

Maqam Echahid: The Symbol of Martyr's Memorial For The Algerian People

مقام الشهيد: رمزية مقام الشهيد للشعب الجزائري.

Miloud Boukhenoune ,Oran -1- University, Algeria.

boukhenoune.miloud@univ-oran1.dz

Tahar Bessais*, Algiers -3- University, Algeria.

taharbessais@ymail.com

Date de réception:(11/01/2021) , Date de révision: (22/02/2021), Date d'acceptation :(13/03/2021)

Abstract :

The present paper discusses the symbolic representation of historical monument called "Martyr's Memorial", and originally known as "Maqam Echahid", that had been built in Algiers at "Riad el Fateh", to commemorate the martyrs killed during the Algerian War of Independence. "Maqam Echahid" had been designed by the Algerian painter "Bachir Yelles" and the Polish sculptor "Marian Adam Konieczny"(1930-2017). On July 5th, 1982, Algerian president "Chadli Bendjedid" had inaugurated Martyr's Memorial to celebrate the (20th) anniversary of Algeria's Independence and Youth Day.

Actually, this monument is the first destination of foreign heads of state and diplomats during their official visits to the country. It is also the worldly representative image of Algeria used in the media, by journalists, film actors, and tourists. Nowadays, Maqam Echahid, including both the military and soldiers El Moudjaheed museums, is open to the general public to discover the historical and cultural backgrounds of the Algerian society.

The study, also, aims to reveal the way the Algerian people preserve and highlight their national identity by constructing the Martyr's Memorial being a historical monument and a universal emblem of Algeria. In fact, referring to the semiotic approach, our study identifies the commemorative functions of this national monument and its role in addressing the political engagement according to the country's relationship with the foreign countries.

Keywords : Martyr's Memorial; Maqam Echahid; Algeria; Symbol; National Identity..

ملخص :

تناقش هذه الورقة التمثيلات الرمزية للمعلم التاريخي مقام الشهيد المشيد أعالي عاصمة الجزائر لتخليد ذكرى الشهداء الذين ضحوا بحياتهم من أجل إستقلال الوطن. هذا المعلم يكتسي أهمية وقيمة تجعله مشحونا بدلالات رمزية يمكن أن تكون مجالا لتأويلات مختلفة لزارته من السواح الوطنيين والأجانب باعتباره أحد رموز الجزائر بعد الإستقلال، إرتبطت صورته بأغلب الأحداث الوطنية والعالمية وهو يعبر عن تمسك الجزائريين بهويتهم ومبادئهم التي نص عليها بيان أول نوفمبر. فدراستنا تهدف إلى تبيان طريقة محافظة أفراد المجتمع الجزائري على هويتهم الوطنية عبر تقديم مقارنة سيميوطيقية للوظائف التذكيرية للمعلم الوطنية وتبيان دورها في ترسيخ قيم سياسية ثابتة تدير علاقات البلد مع باقي البلدان، وتوصلنا بعد دراستنا أن مقام الشهيد بفضاءاته المختلفة حافظ على الذاكرة الجزائرية منذ الثورات الشعبية إلى ثورة التحرير المجيدة حتى جزائر ما بعد الإستقلال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مقام الشهيد، المعالم، الهوية الوطنية، الرمز

INTRODUCTION:

The historical monuments are both the physical and cultural heritage created by artists and sculptors. Regarding their design and construction, they embody a symbolic representation in remembrance of the heroes who fought against the colonizer to defend their homelands and/or support humanitarian causes. Accordingly, the historical monuments are divided into two main categories; tombs of the Unknown Soldier and national memorial. Some Western countries, such as U.S.A, accord distinct tombs to immortalize their heroes, known as 'Unknown Soldier', disregarding their respective names and ranks. Other nations including France glorify the memory of its historical heroes by not only constructing tombs for the Unknown Soldiers, but also by setting up different national monuments, and memorials. In fact, the historical monuments include all sorts of memorials that stand as a symbol of the national martyrdom and sacrifice for the entire countries, such as Martyr's Memorial in Algeria.

After their independence on July 5th, 1962, the Algerian people were determined to commemorate more than 1.5 million martyrs by building a memorial in the capital Algiers. The latter had been recruited by worldly known designers and sculptors, such as "Marian Adam Konieczny" and "BachirYeles", moreover to many national and foreign construction companies which were supported by The People's National Army.

