THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY IN BUILDING MODERN TURKISH ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

It is a real challenge for the young architects in the developing countries on how to express a cultural identity of their local qualities in their cities. The international influences prevail throughout the world by the help of global communication systems. Design is now free from its traditional factors such as local environment and culture indicating the end of borders, customs and earthly differences. Yet, the current curriculum of architectural education in those places does not promise for a positive response for the dilemma. Writings and courses of architectural history helped a lot to universalize the architectural repertoire valid for all without much regard to cultural identities. It provoked for the constitution of a categorization among buildings, regions and historical periods. This paper examines the development of architectural history discourse in the western world and its influences in Turkey to draw attention to the need for rewriting the 'architectural history' in the 'other' world.

Key Words: Architectural History, Architectural Education, Globalisation, Culture.

Introduction

The beginning of twenty first century is characterised by the recognition of cultural identities and also globalisation. Digital media made possible to have global and cultural features at the same time in a cultural identity. Architecture is one of the authorities to express this universal cultural context throughout the world. However this leads to a real challenge for the architects of the developing countries on how to design in their cities where the international influences and development desires of local initiatives has taken command in shaping the built environment (Mahgoub, 2007). Architectural education has a great impact to build architects' minds but curriculum of architectural education has been influenced by the international trends without much regard to the local needs and opportunities. While teaching of architectural history in North Africa is linked to the French colonialism (Djerbi, 2003), in Turkey it covered the Western world from antiquity to the Renaissance and Islamic civilisation (Baydar,

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2003:84). Architectural history courses helped to build a repertoire of good buildings and a consciousness of 'otherness' for the architects of the developing world.

Prevailing impact of western concepts and history on the Turkish architectural historiography and constructions has a significant role. The development of architectural history discourse in Turkey influenced the praxis and therefore contemporary built environment. This paper focuses on the key role of history of architecture courses in creating a consciousness for the architectural assets of the local culture. Increasing awareness of cultural values would support to find the ways of expressing cultural identity in architecture. Therefore the alternative writings of architectural history are required to challenge the global modes of architectural education and practice. The paper will review the development of architectural history and its influences in the Ottoman world.

Development of the Architectural History

Until the central Middle Ages there were no schools of architecture. The architect had learned on the building site. This did not mean that architect's training was merely based on the practical and actual matters of building. We are informed about the education of an architect as early as the first century B.C. that theory and practice are the basis of his knowledge. The Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius (1960:5), in the very first book devoted to architecture De *architectura,* says that architectural education in the Ancient World had two aspects: theoretical which is mainly related to the principles of proportion and practical which is included the manual skills or the actual exercises of building. A wide knowledge of theory and history of architecture is also requisite for an architect who should be equipped with knowledge of various disciplines (Vitruvius, 1960). Theoretical and historical education and practical training had taken place simultaneously in the ancient world. He summarises the process by stating "Let him be educated, skilful with pencil, instructed in geometry, know much history, have followed the philosophers with attention, understand music, have some knowledge of medicine, know the opinions of the jurist, and be acquainted with astronomy and the theory of the heavens" Vitruvius (1960: 45-6). It seems that function of philosophy here, is to make an architect a dignified figure in the society rather than enriching his mental ability to think on the architectural design as a matter of intellectual discourse. The book essentially records the glory of the past clearly admiring the way they were designed and built. It suggests that lessons for future architectural enterprises should be based on the tradition of architecture in which the past is the source of learning.

In the Middle Ages, builders and their Lodges kept the 'secrets' of construction and design which were inaccessible to the general public and even to ordinary builders (Broadbent, 1995). Those secrets of building, practical geometry and the manner of carpenters or masons rather than theory, were behind the design. However the cultural transformations throughout the Middle Ages, encouraged the philosophers and builders to develop methods for solving the problems instead of following the theological doctrines (Radding & Clarke, 1992). Their efforts on rational and objective solutions of the problems improved the intellectual expectations. The new cognitive process influenced the standards of discourse and led to a desire to understand the human and physical world. In the twelve century, architectural praxis was affected greatly from the new intellectual contributions of builders and masters more than from the surviving works of the past. Reasoning the praxis helped to form a body of

knowledge freed from the building site that in turn transformed the method of learning resulting in the schools of architecture independent from a particular site. The earlier schools of architecture (such as the school of Chartes, Paris and Peter Abelard) were established by a group of thinkers rather than mere builders (Radding & Clarke, 1992).

