THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: PERCEPTION AND IMAGEABILITY OF KANO CITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper approaches the question of understanding the memory of politics in Kano city with its architectural and natural surroundings in reference to, politics, memory, imageability, environment, perception and subjective experience (radical observation) based on phenomenological inquiry. Kano is a city in the northern part of Africa most populous country, Nigeria. The memory shaping in community community here deals with, how people identify and form a common bond, narrative and heritage. This paper tends to analyse the memory of politics in an enmeshed experience of Kano city, explaining Kano in precolonial times, colonial and post-colonial era (African, Islamic and western heritage). Enmeshed experience can be defined as the understanding of paradoxes of the notion of identity through which phenomenology points out in relation to the interwoven network of events related to the city. Also, it would examine the city, as a historical environment, stating its importance, time, space, culture and physical attributes and its city image been represented and promoted in a global world. To observe Kano, the place-memory seeing it through political influence, its urban transformation, cultural and economic settings, time and space as a political factor will be analysed through perspective experience, imageability, phenomenological inquiry and radical observation. However, a continuous unfolding overlapping of spaces with material and technology and detail (city narration, photographic images) will be used to interpret the environmental potential and radical observation. Kano is a historical city rich in cultural codes with difference ethnic and religious background, this would, therefore, enhance in experiencing of the city through bodily experiences motives, in order to discover the political flow of memory with the cityscape.

Keywords: Enmeshed experience, perception, imageability, memory of politics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The city of Kano is geographically located in northern part of the most populous country in Africa, which is Nigeria (see figure 1.0). Kano is a cosmopolitan city, which dates back to 9th century. According to Barau (2011) by the 16th century, it was comparable to the likes of Cairo

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a testament to its flourishing nature as a trans-Saharan trade route, linking North African to the southernmost part of West Africa. This has influenced the tradition of governance, arts, and culture, urban environment, architecture and language among others. Similarly, colonialization has affected and influenced the African story, more ferocious than through an exchange of goods, services, and communication. These exchanges though have taken different forms have remained incessant, combining with the local heritage of Kano. Consequently, these results generated a layered and tempered society, which brings about spatiotemporal experiences which are meshed together. This enmeshed experience brings about different perceptions, imageability and subsequently a place-memory.
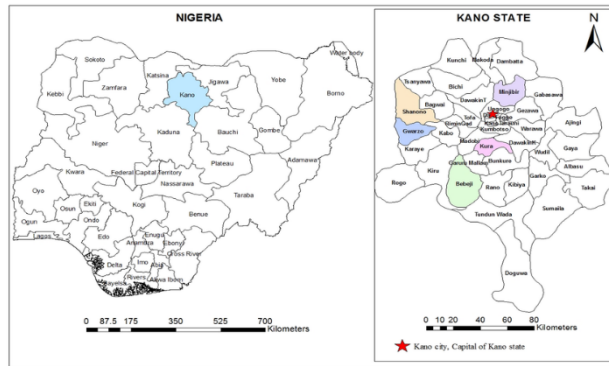

Figure 1. Maps showing geographical location of Kano city. (Source: URL1)

According to Drake, 2005, Steven Holl described 'enmeshed experience' as not simply a place of events, things, and activities, but something more intangible, which emerges from the continues unfolding of overlapping spaces, materials, and details. Within enmeshed space, we understand distinct objects, districts field, as a "whole". Our experience in architecture can only be, however, perspectival, fragmented, and incomplete. These experiences consist of partial views through urban settings, which offer a different kind of involvement or investigation than the bird's eye view, which is typically used by architects. The passage of time, light, shadow and transparency, color phenomena, texture, material, and detail all participate in the complete experience of space. Enmeshed experience expedites seeing, emotive, listening and measuring the world with our entire body experience.

