Myths, Legends and Landscapes

The Interplay of Myth and Mythmaking in Shaping Identity and Space in Addis Ababa

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MARCH 2023
"Common to all political communities is a set of beliefs in unifying narratives about communities special characteristics."

Imagined Communities

Benedict Anderson
The concept of mythmaking in architecture involves the use of narratives, symbolism, and cultural references to shape the meaning and experience of built spaces. These myths hold significance beyond the distinction between fiction and reality; they exist to provide explanations and hold great influence over our lives. Understanding a place and its identity requires an exploration of the narratives and beliefs associated with it, as they directly shape the physical environment. By embracing and incorporating these mythologies, designers and planners can create meaningful and authentic spaces that resonate deeply with people.

Communities, being socially constructed, rely on unifying narratives that define their unique characteristics and differentiate them from others. These narratives offer explanations and guidance to individuals and their leaders, shaping their sense of belonging and collective identity.

In the context of Addis Ababa, narratives and storytelling play a vital role in shaping the city's structure and fostering a sense of community. The city's complex multi-ethnic history gives rise to conflicting narratives, leading to a dynamic interplay where some narratives gain prominence while others are overlooked. Addis Ababa's mythologies draw from elements such as divine right theories, historical revisionism, and nationalism.

The establishment of the Monarchy in Addis Ababa centers around the narrative of divine rights, as Ethiopian rulers sought to legitimize their rule through religious texts and edicts from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. These narratives were reinforced by religious imagery and practices. The period of Italian occupation introduced new narratives that have been subject to historical revisionism by both the people and the government. Additionally, the narrative of nationalism has had a significant impact on shaping Addis Ababa's present-day identity.

This thesis critically examines the role of the myth in historical and mythical narratives in shaping diverse identities and the formation of Addis Ababa. It explores different time periods, spanning from the monarchy era to the Italian occupation, and delves into how these narratives have influenced the contemporary landscape. By understanding the power of narratives, we gain insights into the multifaceted nature of Addis Ababa's identity and the ways in which myth-making processes contribute to its formation.
THE QUESTION

How has myth-making influenced the different identities and shaped the spatial configuration of Addis Ababa through divine right theories, historical revisionism, and nationalism?
As an architect, it is crucial to recognize that the truth of a place is not solely based on factual information of a place, but also on what people believe to be true about it. Creating a place involves not just physical construction and destruction, but also observation, storytelling, association, and ritual.

Mythmaking, in the context of architecture, refers to the use of narratives, symbolism, and cultural references to shape the meaning and experience of built spaces.

Exploring the concept of place uncovers the mythologies surrounding the ways in which we have created and interacted with our built environment. Myths as I am defining it is not just about questioning what is fiction and what is not but it’s about the significance why these myths exist and why they are told. Myths are as much a part of our history since what follows are them exceptionally consequential to how we live.

Therefore, to truly understand a place and its identity, we must consider the narratives and beliefs associated with it, and how they shape the physical environment. By acknowledging and incorporating these mythologies, designers and planners can create meaningful and authentic places that resonate with people on a deeper level.

THE MYTH
Myths have a purpose in existing within Addis and everywhere else. Guided by various motives, people tell these stories to disseminate propaganda; to reveal the politics of context; to perpetuate tradition; to instill beliefs and values; to claim ownership of something and to rebel against pre-established narratives.

The story of Queen Sheba, also known as the Queen of Makeda, is a legendary tale that has captivated people for centuries. According to Ethiopian tradition, Sheba was the ruler of an ancient kingdom located in what is now believed to be Ethiopia or Yemen.

The story goes that Sheba heard of the wisdom of King Solomon of Israel and traveled to Jerusalem to test his knowledge. Impressed by his wisdom, Sheba gifted Solomon with precious stones, spices, and other treasures. The two monarchs are said to have had a romantic relationship during her visit, resulting in the birth of a son named Menelik I, the first King of Ethiopia.

The story of Queen Sheba has been passed down through various religious texts and oral traditions, including the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which considers Sheba to be a saint.

