Sea as a Form-Giver of Human Settlements: Shifting Relations in Barastis, Fishing Huts and the Ocean Villas of Bahrain

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Abstract

Bahrain has been home to the people of the seas and its culture has been constituted upon the 'conversations' with the sea. The name Bahrain derived from an Arabic term '*al-bahrayn*' meaning 'two seas' substantiates its close association with the oceans. The sea has produced drinkable water its ancestors have yielded from the bottom. Despite now considered an oil-rich state, its original riches had come from the pearl trade. The pearl divers had laid the foundations for the early settlements. Thus, the settlements of Bahrain have been derived from its association with the sea and the numerous 'conversations' they have produced over the years. Recently, the modern Bahrainis have abandoned the sea in favour of the shopping malls, which, many argue had led to an erosion of its close association with the sea.

This paper examines these transactions from the early *Basrastis* as living quarters of the fishing community to subsequent ad-hoc 'fishing huts' that emerged for leisure of the fishermen. Later, the oil economy has pushed the people away from the sea. Today, the ocean villas overlook the beaches dotted with yachts particularly in the newly created artificial landmasses. The paper maps the nuances of these transactions that have oscillated between the associations and disassociations with the sea by examining documentary evidence to construct insights into the changing sea culture. It divulges the ways in which its culture has been anchored to how it sees the sea as both the rudimentary anchor as much as a visual spectacle.

Keywords: Bahrain, settlements, sea culture, fishing huts, ocean villas.

1. Introduction

As an island in the Arabian Gulf, Bahrain has been closely associated with the sea throughout its past. In fact, no island can escape the presence of the sea, unless it is as large as Australia, and Bahrain is no exception. Being constituted of one main island and two smaller ones developed out of some 33 (6 inhabited), its residents can hardly exist without experiencing the presence of the sea. According to literature, Bahrain as a human settlement evolved around the sea for most parts of its history. In 'the Pirate Coast', Belgrave writes that at the turn of the 19th century, the principle city of Manama was the central port of the pearling industry, and served as a distribution center for goods bound for Qatar (Belgrave,1966:20). As such, it was intensely involved in maritime-trade and vessels were a main part of the trade. According to Belgrave, "in 1930, when the industry was flourishing, over 20,000 men in some 500 diving dhows set forth from Bahrain to the pearl banks every year" (Belgrave,1966:165). Pearl diving was the main occupation and both the diving industry and sailing kept the island prosperous. However, since the discovery of oil and the subsequent developments and change, it is no more dependent and connected to these. Piracy is gone, unlike some 150 year ago (Belgrave,1966), pearling has been abandoned and the cities have grown inwards away from the sea. Sea has been 'occupied' to create more land for new settlements. As Loch describes, a century ago, the sea provided unlimited quantities of varied fish, dates were grown aplenty and there was money to import rice, sugar, tea and coffee, which kept the sea alive with vessels (Loch,1819). Today, the links to the sea are different and these new orientations demonstrate a change of culture and attitudes to the sea.

2. Literature Review

The theme 'conversations with the sea' proposes at least two presences. A conversation requires the presence of two and in this case, there is water on the one side and land on the other. Neither the land nor the sea is singular since both are inhabited. Islands and seas are thus intertwined and communicate with each other at the intersection; the coast as much as beyond. Understanding this relationship and its manifestations have received attention in literature recently among which Peters (Steinberg et.al, 2015) proposes a "wet ontology" that "problematizes accepted notions of time, space, mobility and materiality as related to water. Steinberg & Peters write that 'the ocean– through its material reformation, mobile churning, and nonlinear temporality–creates the need for new understandings of mapping and representing;

living and knowing; governing and resisting' (Steinberg,et.al:260-261).