Drawing from Barau's (2007; 2008) works, he showed how these experiences manifest in the narrow pathways, construction, and material that are characteristics of the old city. Architectural features such as "domes and minarets" found in mosques and institutional buildings scattered across the city are inspirations from the Arab and Islamic culture while the GRA's (Government Reserved Areas) used by colonial rulers together with CBDs large size plots and tall buildings are remnants of colonial influence. Barau concluded that this generated a hybrid identity to the morphological settings and imageability of the city. The triple heritage framework employed by Barau glossed over a deep component of Kano, the non-indigenes. Urban Kano experience is incomplete if it negates these enclaves. These communities reflect their ancestral heritage, one that is distinct from their host community. Rich in color, custom and industrial, they afford different experiences available within the state, transitioning from a native to Arab/Islamic through to Western experience and finally a different local-non-indigene experience. Experiences can be juxtaposed, meshed or distinct and can be in any order and combination. Hawan Nasarawa, a celebratory procession embarked by the emir and

his entourage bring these different experiences to a confluence, intermingling and exchanging cultural values within a short period traversing through the different enclaves with diverse people paying homage to the emir (see figure 2.0).

Figure 2. Picture collage displaying Hawan Nasarawa and emir's palace. (Source: authors field work)

However, for the young people whom grew up after these developments had already taken place, we inherited the symbolism attached to these monuments. Even though we lived in and are constantly visiting these places with the gates serving as an interface to our history, we have not cultivated our own history of these monuments. Our history has been sterile leaving us vulnerable to the conditioning of prior history unchallenged or a future programmatic history. For a large portion of the people who are not students of the social sciences, arts or humanities, the history of their immediate environment and that of the country as a whole is minimal. History, when offered in schools, is not a compulsory for all. However, this does not mean that history can only be learned through formal education. African has always been known for its traditional way of preserving history orally by master orators. Martins (2012) has cautioned against overreliance on oral history. It is often concerned about the overall picture rather than chronology and specific dates of events. This abandons the monuments memory in a charged political atmosphere susceptible to reductionism to visual value rather than the substance and meaning imbedded within them for centuries.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Kano is a place of constant transformation, which can be term as becoming, as a result of interwoven networks of events, in other words, dynamic systems of network such as economic, social, political, religious and cultural networks. In order to comprehend and interpret the memory of the place and its urban identity which is considered as a spatiotemporal phenomenon, the enmeshed experience is proposed as a conceptual framework for this research inquiry. Similarly, this research adopted radical observation in the phenomenological inquiry of experiencing first-hand experience and observations of the place, with open-ended interviews with the local residents of the place to gather the data. A spatial reading was performed in Kano city. This ultimately led to bodily exploitation of the built environment. Sketches and photographs are juxtaposed between old and new and overlaid together providing a visual prose complementing our field notes.

In this article theme, the memory of politics, social and political identity is painstaking as spatiotemporal events, which is place memory. In this context, the prompt political government-led demonstrates an urban transformation in relation to place memory which meshed together the dynamic and interwoven systems namely; economic, social, political, psychological, religious and cultural dynamics as a whole. Considering the spatiotemporal experiences, there is a spatial transition based on time-space relations which create a hybrid Identity in the urban context of Kano city. These paradoxes are important for interpreting and comprehending the ontological meanings that might be hidden. Furthermore, this makes us focus on phenomenological inquiries. In this context, oscillation is important between these two dimensions, in order to unfold the intangible and tangibles paradox. As a result, dialectical thinking between Paradoxes may emerge. This may lead to reciprocal movement between the opposites (negative dialectics). Asking question is very important in phenomenology. In this phenomenological journey of inquiries, while questioning the ontology, epistemology, and meaning quality may emerge. Quality has two meanings, which overlap each other and therefore, cannot be defined, and that makes it circular, i.e. no end. It is continuous and problematic. The quality exists in both subject and object. The interactions define the multiple meaning of quality.This quality only exists in mutual interaction. Therefore, quality only exists in our places when it exists in us.

Encountering Kano city will evoke some phenomenological inquiries. There exists a vivid compensation or givenness from the city to the environment and from the environment to the city, through planning, scale, proportion, form and materiality. According to Merleau-Ponty, *"Enmeshed experience is a floor of becoming; a whole of interactions or perceptions. Each event of perception, therefore, opens up to its own world. This phenomenon gives rise to a dialogue and prolongs interaction that proceeds as both process and the product."* (Merleau-Ponty, & Smith, 1996).