This story is a symbol of cultural pride for some Ethiopians, and for others it’s a political move to claim legitimacy to power where they believe it was none.
How the Queen made ready for her Journey

And she was exceedingly anxious to go to him, but when she pondered upon the long journey she thought that it was too far and too difficult to undertake. And time after time she asked Tämrin questions about Solomon, and time after time Tämrin told her about him, and she became very wishful and most desirous to go that she might hear his wisdom, and see his face, and embrace him, and petition his royalty. And her heart inclined to go to him, for God had made her heart incline to go and had made her to desire it.

24. How the Queen made ready to set out on her Journey

And the Queen said unto them, “Hearken, O ye who are my people, and give ye ear to my words. For I desire wisdom and my heart seeketh to find understanding. I am smitten with the love of wisdom, and I am constrained by the cords of understanding; for wisdom is far better than treasure of gold and silver, and wisdom is the best of everything that hath been created on the earth. Now unto what under the heavens shall wisdom be compared? It is sweeter than honey, and it maketh one to rejoice more than wine, and it illumineth more than the sun, and it is to be loved more than precious stones. And it fatteneth more than oil, and it satisfieth more than dainty meats, and it giveth [a man] more renown than thousands of gold and silver. It is a source of joy for the heart, and a bright and shining light for the eyes, and a giver of speed to the feet, and a shield for the breast, and a helmet for the head, and
And she was exceedingly angry at him, but whenever she pondered upon the journey of him, she thought that it was too far and too difficult to undertake. And time after time she asked Tämīn questions about Solomon, and time after time Tämīn told her about him, and she became very wishful and most desirous to go that she might hear his wisdom, and see his face, and embrace him, and petition his royalty. And her heart was inclined to go to him, for God had made her heart incline to go and had made her to desire it.

4. **How the Queen Made Ready to Set Out on her Journey**

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And the Queen said, "From this moment I will not worship the sun, but will worship the Creator of the sun, the God of Israel. And that Tabernacle of the God of Israel shall be unto me my Lady, and unto my seed after me, and unto all my kingdoms that are under my dominion. And because of this I have found favour before thee, and before the God of Israel my Creator, Who hath brought me unto thee, and hath made me to hear thy voice, and hath shown me thy face, and hath made me to understand thy commandment." Then she returned to [her] house.

And the Queen used to go [to Solomon] and return continually, and hearken unto his wisdom, and keep it in her heart. And Solomon used to go and visit her, and answer all the questions which she put to him, and the Queen used to visit him and ask him questions, and he informed her concerning every matter that she wished to enquire about. And after she had dwelt [there] six months the Queen wished to return to her own country, and she sent a message to Solomon, saying, "I desire
I will not worship the sun, but will worship the Creator of the sun, the God of Israel. And said they: We charge thee, and our seed after me, and unto all my kingdoms that are under my dominion. And because of this I have found favour before thee, and before the God of Israel my Creator, Who hath brought me unto thee, and hath made me to hear thy voice, and hath shown me thy face, and hath made me to understand thy commandment. Then she returned to her house.

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How the Queen came to Solomon the King

... seeing him, and the whole story of him that hath been told me is to me as the desire of my heart, and like water to the thirsty man."

And her nobles, and her slaves, and her handmaids, and her counsellors answered and said unto her, "O our Lady, as for wisdom, it is not lacking in thee, and it is because of thy wisdom that thou lovest wisdom. And as for us, if thou goest we will go with thee, and if thou sittest down we will sit down with thee; our death shall be with thy death, and our life with thy life." Then the Queen made ready to set out on her journey with great pomp and majesty, and with great equipment and many preparations. For, by the Will of God, her heart desired to go to Jerusalem so that she might hear the wisdom of Solomon; for she had hearkened eagerly. So she made ready to set out. And seven hundred and ninety-seven camels were loaded, and mules and asses innumerable were loaded, and she set out on her journey and followed her road without pause, and her heart had confidence in God.