Grydehøj, writes that 'thinking with water' approach echoes Pugh's aspiration for 'thinking with the archipelago'(2015). He points out that in applying such a notion, Pugh (2013) refers to the Caribbean archipelago as a movement that signifies a metamorphosis rather than a static existence. Walcott (1998) adds that as spaces of movement, both the ocean and the archipelago defy static, linear history but proposes a continuity of mutual transformations. Hayward grapples directly with this intersection of land and sea through his concept of the aquapelago, referring to it as "the integrated marine and terrestrial assemblages generated by human habitation and activity" **(**Hayward,2015**:**84**).** Such "aquapelagic assemblages" are performed entities "that come into being and wax and wane as climate patterns alter and as human socio-economic organisations, technologies, and/or the resources and trade systems they rely on, change and develop" (Hayward,2012:27). Indeed, they "necessarily involve humans interacting with other actants," which "may be animate (living) entities, inanimate ones (such as sand, soil, etc.) or the product of energies (such as individual weather events or larger climatic patterns, such as global warming)" (Hayward,2015:84). Inspired by Hayward, Suwa sees "land and water […] merging to emerge as a whole," with islands not being "groups of isolates but rather assemblages concentrated by the waters" (Suwa,2012**:**14). Accordingly, Stratford et al. argue that, an island is less "a piece of land surrounded by water" than "an intense and enduring relationship between land and water" (Stratford et al, 2011:115). While such theoretical positions have led to deeper understanding of the intimacy between the geo-physicality of some islands and their aquatic surroundings, in the case of Bahrain, little exists so far.

Literature dealing with the association of Bahrain to its ocean takes a more pragmatic analysis and is rare, although recently there have been some studies (Z,2016)**,** (Ansari,2009) looking at its recent developments. The earliest of these are of Belgrave (1966) who was the British advisor to the Emir of Bahrain and had an intimate knowledge of the Island. Loch (1819) and subsequently Fuccaro (2001) have added interesting analysis from the points of view of political formations. Moreover, Hamousch provides some references to the evolution of settlements in the island around Manama and Muharraq (2008). He points out that most settlements were along the coast and that the old port, 'the place on which the present Bab-Al-Bahrain was erected seems to be the embryo of the city' (Hamousch,2008). He further shows that waterfront indeed was the baseline of all developments. Broeze (1977), Khuri (1980) and Rumaihi (1976) who suggest that the economy based mainly on maritime activities determined Manama's destiny as a port city further confirm this. In fact, Hamousch provides a good analysis of the development of the city and the settlements in constant relation to the seas.

Most recent and notable among literature however are twofold. The first is the study of Ansari (2009), which examines the public open spaces on transforming urban waterfronts of Bahrain. Ansari maps out the historical changes of the sea fronts to point out the issues of land reclamation and its impact on Bahrain. The second is the publication produced in relation to the entry by the Kingdom of Bahrain to the 12th International Architecture Exhibition, the Venice Biennale (*la Biennale di Venezia*) in 2010 (Minsitry of Culture,2010). Titled 'Reclaim', this document re-visits the historical, cultural, economic and social connections that had existed between the inhabitants of the island and the sea. Its many contributors demonstrate how the sea has contributed to social life, sea culture, economic prosperity and construction of identity, as much as how the physical developments of Bahrain have led to the erosion of marine ecology. For example, Al Khalifa writes,

> 'I was born and raised in a house close to Qala't al Bahrain and would wake up every morning to the soothing sights of the sea. Such was the importance of the sea that I, as well as most Bahrainis learnt to swim before I could even ride a bike'.
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> May Al Khalifa,2010:

She laments that although those memories linger, their physicality has all but vanished, replaced by the urban sprawl. Matar (2010) adds to these sentiments and writes that for young Bahrainis educated abroad and returning home, 'sea was represented by a fun week-end at a 5-star hotel beach or boat trip with friends'. Ansari (2009) points out that the reason for this distraction has been the reclamation of land, many times over moving away the sea from the habitats of the people. He writes that 'many "coastal" towns and villages find themselves kilometers away from the coast while most of the historically renowned beaches currently lie forgotten beneath rocks and concrete'**.** Arora (2010) however looks at the other side of the coin; the sea life as affected by the presence of the human habitations in the island and their quest for intrusions into the sea. He deals with three things, impact of reclamation on crystal clear clean water that was a source of bio-diversity, the destruction of the fish beds, and the erosion and reconfiguration of the sea bed into underwater wastelands by the mammoth machines. In conclusion, however, Gugger (2010) points out that the Bahraini people's addiction to the sea has not totally diminished despite these negative

developments. Sustained by the 'fishing huts' along the sea-shore, the occupants, he claimed are 'all searching for … an immediate relationship with the sea. Like a genetic code, the need for an elementary relationship with the sea seems to survive in the Bahrain's.