2.The Problem:

This historical landmark, named "Martyr's Memorial" is regarded by linguists, historians, and journalists as a symbol of martyrdom and a token of loyalty towards the blood of the heroic martyrs. It glorifies all those men and women who sacrificed their lives to liberate Algeria from the French colonizer and granted its freedom as an independent and sovereign country. This monument is actually the locus of the historical and socio-cultural memory of the nation, considering that it contains many cultural structures and institutions which date the history of Algeria including, The Popular Resistance (1830- 1954), The Revolutionary War (1954-1962).

3.The main question of article:

What are the symbolic aspects of The Martyr's Memorial for the Algerians people?

4.The aim of article:

This article aims to reveal the way the Algerian people preserve and highlight their national identity by constructing the Martyr's Memorial and identifies the role of this national monument in addressing the political engagement according to the country's relationship with the foreign countries.

5.The approach and scope:

The researchers have adopted the semiotic approach to achieve the aim of this article, by using the framework of existential semiotics, as developed by prof (EeroTarasti) .according to his approach, there is a hypothesis that societies undergo three phases:

First : archaic in which people and communities live still nature-bound life with cyclical time and with mythological worldview and traditions.Second: socio-semiotic which was the avenue chosen by the western world in the emergence of modernity, leading to certain stratified social structures, class, industrialization ,democratic institutions ,enlightenment ,humanistic bildung idea,in one word a certain historic development.The third one is techno-semiotic, the society under modern electronic and computer technology, with internet , increasing communication ,the "extase" of communication ,changing radically the previous structures of social organization. If

this idea is taken seriously , it certainly means that we should not straight ahead reject the cultural traditions and achievements of the past. (Tarasti, 2015, p. 04)

6.Theoretical background:

Charles Sanders Peirce offered a model comprising a represented man, an interpretant , and an object . According to Peirce, a sign has three models: icon, index, and symbol. Saussure's model generally appropriate to language and texts, but Peirce's model has a wide application, including different forms of media and visual arts. The semiotic theories of Yuri Lotman, expressed in his book (*Semiosphere*), Roland Barthes in his famous French study (*Semiotique Et Urbanisme*), and Algirdas Greimas in his article in French language entitled (*Pour Une Semiotique Topologique*), these ideas to all types of messages, including architectural works, had been extended by Umberto Eco, (Ramzy, 2013, pp. 338-358) ,But in our paper we choose to use the framework of existential semiotics , as developed by prof. Eero Tarasti ,and we will seek to discover that revolution in Algeria had been expressed in all the four modes of being that characterise a living tradition (body, spirit, identity and, values and norms). After having described martyrdom as symbol of heroes, we further ask how this impossibility of forgetting, this autonomous act of restoration, may lead actually to the renovation driven by the selective events of changing political imperatives that harvest these symbols and seek to transform memory into political action.

7.The Socio-Cultural Background:

The cultural background is based on two factors: the social and the cultural factors. The Social factor: it includes different aspects such as, family structure, neighborhood organization, privacy and territory, public relations, economical aspect, and political aspect. The Cultural factor: it involves many elements like history, religion, ideology, traditions, customs, beliefs, and ideal. (Parsae, 2015, pp. pp370-373).

8.The Significant Use of a Symbol

According to the representative of Tartu Moscow Semiotic School-Yuri Lotman(1990) a symbol never belongs only to one synchronic section of culture, it always cuts across that section vertically, coming from the past and passing on to the future. A symbol's memory is always more ancient than the memory of its non-symbolic text context. (Lotman, 1990, p. p103).A symbol links between different spheres of semiosis, and between semiotic and non-semiotic reality. Likewise, it links the synchrony of the text and the culture's memory: it is a semiotic condensation tool. Thus, the structure of symbols of a particular culture shapes a system which is isomorphic and functional to the genetic memory of individual (Lotman, 1990, p. p111).

Figure (01): Martyr's Memorial in Algiers

9. The Historical Symbol of Riad al Fateh Site :

Societies have often used/ employed history for collective purposes: instilling a sense of belonging to a political community, honoring the memory of its founders, celebrating the greatness of the group ,and building national identity (Ferenczi, 2002, p. 41). In Algeria, Al-Madania neighborhood, which houses Riad al Fateh project, where Martyr's Memorial is located, has a symbolic history for Algerians. Regarding the past historical events which happened in the region, the place witnesses both the victories of the heroes and the suffering of the population inflicted by the colonial power. Here follows some symbolic historical facts (Bouchareb.A, 1996, pp. 26-38).