25. How the Queen came to Solomon the King

And she arrived in Jerusalem, and brought to the King very many precious gifts which he desired to possess greatly. And he paid her great honour and rejoiced, and he gave her a habitation in the royal palace near him. And he sent her food both for the morning and evening meal, each time fifteen measures by the Perl of finely ground white meal, cooked with oil and gravy and sauce in abundance, and thirty measures by the Perl of
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THE DIVINE RIGHT THEORY

The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menelik is the work has been held in honor in Ethiopia (Abyssinia) for several centuries, and throughout that country it has been, and still is, venerated by the people as containing the final proof of their descent from the Hebrew Patriarchs, and of the kinship of their kings of the Solomonic line with Christ, the Son of God.

Throughout history, Ethiopian rulers have relied on the power of myth and religion to justify and maintain their rule. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church played a significant role in this process, with religious texts and edicts serving as a means to legitimize the state and its leaders.

One such text is the Kibre Negest, also known as the “Glory of the Kings”, which was written in the 14th century. This text traces the lineage of King Menelik I, who is believed to be the son of King Solomon and Queen Sheba, and the founder of the Solomonic dynasty of Ethiopia.

The Kibre Negest presents a narrative of Ethiopia as a chosen people, blessed by God, and under the protection of divine powers. This narrative was used to legitimize the right to rule of Ethiopian kings and maintain their position in society.

The use of myth and religion as a means of legitimizing political power is not unique to Ethiopia and is a phenomenon that has occurred throughout history. However, the Kibre Negest serves as a prime example of the power of myth and religion in shaping the political landscape of Ethiopia and shaping the country’s identity.

Myth-making and placemaking are intertwined with identity. While Myth has the definition of false belief or idea, myths based on rituals, on events and actions overtime are filled with symbolic meaning, whether it is concerned with secular or sacred narratives, it derives its power from being believed and deeply held as true. It becomes a powerful design tool.

Much like the rulers did with the story of the Queen, to have the significance shed did, people had to believe in the Christian religion.
The narratives of Addis like most other cities are full of hidden, complex, and layered narratives that go through the process of myth-making in different ways, one example is historical revisionism; which relates to the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. The idea of undefeated Ethiopia was used to bring different people together and bring forward the ideas of a strong united Ethiopia. Nationalism, which is colonial idea that has failed miserably but some believe is the answer to all problems.

As a country of different nationalities, Ethiopia has gone through different forms of government that have suppressed and disregarded various identities that make up the country. These identities are composed of multiple factors, including history, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, religion, and language variance, all contributing to the Ethiopian culture's foundation.

"Common to most political communities, specific characteristics and a set of beliefs unify these narratives." While there are forms of harmony that come with time when people recognize each other and accept, there is also a form of unity enforced by erasing and building new narratives that have continuously erased our histories, identities, and people throughout history. As a nation of nations, Ethiopia has struggled with the idea of nationalism. The ideology behind nationalism is deeply problematic as it is class-based and an exploitative force that seeks to erase identities violently, which would result in the replication of colonial structures. It is an ideology left over from colonialism and has plagued my country throughout its history, unsuccessfully but with consequences. Ethiopia is a country of different nations that all have their history, which must be acknowledged equally for us to move forward together. There are traditions of sharing and making spaces for the exchange of stories throughout the country. Addis Ababa is the best place to see it because the capital is a melting pot of cultures shared across various identities, creating a sense of sovereignty, and belonging without relying on borders.
THE REVISED HISTORY

The Italian occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941 is a contentious and often misunderstood period of Ethiopian history, and as a result, there have been various attempts at historical revisionism regarding the conflict. However, the myth or the most revised narrative could be the idea that internal colonization doesn’t exist.

It does exist and it has happened in Ethiopia.

When comparing how the internal monarchy came to power above all of Ethiopia and how the Italian colony tried to take over, there are similarities.

Both were imperialists.
THE STORY

Begins here...

or continues...
A modern city filled with diverse individuals, cultures, identity & language, all sharing a common space & history.

In this vibrant city, countless narratives intertwine, forming a rich tapestry of identity, culture & tradition. Within these bustling streets, we carry the weight of our collective past.
An informal settlement in the historic Piassa neighborhood of Addis Ababa, earmarked for removal.