3. The Research and the Research Methodology

This paper traverses the history of Bahrain to explore the ways in which the relations between the ocean and the inhabitants of Bahrain have influenced each other. It examines how the human settlements and the architecture of Bahrain has been fashioned by the presence of the sea and its nuanced influences. The paper employs data from historical records to map this trajectory from the past while the contemporary happenings are discerned from direct observations. The paper employs 'self-reflection' as a method of inquiry of the latter buttressed by secondary data. These findings are corroborated with the evidence from a number of interviews conducted by the promoters of the submission to the *Venice Biennale*.

The paper thus produces a qualitative insight through the application of a composite of methods from documentary evidence to ethnographic and phenomenological inquiries. Its analysis aims at gaining insights and derives the associational meanings that can be discerned from built responses as recorded in the material and non-material communications. Rapoport (1990) that from structuralism, symbolic anthropology, and even cognitive anthropology, this is an approach that has been traditionally used in the study of historical high-style architecture and vernacular environments. This approach has been proved useful mainly in traditional cultures in which clear schemata have been expressed through the built environment.

4. Bahrain's Conversations with the Sea

History records that Bahrain was first settled in 6000 BCE, culminating in a prosperous civilization known as the Dilmun (Website,2016). The importance of Dilmun came from Mesopotemia (now Iraq) which lacked resources such as copper and lumber. The Sumerians who lived in Mesopotemia have sailed across the seas to the nearby regions in search of the goods they needed, reaching the Persian Gulf & Arabian Peninsula and the Indus Valley (Pakistan). Cities along this sea route developed as trading centers and by the fourth Millennium BCE, Bahrain, then known as Dilmun came to be one of the most significant of such ports. The nuanced significance of the sea in the making of Dilmun and its settlements is hard to come by, except that the sea route and the trading activities along the coast have been central in its making. For example, Noor Al Nabi writes that prior to the evolution of the present twin cities of Manama and Muharraq, in around 1783, the island's inhabitants lived amongst fifty small settlements. They were mostly villages and hamlets, located both along the coast and in the interior of the island, recognizable from a distance by their area of development and groups of date palms. There is no doubt that the pattern of settlement on Bahrain's islands owes its longevity to a rich endowment of natural springs, usually referred to as *Ains*. The town of Muharraq obtained its water supply from this curious sea-bed source called *Bia mahab'* (atouristguide,2016)

Further, a recent study articulates clearly how the sea has been one of the major determinants of its culture (Holes,2001). Holes writes that there were two significant aspects of the geography of the region that have shaped their culture, language and society; the land and the sea (Holes,2001). On the one hand, the lands of East Arabia have all been desert with no physical borders between the numerous states and settlements. On the other, there have been shallow but long coastlines affording easy marine access. As he argues, the populations from Iraq to Oman across the states in East Arabia shared a culture based on the sea and the exploitation of what few natural resources the land provided (Holes,2001). In the case of Bahrain, these nuanced streams of cultural as well as economic and social constructions can be discerned under three distinct periods; the Distant Past, the Immediate Past and the Present.

4.1 Distant Past:

4.11 Sea as the Source of Drinking Water

One of the earliest links the inhabitants of Bahrain have had with the sea is rather an unusual activity of extracting drinking water from the sea. Belgrave says that Bahrain constituted a number of springs, several of which rose from the 'bed of the sea'. He writes 'The Arabs dive down to the source with leather skins which they fill with fresh water, close, and carry up *them* through the salt water to the surface. Before artisan wells were sunk, the water from the sea-springs was sold in the Bazaars at four *annas* for each petrol tin' (Belgrave,?). According to Pobst, this bountiful resource in the midst of the desert region was instrumental in the development of Bahrain as an international trading center thousands of years ago. Ships stopped at the island to replenish their stores of freshwater before sailing onto other destinations (Discovering World Cultures,2016). The habits that drinking water brought to Bahrain to become an

international trading center has continued to date in becoming an international finance center; trading in currency as much as goods.