Al-Madania area had been named relating to the martyred brothers :Madani Al-Saeed, Madani El-Haj Abdul Kader, and Madani Otoman.

Al-Madania area was once a military fortress which protected the Algerian people from the Spanish campaigns in 1541 led by "Charles X" and helped them in the destruction of the Spanish fleet during their landing at what has been known nowadays to be El-Hamma Park.

Al-Madania area of –Darrish House- hosted a historic meeting on June 17th, 1954 led by the martyr "Mustapha Ben Boulaid" in accompanying with twenty-one other martyrs, whose recommendations represent the first conception and planning of the War of Independence in November, 1954.

The historic manifestations of December 11th 1960 in which took place at Al-Madania -where Martyr's Memorial built- had displayed the Algerians' rejection of the French colonizer and affirm their determination to liberate their country. Al-Madania area refers to atrocious memories in the history of the country. It had had several torture places that devoted for to the Algerian militants during the revolution, such as the old military fortress where many revolutionists were tortured to death in water pools and wells.

Villa Sakina, an old building at Al-Madania, belonged to an officer of the French Army "Laguillard" who, together with "Dagger" , used to torment and persecute the arrested Algerians.

The location has also a symbolic significance dued to the Bridge of the Destitute, which witnessed the execution of sixty five (65) Algerian workers during the French occupation.

Riad al-Fateh is emblematic significance as the surrounding forest, known as Al-Anasser, was the field of many guerilla operations against the colonizer to gain freedom.

Martyr's Memorial had been constructed at Al-Madania not only because of its historical background, but also for its strategic location and, aesthetic and natural aspects, more over to its overlooking the Gulf of Algeria and its distinctive height as well as the dense forests surrounding it.

According to sociological and anthropological studies, which have focused on the commemorative functions of monuments by drawing attention to the practices of its users, the historical monuments are regarded as forms that constructed to commemorate events and individuals who are important to a particular group or community (F. Bellentani, 2018, p. 03). The commemoration of the aforementioned events (rebel heroism/ colonial crimes), which occurred at Riad al- Fateh, underlines the historicity and the symbolic function of Martyr's memorial. By providing history books, explanatory guides, vivid testimonies of the Mujahedeen who witnessed the events, and the exhibitions presented at El-Mujaheed Museum, Martyr's Memorial allows its visitors to realize the significant function of recollection and remembrance of the colonial period of Algeria. Accordingly, by visiting this historical monument, the Algerian people express their gratitude to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives to build a bright future for coming generations living in an independent country.

The expression of gratitude is either of a religious or a psychological attribute related to the atrocity of the historical past and the martyrs' endurance, therefore, there some visitors ask Allah to mercy the dead and reward them with heaven and recite some verses of Quran. Others sympathize with the dead and feel their distress and pain. They react psychologically by crying out of shock as they find out the cruel crimes of the French army. When they stand in front of Martyr's Memorial, and recall the survived tragedies of the past, the Algerian people realize the value of their national independence.

10. The Geography of Riad al-Fateh :

Riad al-Fateh is an urban area known for its strategic geographical location that extend to the park of "Al Hamma" from northeast , to the plateau of "Al-Anasser" from northwest. On its west side ,Riad al-Fateh encloses the neighborhood of Al-Hamma, while the two districts of "Al Muradia" and "Al Madania" appear on its east side. It is surrounded by "Hussein-Dey" from north, and Al-Anasser one from south. This strategic area extends over 1459,000 square meters including several places which have its cultural and natural heritage, such as The Garden of The Hamma, The Forest of the Arches, The Hill of Al-Anasser, The Slope of the Wild Woman, The Museum of Fine Arts, and Martyr's Memorial (Bouchareb.A, 1996, p. 39).

