The present of the past: persistence of ethnicity in built form

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Abstract:
The subject of this thesis was generated by the prevailing social situation in the city of Karachi, where many communities and ethnic groups co-exist in ethnically defined areas. At the beginning of the research it was clear that a study of the importance of kinship and communal living in the perpetuation of traditions and in the development of cultures would have to be included. The endurance of ethnicity in realized built form became the crux of the entire study. In tracing back the infiltration of the muhajirs into Pakistan's prime city of Karachi and its impact on domestic spatial planning, this inquiry attempts to explore the influencing factors in cross-ethnic differences and to a certain extent trans-class similarities. A number of aspects make this entire exercise curiously stimulating and intellectually invigorating:

- Inadequate existing literature on the relationship between culture and built form in this context.
- The presence of a great variety of ethnic influences in Karachi that add many dimensions to the richness of diversity and similarities.
- Reflection of these in the every-day architecture which is constantly being created by the people and the professionals.

The thesis, while establishing its theoretical framework on cultural interpretations, uses structuralists' perspective to view the case studies in order to ascertain the many influencing aspects of ethnicity and cultural continuity in the context of Karachi. The case studies are based on first hand data compiled by the author through site visits, which involved surveys of houses built by the people, observations of uses of various spaces within the houses, and interviews with residents. These are supported by oral information obtained in discussion with people in the field, and by existing documented information wherever available. On analyzing these data many reflections surfaced which centered around the cultural endurance and persistence of ethnicity in built form.

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ON OCTOBER 11, 2001, THE SATIRIC Bert Is Evil web site, which displayed photographs of the furry Muppet in Zelig-like proximity to villains such as Adolf Hitler (see Figure 1), disappeared from the web—a bit of collateral damage from the September 11th attacks. Following the strange career of Bert Is Evil shows us possible futures of the past in a digital era—futures that historians need to contemplate more carefully than they have done so far. In 1996, Dino Ignacio, a twenty-two-year-old Filipino web designer, created Bert Is Evil (“brought to you by the letter H and the CIA”), with the political salience of white ethnicity persists, suggesting that ethnic groups do not simply decline or politically “assimilate” over time. Some groups maintain a strong identity in spite of having accounted for the presence of other sources of political leaning and past voting tendencies, while Democratic attachments are undeniably strong in towns where the newer immigrant groups have settled. Then juxtapose these historic assessments of ethnic persistence and decline with the patterns observable by our empirical analysis of the effect of white ethnicity on presidential politics in over 1500 towns in six New England states. But if ethnic violence is disaggregated into several forms—for example, violent protest demonstrations, deadly riots, and secessionist warfare—is it not likely that these phenomena are explicable in terms of varying configurations of independent variables? Affect may be more important in deadly riots and calculation more important in secessionist warfare, especially when preexisting units, such as the Yugoslav republics, made decisions about warfare in structured institutional settings. Furthermore, the opportunities for disaggregated analysis are enormous. Everywhere the issue of the birth and death of ethnic groups presents itself explanation.