Therefore, enmeshed experience makes it possible to be in constant dialogue and interaction with the narrative space. It emphasizes on the ways of seeing, reading its narrative, and finding of an interpretive frame involving interwoven network system of physical, political, social, cultural, psychologic and economic dynamics of the campus as a whole. In senate building, the spatial experience can be understood as a possibility of the relation between the perceiving body (the enquirer) and perceived space (city and memories) having paradox that can be grasped within the lived world. At this moment an awareness of the body-mind-space relation help us to see with the minds eyes and to grasp or obtain tacit knowledge.

3. KANO: CITY GATES AND WALLS

Kano developed to noticeable quality as a focal point of a prosperous exchange and an essential end of trans-Saharan exchange course and a rich and productive agricultural district. Today, it is a noteworthy commercial, religious, industrial and administrative centre (Muhammad, 2013).
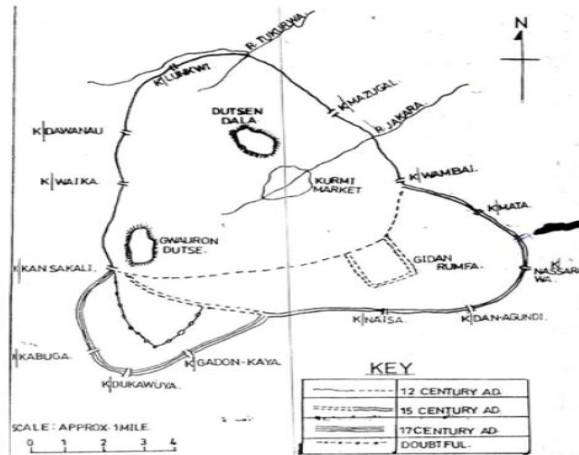
Figure 3. Map of the Wall and Gates of Kano. (Source: Geography Dept, Bayero University, Kano (BUK), 2004). In Adeyemi, A., & Bappah, B. A, 2011).

The summation of events, experiences, and artefacts that had shaped the history of a people are often revered and cherished. Kano city wall and gate like others found in the ancient world have for centuries inform, educate and inspire the local populace of their heritage, which was built in the 11th and 12th century (NCMM, 1992) as a defence mechanism from attacks that was incessant of the period see figure 3.0. As the city grew in population and competed with the cities where civilization began, the city walls lengths were increased. The debate on the exact length of the walls is ongoing. While the Museums and Monuments authorities (NCMM, 1992) measures the length of 14km, Whittlesey (1937) assert a 17km length while Adeyemi and Bappah, (2011) field survey put the length at 27km. The shape with which the wall encircled the city is also a matter of debate. While Adeyemi and Bappah, (2011) are using the terminologies like triangular while Nast (1996) examination of the remains of the wall were described as circular. Nevertheless, these walls were constructed of mud bricks with heights and width varying between 6.8-7.6m and 3.0-4.4m respectively (Adeyemi& Bappah, 2011).

At the height of their utilitarianism, they guaranteed security to the famous *Kurmi* market, emir palace, the populace, mosques, and other traditional institutions. Access was restricted through the gates, of which there are 15. According to Iliyasu (2014) and Adeyemi and Bappah, (2011); 8 gates were built between 1112s-18sAD; 4 in 1460s-70sAD; and 2 between 1619-21AD and then Sabuwar Kofa built in 1937 after the invention of the motor vehicle. As such it allowed for the vehicle's ease of passage. Some of the gates had a security outpost within them including iron gates that were closed at specific hours. This earliest sense of security relationship formed bondage of triumph-ism over aggressors. People viewed the walls and gates as a necessity for their continued living and safety. However, after the jihad of Usman Dan-Fodio from 1804-1808 that united the different warring kingdoms of what was to become the northern Nigeria, their utilitarian function became obsolete. Hence, the subsequent gate to be built after the jihad was Sabuwar Kofa in 1937, which was meant to create easy access for pupils of the then Kano Middle School. This created a generation of the young that associated not with the warring walls but an educational gate.

City walls like other historic buildings uncover the goals and traditions of the progenitors, they are works of those who have never been trained to follow to standard and are considered today as a vestige of their former glory. However an imposing arrangement of human activities,

climate, and other natural factors are rapidly bringing about the decay of the Kano city ancient wall and gates and without annual maintenance, natural erosion quickens the process even further. These issues are a danger to cultural heritage and traditional architecture.