11. The Geographical Significance of Martyr's Memorial :

The semiotics of space is a descriptive process enquiring into the relevant significance of the relationships between objects and their spatial contexts .Since semiotics is the disciplined study of the life of signs that " stand for or represent " something ,space is generally overlooked as the background to other objects of attention .space of "maqam echahid" is the paper on which as Algerian I write my words, the silence that makes musical sounds have meaning in relation to other sounds, and the distance between objects whose meanings are dependent on spatial relations. Space of "riadh el fateh" is the background to a priori perception of the world (Gaines, (2006) P173). Martyr's Memorial is located on area of 37.000 square meters on the Al- Hamma plateau overlooking the Gulf of Algiers. It consists of twelve (12) parts, including the outstanding historical monument made in the Algerian desert of three branches of a palm tree of ninety seven (97) meters high, using five hundreds (500) tons of reinforced concrete each. At their converging point of forty

five (45) meters height, these three branches form an angle of thirty four (34) degrees. In front of each branch stands a statue commemorating the revolutionaries from both the colonial period (the popular resistance to the war of independence) and the construction era (the post-independence) led by the National People's Army. In other words, these statues refer to the determination and the resilience of the Algerian people to defend their country and develop it from generation to generation. The three statues are shown in the figures (02,03& 04),

Figure (02): Bronze Statue Symbolizing the Popular Resistance



Figure (03): Bronze Statue Symbolizing the National Liberation Army



Figure (04): Bronze Statue Symbolizing the People's National Army



The palm fronds constructing Martyr's Memorial are selected in reference to the Arab-Islamic elements of the Algerian national identity. The choosing of the palm is due to both its religious and cultural backgrounds. In the Islamic beliefs, the palm is highly considered. The Holy Quran refers to the palm as a sacred tree in several times. In addition, the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) built the first mosque in Medina (Saudi Arabia) by using the palm tree for its roof. Furthermore, the palm has always been a prominent cultural symbol of the Arabic civilization since the ancient times. For, this tree has been celebrated in many poems and writings by Arab poets such as, Ahmed Shawky who writes:

I see trees in the sky slit unleashed by the sight of wonder
Is this palm the king of paradise prince of fields, bride of the Arabs
[trans. mine]

The poetic lines above underline the importance of the palm to the Arabs in the old days. They reveal the Arabs' eloquence and fluency of in describing things from their daily lives. This is a definitive evidence of the symbolic value of the palms since ancient times to the present day.

12. Visiting Martyr's Memorial: A Diplomatic Protocol

Since its inauguration in 1982, Martyr's Memorial has been visited by foreign diplomats and leaders of many countries all over the world, during their official state visits to Algeria. Once in place, these visitors bend down to lay a wreath at the memorial to honor the memory of the martyr's and their sacrifices for the nation and its independence. Even the French diplomats, the Algerian former colonizer, do respect the protocol by visiting Martyr's Memorial as a reconciliatory gesture between the two nations cultivating peace and harmony among their populations. Accordingly, developing new colonizer-colonized relationship is one of the significant tasks of constructing such historical monuments. In describing the symbolic value of Martyr's Memorial, the Algerian poet Mohamed El Akhdar Al Saihi writes:

That's where all the necks bend and kneel
And subject to old glory and disempowering
Our revolution is as gigantic as is its symbol
But it's higher, supreme, and towering
As if Riad al-Fateh is paradise
Martyr's Memorial above overlooks

13. The Rhetoric of the Place: Maqam-Echahid or the Heart of Algiers :

People could get to urban structures through speeches and verbal expressions. Yet, the subject of study is not the rhetoric of the language, but rather the rhetoric of the place. While the signification is implied and implicit, the style or the design is believed to be more expressive revealing the absolute or complete meaning. In other words, the expression "the heart" of the city connotes the center of a double meaning which is referred to by a symbolic notion. (A. Greimas, 1979, p. 166). The location is not an individual and an abstract concept, but rather it is a place or a part of an area which derives its particularity from its inner elements, to embody a significant meaning and value. Accordingly, it grants a direct connection with the outside world, as being the core of the human life or humanity as it presents both the nation's historical condition and origins. Thus, "Maqam Echahid" is full of abstract and implicit meanings, and concrete human experiences: it is the living heart of the moral values held by the Algerian people (Parsaee.M, 2015, p. 373).