Renaissance began with the revival of Classical period leading to an interest in surviving examples of Greece and Roman architecture. Ancient edifices of history were studied by various Renaissance architects as the lessons of great architecture. Architect as a complete artisan and philosopher tried to find 'ideal' forms for all times and developed the theory of architecture. In the middle of the fifteenth century Leon Battista Alberti wrote the first book on the theory of architecture since the antiquity (Alberti, 1992). *De re aedificatoria*, Alberti's treatise on the art of building, prescribes how to build the buildings of the future. However, the new architecture is to be derived from impressive ruins of the antiquity and the texts about the life of that period. Alberti developed the architecture as a reasonable form of art and led to understand the importance of theory for creativity. Architects begun to think about the 'architecture' as a matter of philosophy aiming to reach an exact knowledge and correct theory (Broadbent, 1995: 13). This was a significant sign of the historical split between theory and practise, which also led to the schooling of architectural training. The architect begun to learn at the school rather than the construction site and the distanciation from the actual production of buildings is ever-increasing (Tschumi, 1995: 24). The 'idea' of architecture was dominating its 'education'. Once it was split from the actual site as well as the tradition and focused on the abstract, intellectual curriculum, history and cultural differences were no more significant for educating 'international' architect.

Publication of architectural theory and history books were part of an effort to establish a universal epistemology for architecture. The sources of universality were however based on the indigenous and spontaneous development process of the western architecture. Various ways of dominancy applied by the Western civilisation towards the 'other' world in the last two centuries and made possible to establish the 'modern' epistemology of the architecture. Historical documentation about the constitution of cultures created a literature on the history of architecture that is established mainly by the western scholars. At the end of the 18th century, Europeans believed that great civilisations were derived from the Middle East via Europe to the world (Larsen, 1989). Archaeological excavations were undertaken with great enthusiasm to reconstruct a great past befitting the industrialising western culture. The Greek and Roman Worlds were accepted as ancestors (Larsen, 1989). Thus they were separated from their historical and geographical bonds and became a part of western civilisation. This was a beginning for politically and culturally divided world named as Orient and Occident. It was agreed that the model of progress is the West while Orient represents backwardness and therefore should struggle to catch up (Larsen, 1989: 234). Edward Said (1985) indicates the late 18th century as a starting point for Orientalism, which is a system of representation applied not only to the Asiatic East but also to the Islamic Orient meaning Arabs or the Ottomans. Orientalism in the western thought and consciousness is constituted by the perception of the Orient by the West (Said, 1985: 203). So it is not real but rather a fiction in which the basic character of the Orient was its weakness.

Theory and history of architecture in the western world shared same view in its early publications, which in turn influenced the architectural education in the Orient. Vitruvian heritage on the architectural theory had established the limits for architectural identifications and formed a linear vision for a progressive architecture (Nalbantoğlu, 2000). Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture* published in 1896, was at first a classical survey on the western styles of architecture. The second edition of the book published in 1901 included the non-western architectural traditions. He classified various architectural cultures such as Indian, Arabic or Chinese. He emphasised the idea on continuity and originality of the western architecture that essentially formed the historical styles. His orientalist approach led him to classify the architectural cultures into two main groups: historical and non-historical architectures (Nalbantoğlu, 2000). In this view the historical styles constituted the history of architecture but non-historical ones had no impact on the history of architecture. The architecture of the 'other' was peculiar without a history but with excessive ornamentation. This categorical structure allowed calculation and comparison of the architectural cultures to demonstrate the priority of the west over the non-western architectural traditions. Further writings on the history of architecture (Kostof, 1985) challenged this western canon by including the investigations of the 'other' architectures. However this benevolent and sympathetic comprise still define which 'other' architecture is more important and worth to be included in the books of architectural history (Bozdoğan, 2001).

