PUBLIC SPACES AS A PALIMPSEST OF CITY LAYERS: THE CASE OF BAHARESTAN SQUARE IN TEHRAN (IRAN)

Hamza Benacer[1]*, Narges Golkar[2], Khalil Bachir Aouissi[1]

[1]University of Blida 1, Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies, Department of Architecture, Blida, Algeria; e-mails: benacer_hamza@univ-blida.dz; aouissikhalil@univ-blida.dz
[2]Tadbir Bana Co, Tehran, Iran; e-mail: na.golkar@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper intends to underline the importance of historic public spaces as the deposits of collective memories, proposing the critical analysis, reinterpretation, and systematization of relevant informative historical layers as a counter model to the globalizing tendencies and their fast pace of transformation. Baharestanis a historic square located in the northeast of Tehran's Historic Center, and it is the home to Iran's Parliament and the Ministry of Culture. It makes the square significant at the national level, especially due to its location surrounded by several exquiste historical heritage buildings. However, following the decline of Tehran's historic center, Baharestan lost its socio-cultural vitality and spatial quality, hosting urban functions mainly heterogeneous to its identity, and eventually turning into a traffic node. Through the comparative study of numerous historical documents, and adapting the concept of "palimpsest", Baharestan Square has been interpreted as the assemblage of different city layers in relation to the environmental and socio-political narratives of the city. The shift from one layer to another intends to reflect some of the lost memories of Tehran and its collective identity in the transition from traditional to modern society. Later on, the paper argues how this palimpsest quality and co-evolution of those plural layers and narratives in Baharestan demonstrate this symbolic square as a "catalytic social infrastructure", giving Tehran an opportunity to overcome the challenge of "social amnesia" and promoting its civic culture and cohesion.

Keywords: city layers; collective memory; palimpsest; Baharestan Historic Square

1. Introduction

A city is the manifest of a collective condition, a social product fundamentally bound up with social reality (Schmid, 2008). This reality describes the city as a deposit of memories, ideologies, and powers, and the demonstration of shared values and collective identity of a society. Yet, this social meaning is critically linked with "the geographical configurations and spatial relations, which give material form and expression to society" (Soja, 1985, p. 90). Aldo Rossi, in his well-known book *The Architecture of the City*, refers to this link between the spatiality (materiality) of a city and its social life (the locus and the citizenry), explaining the city itself as the "collective memory" of its people and, as such, it is associated with objects

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*Corresponding author, e-mail: benacer_hamza@univ-blida.dz

and places (Rossi, 1982). Describing the concept of "urban artifact", Rossi argues how the identity and "collective memory" of a city and its inhabitants endures around the historical buildings and public squares (Rossi, 1982). Thus, each historic public space offers a potential case study to investigate the layers of memory of a city and even of a nation, identifying the social constellations, power relations, and conflicts as each layer encapsulates and situates a certain time and events (Soja, 1985).

In addition to this perception of a city as "the locus of collective memory", the relational concept of space and time enables the understanding and analysis of city's processes at different levels. Another way to put this is that "the space stands for simultaneity and the synchronic order of social reality, and time, on the other hand, denotes the diachronic order and thus the historical process of social production" (Schmid, 2008, p. 29). With this relational and composite notion of the diachronic-synchronic order of a city, a historic landscape can be presumed as a "palimpsest" that reveals a deeper sense of place (Marvell & Simm, 2016; Tuan, 1977) and the stratified identity within the context, while it "offers a potential for the invention of new layers of meaning" (Tschumi, 1996, p. 193). Considering the fast pace of transformation in Tehran and its loss of collective identity, this paper reflects upon the stratified identity of Baharestan, adapting "palimpsest" to a theoretical concept with the aim of a more in-depth approach. The performative quality presented by this palimpsest meaning, besides the symbolic role of Baharestan, describes the potential of this pubic square for confronting Tehran's loss of collective identity.