Addis Ababa carries the weight of a shared history, shaped by diverse communities with different understandings of the past. The conflicting interpretations of historical events create a complex social landscape where the city’s residents grapple with their shared but divergent understanding of the past. From the scars of colonization to the echoes of ancient civilizations, Addis Ababa is a place where competing narratives converge, sometimes resulting in contention and competing claims.

Myths, too, weave through the city’s identity, both inherited from the past and actively constructed in the present, breathing life into its streets. Ancient tales blend with contemporary legends, blurring the boundaries between the tangible and the intangible. These myths, passed down through generations, shape the collective consciousness, influencing the city’s architecture, customs, and traditions.
Exploring the concept of place unravels the mythologies surrounding the ways in which we have created and interacted with our built environment. Myths as I am defining it is not just about questioning what is fiction and what is not but it’s about the significance why they are told. Myths are as much a part of our history since what follows are then exceptionally consequential to how we live.

The power of myths lies in their ability to bring a sense of ownership, identity, unifying ideas and connection to something significant. In Ethiopia, the myth of coffee serves as a prime example of how myths can establish a deep sense of ownership over a cultural treasure. Coffee becomes more than a mere beverage.
Through the process of my research and exploration of imagery I found a connection with printmaking and mythmaking.

Layered printmaking process involves building an image by printing multiple layers of ink on top of each other. Each layer can be seen as a separate narrative element that contributes to the overall composition of the image. Similarly, the city of Addis Ababa is a complex and layered place, with multiple narratives and histories entangled within it.

Like the different layers of ink in printmaking, the different narratives of Addis Ababa are often hidden or partially obscured, requiring a closer examination to reveal their full meaning. For example, the city has a rich cultural history that is often hidden beneath the dominant narratives of political power and economic development.

The following prints are silk screen printed.

Silk screen printmaking, also known as screen printing, is a technique used in visual arts to reproduce images on various surfaces. It involves pushing ink through a fine mesh screen onto a substrate, selectively blocking areas to create the desired image. This process allows for the replication of designs, patterns, or illustrations with precision and consistency. It also a process of creating an image through layers.
THE CITY
**KEY TERMS**

**Narrative:**
Building meaning, myth-making, stories of the human experience.

**Erasure:**
The removal of space, writing, recorded material, or data. A natural degradation (forgotten) of memory and space. A purposeful act of erasure through historical revisionism.

**Communities:**
Unified through a set of beliefs or special characteristics.

**Myths:**
A widely held but false belief or idea. That definition does not disregard their importance; myths are part of our history since what follows them is exceptionally consequential to how we live.

**Nationalism:**
A deeply problematic ideology as it is class based and an exploitative force that seeks to erase identities violently, which would result in the replication of colonial structures.

**Historical Revisionism:**
The act of erasing historical narrative to fit a better narrative.

**Divine Right Theories:**
A political and religious doctrine of royal and political legitimacy

**Identities:**
The fact of being who or what a person is, how do they identify themselves.

**Land:**
Land as not just a site but an integrated identity, history, place, environment, and people.


Poynter, Sir Edward John. The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon.


Sydney, Australia., 1881, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Grand Courts.


To be continued...
MYTH.

The synthesis of myth and architecture is captured in the concept of mythmaking, which encompasses the integration of storytelling, symbolism, and cultural references within the architectural design process. By incorporating these elements, architects have the power to create spaces that go beyond functionality, resonating deeply with individuals and communities. The interplay between narratives and architectural forms fosters a profound connection, allowing people to engage with and find meaning in the built environment.

The research emphasizes the importance of recognizing and embracing the complexity of collective narratives, and the role they play in shaping the identity and experience of a place. By understanding why these narratives exist and who they serve, architects and designers can create spaces that honor and amplify the diverse stories and cultural heritage of a community.

In conclusion, the research underscores the transformative power of mythmaking in architecture. By weaving narratives, symbolism, and cultural references into the design process, architects can create spaces that evoke a deep sense of connection and ownership. Ultimately, this approach fosters a more meaningful and inclusive built environment, where people can find resonance, belonging, and a reflection of their own stories within the spaces they inhabit.