Development of Architectural History in the Ottoman World

In the Ottoman culture and possibly in the rest of the 'other' world, architectural history and theory had been rarely as a matter of scholarly writing. This does not mean the lack of written material on architecture but rather lack of literature on the epistemology of architecture. There are limitless numbers of archival documents explaining the construction process of buildings but there is not much on how the buildings were designed. Before the 19th century architectural epistemology is not separated from the practise and integrated with the oral culture of the Ottoman society (Tanyeli, 1996). Only in the 19th century the Ottoman intelligentsia attempted to bring light to the qualities of Ottoman architecture under the patronage of Sultan Abdulaziz (Çelik, 1986: 149). The work called *Usul-u Mimari-i Osman-i* (the Ottoman Architecture) was published in 1873 and prepared by Edhem Pascha, Montani Efendi and Boghos Efendi for the Vienna Universal Exposition (Çelik, 1986: 148, Tanyeli, 1996: 86). It was a significant work to establish an architectural epistemology for Ottoman architecture. It defined the past, questioned the present and developed a discourse for the future (Tanyeli, 1996). The work criticised the increasing foreign influences in architecture of the Capital city and argued that imitation of European styles would end the Ottoman architecture (Çelik, 1986: 149). This early attempt to write scholarly about the indigenous architecture was however based on the Vitruvian model. It analysed extant buildings to deduce the architectural principles that outlined Ottoman architecture. The reorganisation and recording of Ottoman orders very much in the line of western models was the first scholar attempt to establish an architectural epistemology for the Ottoman architectural culture.

Another document was prepared for the 1893 Industrial and Agricultural Exposition (Çelik, 1986:151). It criticised the architecture in Istanbul at that time for not following the true architectural rules. The document discussed the Western and Islamic

styles to present an appropriate style. The commission chose Renaissance as the proper European architectural style from the books of the history of architecture. The debate on styles did not present a clear understanding and definition but rather confusion. However this document is important as it presented an early cultural concern about architectural identity and criticized the imitations of European styles (Çelik, 1986).

At the end of the century, a prominent Turkish art historian Celal Esat Arseven criticised the European art historians due to their generalisation about Persian, Arabic and Ottoman art and architecture. He argued prevailing impact of European architecture on the contemporary practice in Istanbul and proposed a method for a better understanding of the Ottoman art and architecture (Çelik, 1986: 151). His objective was to set up a method for discovering the underlying rules of Ottoman architecture, which, in turn, he believed, would be applied to contemporary practise. Seemingly, the 19th century French architectural authority, E. Viollet-le-Duc, influenced him. He applied his method to record and measures the extent monuments whose scientific analysis was initial steps to lie out the legacy of local architecture. All three major attempts to save the declining Ottoman architecture emphasised the values of Ottoman architecture and discussed the legitimacy of the European styles in this Islamic culture. Revival of the past became a common proposal to create a contemporary but national identity in architecture. The methods to analyse the past glory or objectives to find out the rules of Ottoman architecture and even the ideology of nationalism were not thought originally but rather the European precedents were followed up by the local initiatives. However the study of the local architectural heritage in relation to its past and future generated the basic question for young Turkish architects: how to design for ourselves.

Architectural Education in the Ottoman world

The distinct architectural education program was started in 1882 in the Academy of Fine Arts of Istanbul. As in other parts of the world the system of architectural training was based on the Ecole des Beaux-Arts of Paris (Çelik, 1986: 153). Teachers were western and students were Greeks and Armenians in the early years of architectural education in the school (Çelik, 1986: 152). Pioneering architects Kemalettin Bey and Vedat Tek who initiated the First National Architectural Movement at the turn of the century were also educated in the western countries (Tekeli, 1984: 12). Their attempts to revitalize the traditional architecture remained as a matter of style leading to an eclectic architectural vocabulary (Özaslan, 1995: 83). The architectural activities in Istanbul and later in Ankara that is the new capital city of Turkish Republic had continuously reflected a dichotomy between the western and local architectures. This time, newly founded republic was based on the western principals ignoring its past that, just as in the modern ideology, represented backwardness. The creation of the new built environment for the national modern state followed the developments of architectural movement in Europe. In the early two decades European architects came to Turkey to apply the principals of the Modern Movement both in practice and education (Tekeli, 1984). Modern architecture dominated the building and city planning programs of the State until 1940s.