Rehabilitation of the city walls and gates

Kano's recent urban development can be traced back to the concentration of investments by the exploitative colonial rule of the early 20th century. Post-independence Kano continued these resource allocations and infrastructure development within the metropolis to boost the economy at the detriment of the peripheral town and villages, gravitating population towards the city. Investments in roads, bridges, and underpasses were aggressively pursued from 1999 till date to cater for the 3.6million people within the (World Population Review, 2017; UN, 2016). Facelifts were given to old public building. Within the ancient city, sidewalks along the wider routes were provided to "modernize" the environment. Housing estates by the public and the private sector all formed part of the aggressive urban interventions. As noble and sublime as these projects were, some were not without grievous antagonism, not least the cases of *Kofar Na'isa, Sabuwar Kofa* and *Kofar Nassarawa*.

The rehabilitation project of the city gates and wall under review were financed by the government. The sum of $70,000.00 was released for the project as a grant under the "Preservation of Cultural Heritage of Developing Countries" (Akinade, 2005). However, in this paper, three gates were analysed to understand the perception of the city through body experience while revealing the imageability of the past-present and future in the politic of memory.

Kofar Na'isa

Kofar Na'isa stretches 2,001.00 square meters to *Kofar Gadon Kaya*, with a gate length of 30.3m, a width of 3.0m and height of 6.8m, which was traditionally built with mud in 1470 AD and was rehabilitated in 2004 (Adeyemi &Bappah, 2011) see figure 4.0.


Figure 4. Diagram narrating the place memory contradiction of the gate. (Source: authors field work)

The demolition was mainly as a result of road expansion at *Kofar Na'isa* and this led to an over pouring outcry from the general public. Niven (1933; 339) had shown that "some of them

(gates) have been widened to take motor transport, but some are still as narrow as they originally were, with a bend in the passage to aid the defence". However, the motor industry was in its infancy and its associated impacts not grasped at the time. Hence, the enthusiasm it generated within the public will allow for such historical misdemeanour. Likewise, heritage conservation as a global movement had not been established, local communities preserved their artefacts, and the region was under colonial rule. A civil disobedience was inconceivable within those contexts. In contrast, the events of 2010 were in a heritage heightened self-conscious era. People were shocked and distressed, surrounding the 500-year-old gate as it was pulled down (*Kofar-Na'isa*, 2013). "declared a national monument in 1964", Jaafar, Ya'u and Usman (2010) expressed their dismay and uncovering that the monuments were destroyed without the consultation and consent of the NCMM. At the time German government was providing funds for the "rehabilitation of [the] walls" (Daily trust, 2010), to which Kofar Na'isa was included, the government undermined its own ad-hoc committee Protection, Promotion, and Preservation of Kano City Wall to the destruction of the gates. The reconstructed gate was an abysmal caricature of the ancient. However, as the documentary by *Kofar-Na'isa* (2013) (not to be mistaken with the gate. We have the tendencies of using places of origin in our official name) showed, others see it as a positive, allowing swift vehicular movement.

Sabuwar Kofa

Sabuwar Kofa stretches 556.80 square meters to *Kofar Dan Agundi*, with a width of 3.7m, and height of 7.0 m, which was traditionally built with mud in 1937 AD and was rehabilitated in 2004 (Adeyemi &Bappah, 2011). see figure 5.0.
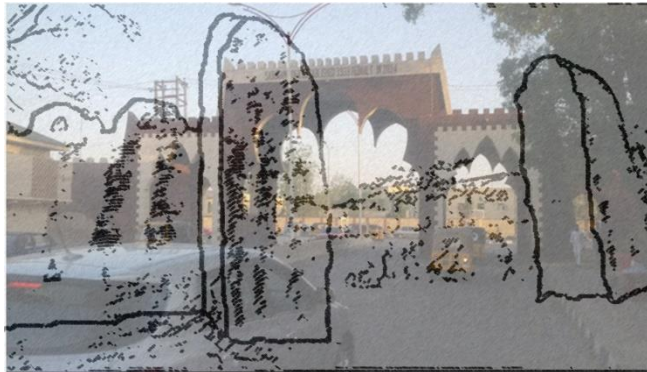
Figure 5. Diagram narrates the contradicting relations in the past and present feature of *Sabuwar kofa* gate. (Source: authors field work)

Sabuwar Kofa, a victim to road expansion after being rehabilitated and refurbished in the erstwhile decade. It was demolished along with parts of the wall. The paradox of differences and similarities are visible in the physical environment through the old-new urban transformation in this gate, see figure 4.0.

