we consider that the traditional form reflects our roots, this does not mean that it expresses our own identity. Identity in contemporary Saudi architecture should reflect Saudi society with its contemporary morals and values. It is necessary for us to understand ourselves and the forces at work within our society and to respect them rather than impose ready-made forms and

Figure 17: Different images in the City of Dammam representing the re-use of traditional forms. (Source: Author, 1995).

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convince ourselves of their validity to represent our identity. In this sense, our identity should be inspired from within, and should proceed from our own understanding of the surrounding world, from our interaction with all aspects of everyday life.

Meanings in architecture emerge from the interaction between people and physical objects. However, the social requirements change over time, which means that the associated physical objects will also change, or at least the meaning of the physical form will change. For example, while the traditional house consisted of a limited number of multi-purpose rooms, the new economic power of the contemporary Saudi family increased demand for larger numbers of rooms by family members, which naturally increased the whole house (Doxiadis, 1977). Furthermore, the increase in number of women working outside the home, which followed the spread of education, forced many families to employ a house maid and/or nanny. This new situation developed eventually to become another tool to express social status. Also, the meaning of the kitchen changed from a dirty place to a place associated with the main living spaces that may be exposed to visitors.

The aforementioned changes in the home either in the external or the internal domains reflect how things may change in society. People tend to experience new things; this will pave the way to internalize a new identity in the home environment. Unless there are continuous shared values which have the ability to control the relationships in a society and regulate the changes, society will fall into chaos.

Conclusion

Identity, similar to other social phenomena, may change over time, which means that each generation will express its identity from its own perspective. This is not to say that society will shift from one discrete identity to another, but people will interact with new technological inventions and foreign ideas etc. Lifestyle, hence, may change and new meanings for useful things will be created. In many cases the strands of past experience will influence people's evaluation of the new things, thus enabling them to choose those new things that provide them with a sense of continuity. According to the pressure that people may be under, all or part of the old identity may continue. In that sense, in spite of this long chain of physical and social change, we cannot say that the old identity of local societies in Saudi Arabia has completely disappeared.

In this paper, we have tried to examine the reasons which have led to the search for identity in contemporary Saudi home environment. One of the main reasons uncovered was the confusion between the terms modernization and westernization in Saudi society. This phenomenon is common in many non-western societies today. However, in Saudi Arabia the situation has an added dimension because of the deeply held religious belief of its society. The resistance that the people have shown to social change reveals that even where there is a total physical change, people will keep up the vital traditions that maintain continuity for society, which we have termed 'cultural core'.

The link between tradition and the cultural core has emerged from the religious and social connotations of the traditions. The cultural core, as we mentioned previously, has the ability

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to survive over time. Its existence is essential to regulate the non-verbal communication system in any society. We proposed that in the early period of change, cultural core played a vital role in developing an internal social mechanism to absorb change. Despite the hybrid form that emerged due to this mechanism, a high sense of continuity may have existed in architecture at that time. In the later period of rapid change, the cultural core also continued to have a role. This was manifested in the wide drastic alterations to the villa type housing. Even though these alterations contradicted the external appearance of the villa, people made changes in their houses to meet their religious and social values. This showed the importance of respecting the cultural core, which exists in people's minds and begins its organizing and communicating role when people start to live in the new houses.

One important issue regarding identity should be mentioned, that identity is not something given to society, but it is something that should emerge from the interaction between individuals and groups in society and between the whole society and the surrounding physical objects. Therefore, in order to really understand the issue of identity, we should first explore the meaning of identity to people and what their mechanisms are for expressing it in the built environment, rather than impose certain forms on them and try to convince them about their validity as a reference for their identity. This study sees the prevailing trend in Saudi Arabia for borrowing from the past as a kind of architectural fashion developed and enhanced by architects and not as a decision made by the people.

Studying the mechanisms that enable people to express their personalities and develop readable codes in the community requires from us a clear understanding of the relationship between physical change and social dynamism. It is necessary to mention here that every physical object may change over time according to the change in its use by people. In that sense, new meanings may be attached to this object. Change in the meaning of the object over time, thus, may reveal how societies change and adapt to new circumstances. This is what we assume happened to the villa type housing. At first, owning a villa became a social symbol reflecting the status of the family. Later, when large numbers of people moved to villas, owning a villa lost its role as a social symbol. A new social symbol will take or has already taken its place in the society. This could be manifested in the type of building materials used, furniture, etc.

In general, people tend to express themselves in their built environment, which means that, in addition to the explicit constraints such as building regulations, the spatial relationships and the physical forms will respond to the implicit, socio-cultural constraints. People tend to identify themselves by using their surrounding objects. Moreover, this process of identification can take place both consciously and unconsciously. The process will absorb imported physical forms either by giving them a specific meaning compatible with core values or will modify these forms to meet the existing meanings.

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