2. Tehran and the loss of "collective identity"

"Tehran is an oddity. It is a city with a long history and a short memory. As a human habitat, it is almost eight thousand years old, but as a capital city, it is a neophyte" (Milani, 2004, p. 83). Tehran, the capital of Iran, is a fast-mutating city, producing new realities and driving the transformation of multiple/stratified Iranian identities every day. With a rapid pace of urban transformation and reconstruction, the image of Tehran has entirely changed over the time. Demolished and rebuilt over and over, the city is the representation of its sovereigns' commands and the legacy of reforms (Golkar, 2015; Grigor, 2016), "a city with long history and short memory" (Milani, 2004, p. 83).

Since becoming the capital in the 1780s, with the establishment of Qajar Dynasty, Tehran has remained the political center of the country and started to move toward becoming the economic, social, and cultural center of the country with a great rate of rise in its population and rapid urbanization. Tehran is a paradigm of Iran's society, as this young metropolis is a mirror of the whole country—its inhabitants have come from around the country with varied cultures, beliefs, languages, and life styles, and formed a modern society, which became the co-existence of differences (Bayat, 2010; Habibi & Hourcade, 2005). This cultural diversity, in the absence of a "connective structure", has diminished urban cohesion and shared identity between the inhabitants of this never-resting metropolis, causing a lack of sense of belonging and coherence (Assmann, 2011). On the other hand, the loss of "collective memory" in Tehran is mainly linked with extreme changes brought by the modernization of the traditional life of the city (Figure 1). Madanipour (2003) argues that a tense coexistence of old and new, in which they constantly struggle for domination, is a hallmark of the modern history of Iran and it's capital Tehran. Accordingly, the lack of "collective memory" and "sense of belonging" has been argued by several authors as the cause of current cultural void of Tehran's inhabitants and Iranian society

in general (Ahari & Habibi, 2015; Alemi, 1996; Amirahmadi & Kiafar, 1993/2012; Behzadfar, 2007; Habibi, 2010; Goodarzi et al., 2019). This absence is deepening the issue of "social amnesia" (Piran, 2012), which needs to be addressed by reclaiming those lost memories and shared identities while new common values should be introduced.

Figure 1. Construction of the Ministry of Finance on the ruins of the Qajar Palace, Tehran.

Note. From *Housing Contemporary Forms of Life. A Project for Tehran*, [Photography by A. Khadem, 1937], by The City as a Project, 2012 (http://thecityasaproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/02-Qajar-Ruins_small.jpg). In the public domain.

However, public spaces are the deposit of collective memories and they could act as catalytic social infrastructures, promoting civic culture and cohesion in cities (Madanipour, 2004). The history of public squares in Iranian urbanism dates back to before Islamic period (9 B.C.E. to 3 A.D.), working as a multifunctional centre for cultural, official, and commercial purposes. Public squares were the connecting rooms working alongside the axial urban form which was the main geometrical pattern of Iranian cities in both pre-Islamic (3 A.D. to 7 A.D.) and Islamic periods (7 A.D. to 19th century; Habibi 2013). In cities such as Tehran, which was mostly built after the 19th century and developed in the early 20th century, most of the primary squares were built during the modern period. Going through a fast process of modernization, Tehran's public squares transformed from the enclosed and introverted urban rooms to the vast geometrical spaces produced by the axial planning of western style, and later they have converted to the expansive traffic nodes, planned for the intersections of streets (Madanipour, 2006; Marefat, 1988).

Considering this rapid transformation, some public spaces, such as Baharestan Square, whichis known to be the "transitional stage" (Madanipour, 2006) and a window to the Iranian modernity, represent a unique condition for the comprehension of Tehran's loss of collective identity. As part of the historic center of Tehran, this space of transition represents the

pulsing heart, identity, and the collective memory of the city and its people and offers an opportunity "to grasp the significance of the urban structure, its individuality, and its architecture which is the form of this individuality" (Rossi, 1982, p. 131).