Kofar Nassarawa

Kofar Nassarawa stretches 781.50 square meter to Sabuwar kofa. Built by Emir Mohammadu Rumfa and was named Kofar Kawaye in the year 1466 AD (Adeyemi &Bappah, 2011). After 395 years, the gate was renamed *Kofar Nassarawa* (URL 2), see figure 6.0 and 7.0.

Figure 6. Picture showing the new flyer over bridge at Kofar Nassarawa. (Source: authors field work)

Figure 7. Diagram narrating the continuity emerging from the appearance of the the gate transfromation through memory. (Source: authors field work)

Kofar Nasarawa (figure 6.0 and 7.0) the circumstances fair better amongst the other city gates and wall mentioned earlier. It was double road link to different parts of the city however due to so-called urban transformation implementations by replacing old projects with a new project of construction. The government supported urban transformation process took place there by tearing down the old structure and replace it with a fly over bridge. While constructing the over-head bridge, partial interventions were made to the gate. The top flat roof was demolished to accommodate the gradient of the bridge. It was reconstructed according to the priors' principle. Though the original gate built in 1463 had long been demolished, it is its reconstructed successor that was preserved.

In a period when cultural heritage is exploited and advertised as a revenue source and collecting donations to that effect, the exact opposite is been done by distancing the public from their heritage while projecting a modern city. However with Kano city reach in varieties of cultural codes, a form of urban transformation has taken place in a democratic setting. Transformation here denotes a continuous change of phenomena that would last forever. Transformation in this text is described as metamorphosis, where Deleuze in his work Difference and Repetition (1994) describe metamorphosis as a difference in itself, and he links it to the eternal return of Nietchze, in the way the eternal return exists in every metamorphosis. Urban transformation can be experienced as a continuous production of difference in everyday life in a certain locality, and this depends on the social relation of the users within a place which transforms the users and the locality simultaneously like in metamorphosis.

Sabuwar Kofa and *Kofar Na'isa* were among the restored gates shifting the memory in one direction before the demolition while the icon of modern Kano, the bridge, is at *Kofar Nasarawa*. With this observed they provide the constant interaction and contradiction of traditional & modernity and seem the viable cases to explore the politics of memory in the city.

4. CONCLUSION

While one strolls through the gates (Sabuwar Kofa, Kofar Na'isa, and Kofar Nasarawa) one can develop a consciousness of politics of memory by addressing an event that occurred with the role of politics shaping the collective memory of Kano. The memories in Kano are influenced by political and cultural codes. Where administration of Kwankwasiyya led by Kwankwaso with its policies and ideologies redefined the cities imageability through the rehabilitation of the city gates and walls.

In this phenomenological approach, the inquirer was enmeshed into an ontological and epistemological journey that unfold the metaphysical relations, (hidden and unhidden, tangibles and intangibles) dimensions for better grasping and comprehension of sway in memory, perception, imageability, meaning, interpretation, identity etc. and the constant flow of becoming ın a gestalt shift. Rather it portrayed a paradox of change and continuity. The continuity was in perfect mutual relation with the change because there is resistance to change. According to Walter Benjamin (1999: 517 (P1, 7) "When I walk the streets of a city, the meanings of the streets have been layered by my own personal experiences and memories and the encounters with the city and its people and multidimensional histories". Equally, they have been layered for each citizen and user of the city. (Saarikangas 2002: 55,). This can also be related to Kano, where the city now through bodily experience has witnessed a contradiction of an overlay where the process of politics of memory as emerged as a way to relate ideas and action to a life changing experience of the city.

In this paper, phenomenological approach to Kano as a paradigm was fashioned in order to understand and construe the politics of memory and urban transformation (perception and imageability). It is obvious that we do not usually recognize, we do actually dwell in architectural metaphors and poeticise images which provide specific realms and horizons for experiencing and understanding our life's situations.

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