However Anatolian themes were at the centre of the nationalist and official production of culture for modern Turkey in the 1930s (Bozdoğan, 2001). Architectural culture was inevitably affected by this new trend like the other branches of art such as music, literature, painting and sculpture. Vernacular architecture and pre-Islamic

civilisations of Anatolia became the new sources for the search of a modern and national Turkish architecture (Bozdoğan, 2001:255). European architects had a significant role in encouraging the traditionalist discourse both in education and practice (Bozdoğan, 2001, Nalbantoğlu, 1993). Ernst Egli, Clemenz Holzmeister, Bruno Taut and Paul Bonatz encouraged the studies of vernacular architecture through their teaching of the early generation of republican architects (Bozdoğan, 2001:257). Ernst Egli begun to teach in the Academy of Fine Arts and was appointed to reform the architectural training program according to the modernism (Nalbantoğlu, 1993:68). Egli's appreciation and interpretation of traditional Turkish architecture in terms of the modern architecture became the leading discussion for further definitions. He insisted on the locality and therefore emphasised the significance of the context. Egli's contextualist and regionalist approach to the idea of contemporary architecture was inspired by the Anatolian vernacular, which also influenced his building practise in Ankara. The "cubic" form of traditional houses in Anatolia with its responsiveness to nature and context by use of courtyards, shaded porticos and cubic window projections, was seen a convenient model for creation of the 'national' modern architecture (Bozdoğan, 2001). This understanding went parallel with the criticism of the Modern Movement by Bruno Taut who was the successor of Egli at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul.

The Idea of Sedad Hakkı Eldem's Architecture

The beginning loss of faith in modernism and the new economic and political scenes in the world led to a new demand for a national architecture in Turkey. The regionalist discourse that already established by European architects had a chance to extend the argument. The initial changes were seen in the architectural education where the Turkish architects had begun to teach. One of these influential teachers was Egli's assistant at the academy: Sedat Hakkı Eldem (Nalbantoğlu, 1993: 68). He is the most important figure of modern architecture that practiced, taught and researched architecture for more than fifty years in Turkey. Eldem was a descendant of Ottoman elite and educated abroad. He was trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul between 1924-1928 and the following year was sent to Europe to complete his architectural training (Bozdoğan, 1987:29). He was culturally 'in-between' the European and Turkish cultures that in fact deeply effected his position of architecture.

The conflict between the traditional and modern architecture was eliminated by definition of traditional Turkish house within the 'modern' canon. He studied, recorded and sketched the old houses of domestic architecture. He had begun to explore the houses and other buildings through his studentship at the architectural school. Eldem has exhibited his extensive series of colour perspectives and beautiful sketches in Paris and later Berlin under the title "Countryside Houses for Anatolia". He projected images of individual dwellings with pitched tile roofs, repetitive windows and cubic window projections above solid walls set in a hypothetical countryside. He believed that traditional Turkish house has same conceptions of the modern house. He states that a style of national architecture is to be derived form the Turkish domestic architecture and imitation of the European style should be avoided (Eldem, 1980: 90). The contemporary Turkish national style would be in accordance with the modern architecture in terms of material and basic design characteristics (Eldem, 1980). His experience and studies in Europe led Eldem to 'discover' the modern qualities of the Turkish House such as lightness, transparency and modular logic both in structure and

building design. He confirmed this idea indicating that one of the pioneering architects of the Modern Movement, Le Corbusier, was also deeply inspired by the Turkish house (quoted in Bozdoğan, 2001: 261).

On the other hand he was influenced by the architecture and ideas of the modern masters such as Le Corbusier, Auguste Perret and F. L. Wright. He studied the architecture of Le Corbusier from the books and site visits. He was fascinated by the Domino House project but unhappy with his insufficient attention to the reinforced concrete skeleton, which, he believed; modern architecture owes its structural success (Eldem, 1980). He devoted himself to the reinforced concrete skeleton believing its possibility of translation into the Turkish vernacular architecture. He, therefore, moved to A. Perret's office aiming to learn more about his inspiring uses of the material. The most important of these influences was of Frank Lloyd Wright's prairie houses published by Wasmuth. When he saw the album in Berlin, he believed that he "…discovered some important elements of the Turkish house of the future in these designs. The long, low lines, the rows of windows, the wide eaves and the shape of the roofs were very much like the Turkish house I had in mind. These romantic, naturalistic houses were far more attractive than the box-like architecture of Le Corbusier" (Eldem, 1980: 91). He questioned the difference between the designs of Wright and Le Corbusier and came to conclusion that Wright find his design inspirations in the indigenous cultures rather than America itself. This was the second confirmation to support his idea on an attempt to compromise the old and new.