3. Baharestan—a contextualized palimpsest of city layers

Baharestan is located at the northeast of Tehran's historic center. It is the home to Iran's Parliament and the Ministry of Culture, which makes the square significant even at the national level. It is also surrounded by several exquisite historical heritage structures. Holding the memories of social power, political demonstrations, national and religious celebrations and clashes (Shahri, 1993), Baharestan is a "collective space" with a decisive role in the modern history of Iran. It demonstrates an urban stage that made the society visible to the eyes of the authorities and ruling powers, turning the private city to the public one (Golkar, 2015). In describing its political character, Baharestan Square was stated as the square of riot, conflict, revolution, and slaughter (Shahri, 1993). Due to this political meaning and as a direct representation and symbol of the ruling power, the square's central statue has changed several times, demonstrating the constant upheavals in the modern history of the city with its active and ever-changing character (Ahari & Habibi, 2015; Bastani Raad, 2011).

On the one hand, Baharestan Historic Square and its connected cultural heritage, due to their socio-common values, represent a great opportunity for sustainable development of Tehran. On the other hand, the spatial-temporal particularity of Baharestan for the history of the city describes its significance as the "locus of change" and "transitional stage" between tradition and modernity that suggests a potential for the "union between the past and the future" (Rossi, 1982, p. 131). However, this transition from one stage to another did not happen in time, but over time. As James Corner argues, "there is a duration of experience, a serialistic and unfolding flow of before and after", and the city has been experienced temporally and analogously. This is why "the geography of a place becomes known through an accumulation of fragments, detours, and incidents that sediment meaning, 'adding up' over time" (Corner, 1992, p. 249). This notion of "continuity" and co-evolution demonstrates that Baharestan's past has already and constantly been living within its present and future. At the same time, this notion explains that separating tradition from modernity is already a mistake, as modernity is perhaps just a reinterpretation of the past, and the difference between the two is just a matter of degree in which the past, present, and future co-evolve (Frampton, 1992). This composite structure, as constant unfolding between before and after, resembles the idea of "palimpsest" and it is widely discussed in different disciplines as well as in urbanism and architecture.

4. The palimpsest

The concept of a palimpsest, which can be traced in the works of many authors, such as Corboz (1983), Marot (2003), Corner (1992), Lynch (1972), Rossi (1982), and Tschumi (1996) (with different observations), generally stands for an active and critical approach toward the "collective memory" and shows how cities are constantly accumulating layers that influence the way we build and design them. Corboz (1983) suggests "reading" cities and landscape as palimpsests and the accumulation of stratified layers in the same way as archeologists do, in order to understand the different narrative of a city. Having more interest in archaeological aspects of cities, Rossi (1982) believes that cities are constructed in layers over a long period of time. However, with more focus on corporal aspect of memory, for Rossi, the city is a

material artifact, made up through an accumulation of the inhabitants' needs, and feature artifacts, objects, and buildings, collective, and personal memories. More similar to the view of Corboz (1983), his follower Marot (2003), with a multi-layered notion of landscape, describes a city as a "mental organism" whose previous states of existence are accessible to varying degrees and different spatio-temporal depth. His geological perspective provides a view on how memory and palimpsests are related, and gives a broad overview on how a palimpsest is present in both material and immaterial world. Then the memory can be visualized through different examples of stratification, superimposition, and layering (Marot, 2003). However, both ideas of archaeology and the geological phenomena of sediments and stratification maintain a common view on how cities have been constantly erased and rewritten. Actually, what remains is a layered city, a palimpsest, where earlier phrases of construction influence the writing of a city's future, and the juxtaposition of old and new, past, and future create a sense of place and identity where people can relate.