4.1.2 Sea for Pearls for Riches: the Economy and the Culture

Long before Bahrain became rich with the discovery of oil in the 1930s, the harvesting of natural pearls from the sea has indeed enriched it. This historical connection has led to the making of the core facet of Bahraini culture, so much so that today, the Minsitry of Culture and Heritage is re-dignifying the spaces and places of the pearl industry as the main culture-giver of the island. Belgrave says that the interests of the Bahraini inhabitants of the island were mainly commercial and connected with the pearl industry (Belgrave,?). He further writes that 'Bahrain has been famous for many centuries as the center of the pearl-diving in the Persian Gulf. The welfare and the very existence of the people depend upon the pearls' (Belgrave,?). According to Pobst, by early 1900, about 900 ships were involved in the pearl industry. Nearly half of Bahrainis depended on pearl trade for their income, either as ship captains, divers who harvested the pearls or as pearl traders (Discovering world cultures,2016). Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities writes that,

> "Pearling" may seem an unusual word but it suits to describe almost every aspect of life on the islands of Bahrain for many centuries. The island society developed an economic, cultural and social system that was based on a singular source of income, a natural product of incomparable beauty: the pearls of Bahrain. While during the pearl-diving season everybody took up his or her role in facilitating harvesting of the oyster beds and later the collection and trade of the pearls brought forth, during other times of the year they may have had different occupations. But it was their role in pearling which defined income and social status"
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> Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities,2016:

Fig. 1: Pearl divers of Bahrain
Source: www.bahrainpearldivers

4.1.3 Sea as Trade-giver: Rise of Ships and Shipyards

The pearl industry and the commerce in fact gave rise to a healthy and vibrant industry of boat building. Belgrave writes that [in 1900] 'there are no local industries of any importance except boat building' (Belgrave,?). According to the tourist guide of Bahrain, "It was famous for the making of dhows; a single-masted ship with a lateen sail, sharp prow, deep forefoot, and raised deck at the stern, … Many variations of dhows were constructed the most common being: *boom*, *sambuk*, *shu'ii* and *jalbut*. Each of these had its own specific design and special use. The boat-builders of the past never used any plans for the construction of these ships, but all the dimensions were memorised. The wood used for the construction of the hull of these ships were usually teak or mangrove and were imported from India, whereas the ribs were made from acacia which was grown locally. Traditionally, no nails were used but special joints between the planks of the hull which were covered inside the hull with pads of palm leaves (Discovering World Cultures,2016). History records that 'At the beginning of the 20th century, Bahrain was home to more than 30 active shipyards that built vessels for the pearling and fishing industries, employing 17,500 divers and their helpers in a fleet of over 500 dhows' (Carey et al,2016). Others suggest that 'Dhow building peaked in the early part of the 20th century, when the pearl fleets, often more than 5000 boats, set sail for the oyster beds in June and returned in October' (Bangs,2016)

Fig. 2: Cargo boats in the pearl industry
Source: flicker

4.1.4 Marine Urbanity: Sea as a Form-giver of Settlements

According to historical records, 'in the 1940s, the Bab-Al-Bahrain—the gateway to Bahrain—was built on the northern coast of Manama and the visitors to Bahrain stepped off the boats and walked through the arch as they entered' (Discovering world Cultures,2016). As Alrouf and Hamousch point out, the urban structure of the city of Manama, emerged in clear response to the Gulf; the coastline (Alrouf,2013;Hamouche,2008),. The main roads ran parallel to the coast while the city in its early stages evolved along the coastline with many of the villages dotting the coastal edge. On the one hand, fish as a staple food available aplenty to be harvested. On the other hand, all the fertile land extended along the northern stretch of the Island.