In 1932, Sedad Hakkı Eldem launched a seminar on the national architectural style at the Academy of Fine Arts (Eldem, 1980:91). The main objective was to encourage the development of a new, modern Turkish style based on domestic architecture. The initial step was the extensive documentation of existing examples of traditional houses, in Istanbul and in various towns of Anatolia. Then he was able to abstract the underlying typological matrix of Turkish House from the hundreds of individual examples studied by him and by the students throughout 1930s and 1940s. The seminar was so influential that resulted in the development of a new architectural style commonly known as the Second National Architecture, which replaced the Cubist forms that had developed during the early republican period in Ankara. Eldem declared his oppositions to the work of German and Austrian architects who played a major role in building the new capital city in the 1920s and 1930s.

Eldem's architectural vocabulary based on the understanding of the Turkish House was to be applied to the new constructions, which must have pitched roofs and eaves. However, the outbreak of Second World War affected the Nationalist Movement. Political atmosphere of the period demanded the nationalist line but solid and monumental in architectural expression. Buildings were built of stone, strong and durable that is called the Stone Age by Eldem (1980: 92). Istanbul University Faculty of Sciences and Letters was designed by the trio of Sedad Hakkı Eldem, Paul Bonatz and Emin Onat, in 1942-43 and was a significant example of the reinterpretation of Ottoman –Turkish official style. Eldem approached to the official architecture with the similar romantic attitude that he applied for the vernacular architecture. He examined the basic architectural qualities of the Ottoman-Turkish architecture and derived abstracted principals to lead the new designs national in character. The inspiration source of his designs continued to be surviving examples of historical architecture of the native culture until the 1950s when Turkey underwent to major changes in political

and economic spheres. Under the overwhelming desires of internationalism, nationalist approach was disregarded as an eclectic or fascists manner. The seminar came to the end.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that there is a great difference between the western and non-western cultures about the understanding of architectural history. While the former historically claims the authority to classify and value the cultural representations due to its power over the 'other' the latter accepts all categorical definitions. While in the former the architectural epistemology aims to define the universal and timeless characteristics of the 'ideal architecture', the latter lacks the views on claiming the initiatives to define architecture. Seemingly selective coverage of contemporary architectural history will keep the view of 'otherness'. This paper proposes that there is a need to rethink the scope and content of architectural history not only for the 'other' world but for all.

We argue that there should be new awareness in architectural education to reclaim a cultural approach which would be a stimulating agent for a production of built environment where the local conditions, characteristics and preferences should determine the urban form and its architecture. The emphasis on the 'architecture of the place' can be a departure point to evoke a resistance to the prevailing impact of Western concepts and practices in formulation of our cultural values and built environment. Inventions in architectural education can be based on the world of lived experiences, of sensations, of perceptions and of needs since the existing built environment already forms the cognitive repertoire of a student of architecture before he or she starts a formal course. This paper indicates the promising role of historic built environment within the contemporary architectural education in the 'other' world. In particular, the paper focuses on the key role of history of architecture courses in creating a consciousness for the architectural assets of the local culture.

We do not propose the rewriting of architectural history for the'other' but rather writing of architectural history by the 'other'. However, this needs an initial step that disclaims all categorisations in written tradition of the architectural history since Vitruvius. For that, the 'other' should leave to look at the self as the 'other'. This is in fact a fictitious identical category, which should be dismissed before starting any scholar or polemical discussion about the writing of architectural history. Sedad Hakkı Eldem is a good example of dealing with the tradition of local architecture that is common in the 'other' world. For him, like the others, tradition is an inspiration source for new designs that meant to be responsive within the modernizing context of 'other' cultures. Modernizing the traditions through by rationalisation, abstraction or justification of its appropriateness with modernism is a common way to be included in the western world. In the end, it is an acceptance of 'otherness'. However a contribution to the universal epistemology of architecture requires equal selves and a democratic discussion environment from which not alternative histories but rather the pluralist architectural history views may come out. Such an architectural history would contribute much more to the education of young architects in the globalizing world than its present form that is based on the split between the local awareness for the 'other' and history of architecture for the all.

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