The palimpsestuous attitude then offers "a creative and hermeneutic potential for the invention of new layers of meaning while taking the present layers in all their complexity as a point of reference for the design" (Tschumi, 1996, p. 193). This performative dimension fulfills both of these roles: conserving the traces of the past and being receptive to the new writing. So, it permits to re-investigate the city for what has been excluded and neglected, both conceptually and spatially (Choay, 1994), while adding new layers without erasing those layers of the past that are essential to the collective identity of a city and its citizens. Yet, to reveal both tangible and intangible layers within the context—ideas, values, traditions, and individual or collective memories—it demands a deep investigation and interpretation. As we must observe through a "sensitive look" to capture those "hyper-connections" (Choay, 2003) of a place, it contains an "unlimited potential for discovery" of urban memory and the potential future of the city (de Solà-Morales, 2013). This deep notion of a place explains "our contemporary moment in history, always defined in critical relation to the complex cultural layers of the past" (Milinković et al., 2019, p. 15). While the "surveys of the present state of affairs and its historical background often do not take enough space and time in preparing for future spatial interventions", the concepts such as palimpsest would provide "an alternative, critical mode of spatial and historical enquiry" (Milinković et al., 2019, p. 3).

Correspondingly, in this part, Baharestan will be approached as a palimpsest of city layers, each produced by the encounter of different environmental logics and socio-political forces, situating their orders and purposes. The analysis was then carried out in different directions, using various materials and documents. Through a collection of available historical maps, photos, and manuscripts, the study explores the socio-spatial formation of the city through their constant mutual relation and the way they have unfolded within the context of Baharestan. More than a historical description, the analysis here aims to underline the different narratives and place meanings of Baharestan in relation to the extended milieu of its public realm to the city scale, and even the country scale, acknowledging its potential as a counter model to the current unsustainable growth of Tehran.

4.1. The city of mountains: the distinctive physiognomy of a city

"The situation of the town, in full view of the snowcapped mountains of Elburz, is unquestionably fine; and the air is clear and exhilarating. In a word, it is a pleasant place to stay in, rather than an interesting place to see" (Browne, 1893, p. 100).

This description of Tehran by E. G. Browne in 1893, and by many other western travelers and visitors show the inseparable relation of Tehran with its surrounding mountain as its distinctive physiognomy. Sitting on the skirt of a mountain, several waterways are passing through the region in north–south direction. The north and east edges of Tehran are demarcated by mountains (Alborz Mountain range) in a way that the city is embraced by its topographic landscape. Looking to the northeast, Baharestan area (primary defined as the shared space of three gardens) had a unique panoramic view to both mountain scenes, which is significant to its topological condition and place meaning. The geographic features in relation to the physiognomic feature of the city and the presence of vast gardens with several water canals (Qanats), such as Qanat-e-Nezamieh, describe the environmental quality of Baharestan's original landscape, which vanished through the process of transformation.

4.2. The palatine city: Negarestan summer palace

"It was the function of the Negarestan mural decorations to celebrate the power of Fath-Ali Shah and his government" (Diba, 2011, p. 25). Developed in the second half of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, Baharestan was initially an open space in front of Negarestan Garden, a summer palace located outside Tehran's walls at the north edge of Arg (citadel) and built by Fath-Ali Shah Qajar in 1807. Negarestan Garden was one of the three illustrated suburban gardens in Nascov's Map (1826), which is one of the oldest maps of Tehran from Fath-Ali Shah Qajar period (Mehryar, 1999). Negarestan, alike other designed gardens of the palatine city of Fath-Ali Shah in the first decade of his reign, followed the garden palace tradition of Persian architecture (Diba, 2011). As the main place for the cultural movement of Fath-Ali Shah, its cultural significance later continues with hosting the Ministry of Culture (1928–1932) and educational activities. At the same time, the governmental function of Negarestan was the origin of the political significance of Baharestan and placing the Parliament in this area following the Constitutional Revolution or *Mashruteh* (1906–1911).