Fig. 3: Settlements and seaports anchored to coast
Source: Author

4.1.5 Linguistic Legacy from the Sea: The Portuguese Connection

The Portuguese briefly controlled the Gulf Coast in the 16th Century and have left a small linguistic legacy, in terms of sea and shipping. Following terms are noteworthy.

Cawiya: long nail used in ship building. <cavilha meaning pin dowel or peg>
Durmet: sleeping shelf on a boat <dormente meaning sleeping
Katli, Katri: bench on the poop deck on which the captain sleeps <catele or catre meaning bed>
Burd: side of a ship side <bordo meaning board or broadside of a ship>
Bindera: flag <bandeira Idam>
Galbut: a small boat for carrying cargo

4.1.6 Sea as the Source of Sustenance – Fish as the Staple Food

Being an island with very little vegetation and resources, it is natural that it has looked to the sea as the source of its sustenance. Bahrainis, apart from being pearl divers, have also been fishermen, fish having become an essential accompaniment to all meals. In fact, historically, 'The backbone of the economy was palm cultivation, fishing and pearl diving' (Hamouche,2008). Fish had no capital value (not imported or exported), thus fishing traps, the main method of fishing in the island were not controlled by Al

Khalifa (Hamouche,2008). Most Bahrainis had one thing or another to do with fishing and sea, which they knew about as much as northern Arabs knew about camel and desert (Hamouche,2008). Specialized fishermen known as *rassamin* built fishing traps and rented them for U.S. $150 to $5000 a year with the most expensive in Sitra island (Arora,2010). In fact, the meeting between land and water was stitched together with the fishing nets that the northern coast was characterized by an array of fishing nets, anchors and ropes stretched between land and the sea. Moreover, fish has given rise to a culture of fish-centric food. According to Hospitality 21, 'Since, most of the Bahrain feeds on fish, one of the local's favorites is Hamour fish which can be served grilled, deep fried or steamed…This fish is also used in a dish called Machboos. This is one of the most sought after tasteful delights in Bahrain' (Hospitality 21,2016).

Fig. 4: Northern coast stitched together by fishing nets, anchors and ropes.
Source: Flicker

4.1.7 Sea as the Link to the World: Ports

History records that Bahrain was the Centre point of the most important trading route in the world; between Mesopotamia and Indus valley (http://rickbeeman.com,2016). From copper to incense and subsequently with pearls, for thousands of years, Bahrain acquired professional expertise in the sea trade while constructing a culture that derived its essences from the associations with the sea. Subsequently, lack of many other resources in the island meant that the people of Bahrain relied on maritime transport for the import of food, building materials and other daily necessities from overseas. It thus gave rise to a number of Ports, the main one being in Manama. According to exhibition narratives of the National Museum, a caption records that 'the development of incense trade (of Tylos) brought Bahrain into closer contact with mainland Arabia, and Arabia into closer contact with civilizations—and religions—of the outside world'. The ports have also led to the construction of Forts to defend the island from intruders, from the early pirates (Belgrave,?) to the late colonizers. The recently revived Qal'at al-Bahrain for example was the ancient harbour and capital of Dilmun, which later housed the Portuguese fort. According to Unesco, it comprises 'an artificial hill formed over time by successive occupations…immediately adjacent to the northern coast of Bahrain; a sea tower about 1600m North-West of the tell; a sea channel of just under 16 hectares through the reef near the sea tower, and palm-groves' (Unesco). Later two other ports came into being; one in Manama and another in Budaiya. The Mina Salman Port constructed in 1956, which has now been redeveloped as the Kalifa Bin Salman Port is the premier port in the Gulf. Bahrain has thus continuously derived a significant international presence and a link to the world through the ports and the sea.