14. The Distributive Indications of Maqam-Echahid: Martyrs' Tombs as a Sample

In his published article “On the Metaphorical Connectivity of Cultural Sign Systems” (2013), Marcel Danesi defines the distributed sign as a “form that is connected interpretively (symbiotically) to a conceptual metaphor as a consequence of the metaphor being distributed throughout the cultural network of meaning. The latter can be called a ‘Meta-form’, for lack of a better term, which is the meaning extracted of a specific conceptual metaphor that works its way into interpretation and use of physical forms such as objects, rituals, symbols, and the like” (Danesi, 2013, p. 35). Correspondingly, in addition to Martyr’s Memorial in Algiers, several memorial tombs and monuments are dispersed all over the country. Almostly, every province and village has constructed martyrs’ tomb in memory of the martyrs of the specific region. At the fore of each martyrs’ tombs, a small memorial is constructed on which both the names of the dead and selected verses from Quran that inscribe to honor their memory and show their distinguished status in Islam. While Martyr’s Memorial, or MaqamEchahid, represents a national conception of the martyrdom. These martyrs’ tombs demonstrate a more regional or local illustration. Although different, MaqamEchahid and the martyrs’ tombs are interconnected in their symbolic value: altogether, they honor the martyrs and celebrate the Algerian revolution during several occasions including; Martyr’s Day in February 18th, Algeria Revolution Day in November 1st, Algeria’s Independence and Youth Day in July 5th, The Events of December 11th.

Figure (04): Martyr's Tomb in Batna City



CONCLUSION :

Martyr’s Memorial is a socio-cultural, political, and historical symbol representing the Algerian national identity. It illustrates a double symbolic function as it embodies both the cultural background and the historical memory of the Algerian people. This paper represents this monument as a regarding link between the past, the present, and the future of the Algerian society, as reflected on the written inscription on the inauguration board of Martyr’s Memorial: " . In the honor and glory of the good citizens who spent their whole lives through the past generations defending the sovereign nation and liberating it from the repressive colonial power, to establish the wellbeing, freedom, and social justice for the Algerian people. In glory of all those who sacrificed themselves to grant the human dignity and the civil rights, prevent discrimination protecting the core elements of its cultural and national identity".

Let this memorial then be the symbol of freedom, martyrdom, and sacrifice for the love and glory of Algeria. The concept of symbol proposed by “Lotman” emphasises the double mechanism of it: the function of cultural memory and mechanism making the culture more coherent. The discussed example of Martyr's Memorial in Algeria is a very interesting example of the symbol existing both in the urban reality and in the cultural memory of generations which invites every visits of French leaders to express their apology to Algerians people because apology should not be a transaction in which forgiveness follows apology, but meaningful apology should include

recognition and remorse, moreover, it is also important to have appropriate forms of action to deliver recognition, remorse, or repentance and embodied apology in memorials and renaming places, compensation, repatriation and reconciliation.

Bibliography List :

- (A. Greimas, 1979), *Sémiotique de l'espace ; Architecture, Urbanisme*, sortir de l'impasse, Editions de Noël / Gonthier, France.
- (Bouchareb, A, 1996), *Maqam Echahid ; symbole et commémoration*, Anep, Alger.
- (Ferenczi, 2002), *Devoir de Mémoire droit à l'oubli*, Complexe, Belgique.
- (Lotman, 1990), *Universe of the Mind, a Semiotic Theory of Culture*, I.B Tauris, London.
- (F. Bellentani, 2018), *Pour Une Approche Sémiotique des Monuments et Des Mémoires*, Cygne Noir, Canada, 6.3.
- (Danesi, 2013), *On The Metaphorical Connectivity of Cultural Sign Systems*, Signs and Society, Chicago, USA, 1.1.
- (Gaines, (2006) P173). *Communication and the Semiotics of the Space*, Journal of Creative Communications, London, 1:2
- (Parsaee, 2015), *Space and Place Concepts Analysis Based on Semiology Approach in Residential Architecture the Case Study of Traditional City of Bushehr Iran*, HBRC *Journal, Iran, 11*.
- (Ramzy, 2013), *Visual Language in Mamluk architecture : A semiotic analysis of the Funerary Complex of Sultan Qaitbay in Cairo*, *Frontiers of Architectural Research, Cairo, Egypt*, 2.
- (Tarasti, 2015), *On the possibility of Existential Semiotic Theory of Culture*, International Semiotics Conference ; Semiotics of Cultural Heritages : Authenticity to Informatics, Istanbul, 7-10 May, 2015, Turkiye.