4.3. The city of gardens: Mahalla Dawlat and the architecture of gardens

"Whence we enter another avenue similar to and parallel with Khiyaban-e Ala'ud Dawla . . . This avenue is bounded on the right by a fine garden, the Bagh-e Lalezar (Garden of the Tulip-bed), which belonged, I believe, to the talented Riza-Kuli Khan, generally known as the Lala-bashi, or the chief tutor of the Shah" (Browne, 1887, p. 104). By the end of the 19th century, and according to Tehran's map from 1891 (The Map of Abdol-Ghaffar), Baharestan was part of Mahalla Dawlat (Royal Neighborhood), Tehran's most prestigious neighborhood that was developed and built during Naseroddin Shah's expansion of the city in 1870 (Katouzian, 1996; Marefat, 1988). With the establishment of new systems of land ownership and property rights, during Naser al-Din Shah's Modern reforms (mostly due to the attempts of Mirza Hossein Khan Sepahsalar who became the Prime Minister in 1873), Negarestan Garden gradually became surrounded by several gardens and lands owned by the newly emerged elites. In this period (1871–1896), the forecourt of Negarestan was surrounded by Sardar Garden (in the east), Nezamieh Garden (in the west), and Negarestan Garden (in the north) from three sides, and with the development of Tehran toward the north–east, Negarestan garden became part of the city (Figure 2). During the Qajar era (1789–1925), most of the surrounding lands were used as gardens and arid lands. Thus, the access to Baharestan was through a narrow way from the western part of the square (Nafisi, 1975).
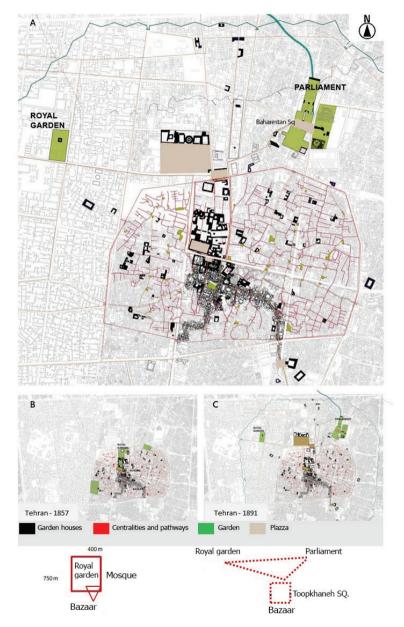
Figure 2. The location of Baharestan square in relation to the historic core of Tehran between (1857–1891), demonstrates the transitional role of Baharestan as an intermediate district.

Note. Panel A: The relation between Tehran Citadel and Bazar with the gardens of Mahalla Dowlat and parliament area. Panel B: Tehran Citadel in 1857, the relation between Bazar, Mosque and Royal garden in the heart of city. Panel C: Tehran Citadel in 1891, the expansion of the city in the 19th century demonstrates Baharestan and parliament area as a transitional area between the first and second walls of Tehran. Adapted from *A Practice of Remembrance: Water for Regeneration of Public Realm* (panel 3), [Unpublished master thesis], by H. Asghari, 2016, University of Politecnico Di Milano. Adapted with permission.

4.4. The city of new elites: Architecture as a political tool

At the end of the 19th century, concurrent to the development of Mahalla Dawlat (Royal Neighborhood) and the emergence of the new elites and landlords, Baharestanwas representing a coexistence of opposing powers, different to the superiority of the Monarch and the court, which had traditionally been the most detached entity from the masses. New buildings constructed by these new elites would be seen as the demonstration of shifting political boundaries and contesting social powers. Between all, the main three buildings will be briefly discussed here.

4.4.1. Baharestan Palace

In 1868, the reform-minded minister, Mirza Hasan Khan Sepahsalar (1827–1881) purchased a part of Sardar Garden (at the east side of Negarestan palace), and four years later, in 1872, he built Baharestan Palace within the garden, representing a combination of Qajar architecture with European style (Teymoori, 2013). Thirty years before the "Constitutional Revolution" and during the construction of the Palace, when Sepahsalar was questioned about the magnificence of his palace, he responded: "I am building a parliament for Iran's nation" (Teymoori, 2013, p. 134).

4.4.2. Sepahsalar (Sepahsālār) Mosque

Sepahsalar Mosque (a historic school in Tehran), built in 1878, was another attempt by Sepahasalar to communicate a progressive tradition in opposition to the conservative court officials and clerics persisting in their enmity against modern reforms (Dabashi, 2008). However, both secular reformists and traditional religious class had a common position against the concurrent colonialism of the British Empire and Russia, which was highlighted in Tobacco Uprising in 1891 (Sharifi, 2013). The Uprising was the genesis of the Constitutional Revolution or *Mashruteh* (1906–1911), which led to the establishment of parliament in Baharestan, and marked it from then on as a locus of political contests.
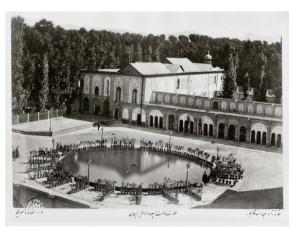

Figure 3. The front façade of Emarat-e-Masoudieh, Tehran.

Note. From *Album of historical pictures,* by Saheb Abad Co., n.d. (https://sahebabad.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/masoodiyeh-23.jpeg). In the public domain.

4.4.3. Masoudieh Palace

Another significant building that reflects the political character of Baharestan is Masoudieh Palace complex (Emarat-e-Masoudieh; Figure 3). The palace is located in the south of Negarestan Garden and built in 1879 by Prince Masoud Mirza (Zell-e Soltan), the son of Nasseredin Shah. He was denied succession to the throne, and this describes his opposition to the court of his brother Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar. Being known as an anti-nationalist figure, Masoud Mirza's

4.5. The city of modern state

Between 1925 and 1941, Baharestan went under several transformations and almost lost its recreational and environmental quality. To promote the new centralized state, modernization and secularization, a vigorous public building program launched in the city to accommodate the functions of modern state (Marefat, 1988). In this period, Baharestan experienced a shift in urban functions and meanings and became the focal place for new educated intellectuals restating the cultural aspect of the square. Consequently, Shahri argued about the introduction of different urban elements for the improvement of the public square between 1925 and 1931, such as planting trees, lighting installations, laying pavements, flower designs, and the separation of footpaths and car roads, like the public European squares in Baroque style (Figure 4). Several commercial, educational, and leisure functions expanded in the square's immediate surroundings, and new urban life unfolded in Baharestan, surpassing its political function (Shahri, 1993).

However, after 1930, the new network of vehicle transportation converted Baharestan into a traffic circle, which connected the new and old parts of the city (Madanipour, 2006; Marefat, 1988). The square which used to forma shared space and void between multiple urban gardens and their architectural contents, and which was a stage for different public demonstrations, turned to a terrific circle with a central statue as a piece of the new state iconography (Marefat, 1988).

As historical reviews show, by the end of this period and the rise of nationalist debate on the oil nationalization, Baharestan Square found a dual position during these critical years: on one hand, it was a place for the manifestation of stability and modernity as part of wealthy neighborhood of Tehran; on the other hand, it was a scene of constant political demonstrations and public gatherings that culminated in 1953 with the coup against Mosaddeq's government (Abrahamian, 2018). This dual

Figure 4. The central building of Melli Bank in old Tehran.

Note. From *Tehran's Ferdowsi Avenue*, [Photography by M. Pakzad, 1946], by Shahrefarang, n.d. (http://shahrefarang.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Ferdowsi-Pakzad-Bank-46.jpg). In the public domain.

implication actually demonstrates the overlap and intersection of the two aforementioned city layers.

4.6. The bipolar metropolis

The fastest growth of Tehran, and its evolution from an over-grown village into a metropolis, happened during the Pahlavi era (1925–1979). In the last years of Mohammad Reza Shah's reign (during the 70s), a veritable urban crisis engulfed the city, which was by then dangerously divided between the rich and the poor, the South and the North (Abrahamian, 2018; Milani, 2004).

After 1960, Baharestan Square, similar to other parts of Tehran center, lost its social life and the degradation of its urban spaces started. By the end of the Second World War and as Iran was moving from a feudal economy to a capitalist system, the social segregation was growing every day and creating a greater gap between the living conditions of the poor and the rich. The desire to create modern spaces, through the imposition of western styles and designs, had diminished the traditional life of the public spaces, and a return to the past did not result in a return to traditional structure of sociability in the public spaces (Grigor, 2005; Soltani, 2011). With the new bipolar urban condition of the city, caused by its social division, the town's upper class left Baharestan neighborhood to live in the northern part of city. This process extremely reduced the previous educational and recreational functions of the square. At the same time, new buildings typologies with early modern architectures were constructed in the square's surroundings. So, between 1960 and 1970, a combination of facades changed into an international architectural style ruined the previous harmony of the square's skyline. After the suppression of the 1963 Uprising, in opposition to the reforms of the "White Revolution" (a series of reform policies between 1960 and 1963), Baharestan's socio-political significance as a gathering place for demonstrations faded, leading up to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 (Bastani Raad, 2011).

4.7. The private city

"They (clerics) have offered their theocentric paradigm as an alternative to the rational and secular model of modernity. The Islamic Revolution, too, was, at least in its architect's mind, an attempt at halting the march of modernity" (Milani, 2004, p. 23).

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the economic decline which came during the war (1980–1988), the socio-environmental qualities of Baharestan, like other parts of Tehran, weakened. As all the sense of sociability was reduced and even removed from the spaces of the city, public activities moved to the domestic spaces and the interior, turning Tehran to a "private city" (Soltani, 2011).

Consequently, in this period, Baharestan progressively lost its social and architectural definitions, hosting urban functions mainly heterogeneous to the identity of a square, while the residential units in the area were gradually emptied and abandoned, or used as warehouses. Several new buildings incompatible with the architectural and historical character of the square have been constructed, diminishing its spatial consistency and durable identity. Though after the completion of the new building in 2004 the parliament returned to its home, this return was the beginning of an extreme transformation of Baharestan district, particularly in the east and southeast of the square. Following the development project of the Parliament complex (Paradise Baharestan), multi-story skeletons rose up within a short period, side by side with the Parliament and Sepahsalar historic

mosque, destroying the previous historical alleys and the neighborhood behind it. This raised many debates in the country's public sphere requesting the deep study and precise control of the current urban projects, affirming the importance of this historic square not just for the collective memory of Tehran, but also for the collective identity of Iran's nation.

5. Conclusion

The multi-layered reading and analysis of Baharestan Public Square demonstrate the co-existence and overlap of different city layers in relation to the environmental, socio-cultural, and political narratives of the city. Baharestan represents a "palimpsest" on which "generation after generation has left discontinuous traces, which look to us like fragments, often imperceptible and hard to recompose" (Secchi, 2007, p. 6). Originated in recreational activities and summer palace of Qajar king (1807–1869), Baharestan was enhanced by the development of Mahalla Dawlat and its gardens (1869), loaded politically due to the nationalization uprisings and constitutional hegemony (1903), re-functioned to an educational-cultural district (1928), then to a traffic node by modern state, abandoned due to the decentralization of city, and finally degraded rapidly through the ignorant transformation into a privatized city and its anti-social logic.

The co-evolution of different city layers and their narratives in Baharestan, which are constantly in interaction, unfolds different urban identities with their specific architectural expressions. Contrary to the current rapid transformation, Baharestan's stratified and durable character describes the need for a sensitive and inclusive understanding of the permanent qualities, representing a sense of "collective identity" and "robust civic image" in this symbolic square (Lynch, 1960). In fact, while the lack of civic infrastructure and fading of social spaces threaten the "cityness" (Sassen, 2005) of Tehran, the regeneration of historic squares based on their rooted, plural narratives would turn this heritage into "catalytic social infrastructures" (Madanipour, 2004). This inclusive approach to the regeneration of historic public spaces would enable the city to overcome its current "collective illiteracy" and "social amnesia" (Piran, 2012). However, this catalytic meaning maintains that reclaiming those lost identities and memories, rather than fixing and conservation of the past, should be seen as a critical intervention which changes the city itself by rearticulating, layering, and re-use of fragments—in short, by its reconstruction (Marot, 2003). In this way, historic public spaces perceived through their cultural heritage and communal dimension would offer powerful urban assets, supporting the sustainable future of cities and re-shaping them in line with their collective and shared values.

Acknowledgements

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