4.1.8 Sea for Cultural Activity

Sea has been the foundation of culture of Bahrain, in as much as the desert has been. For thousands of years, maritime trade, pearls and fishing have been the cornerstones of life in Bahrain, everyday practices and habits have been derived from these activities associated with the sea, while they have also been performed in spaces adjacent to the coast. As Saleh (2013) points out, 'for this island community, playing, fishing, singing, [and] dancing were defined by the very nature and practices of play, recreation and work in the space provided by the coast, and in the long period of time that fishermen and pearl divers spent in the sea' While the building materials for the construction of houses in the past came from the sea, almost all the celebrated traditional houses that are considered to reflect the Bahraini Cultural identity are houses of pearl traders and those associated with the pearl trade. This inalienable connection to

the sea as a cultural base is well exemplified in one of the main cultural celebrations: Eid Al Adha known as the Feast of the sacrifice, when the families communicate with the sea, by throwing flowers and plants to the sea. TimeOut Bahrain reminds us that 'children plant beans in a basket and water them daily till they grow into a plant. During the Heya Beya ritual, youngsters don traditional clothes and join friends, neighbours and family to sing ancient songs before sacrificing their home-grown plants by throwing them into the sea'. (www.timeoutbahrain.com,2016)

Fig. 5. Families throwing Haya Baya plants to the sea during Eid Al Adha in 2013
Source: Getty Images

4.2 The Immediate Past: Post-Oil Bahrain

Bahrain's 'conversations with the sea' took a dramatic turn with the decline of the pearl industry around 1920s and the discovery of oil in 1930s. Hay writes that 'before oil was found, the economy of these sheikdoms (Bahrain) depended on the pearl industry and to a lesser extent on fishing, boat building, and the carrying trade. These occupations afforded them only a precarious livelihood, and when the introduction of the Japanese cultured pearl between World War I and II knocked the bottom out of the natural pearl industry, they were faced with starvation. Fortunately, oil came to the rescue' (Amirahmadi et al,2012). Thus if pearl, fishing and maritime activities attracted the inhabitants of Bahrain to the coast, the oil industry pulled them away from the coast to the oil fields. Thus begins the era of development, which at least in the initial phase was centered on the land itself; with the establishment of the Awali camp, which housed most of the oil workers. In writing the 'Visions of the City: Urban studies of the Gulf' which traverses the ways in which the Arab city has been studied and presented through the Oil Urbanization, Fuccaro (1999) hardly refers to the ocean or coastal presence of these cities. This suggests that either the cities that evolved through oil urbanization did not relate to the ocean or did not have an influence upon its presence. However, she refers to the 'cities of salt' which rather indirectly acknowledges the undeniable association with the sea. Nevertheless, as Hooshang (2012) points out, the oil industry did not lead to the emergence of any new towns that could challenge the role of the traditional urban centers: Manama and Muharraq. Fucarro writes, 'a physically expanding coastline also effectively meant that at least until the 1960s the extension of Manama's urban boundaries and the articulation of the modern state became increasingly projected towards the sea rather than looking towards the hinterland' (Fuccaro,1999).

4.2.1 Sea as the Extension of the City

Despite the shifting of development and location of economic activities inland; towards the oil fields around which residency would have been most useful, there is no evidence that settlements sprang up closer to the oil fields in any significant way. Since Bahrain was a small island, and that oil wealth helped build up a relatively good transportation system in terms of road networks, people still resided in the old neighborhoods and travelled to the oil-related work places. In fact, Bahrainis were employed in the lower ranks of these institutions accounting for only 30% of the workforce while the higher ranks were the British, the American and other expatriate workers. For the expatriates, the compounds provided accommodation thus effectively curtailing the growth of natural settlements and expansions (Fuccaro,2009). Moreover, when the two cities, Muharraq and Manama grew with the increasing populations and expansion of commercial activities prompted by oil wealth, it was again the sea that was intruded rather than the barren and empty land that existed inlands.

Grydehøj theorizes this as 'thinking with water' (Grydehøj, 2015) and argues that the popular term used to identify this process; reclamation indeed is wholly inappropriate. Reclamation did not 'reclaim'

anything that existed before but created new land from water. In fact, it is fair to say that post oil Bahrain looked at the sea again; this time as a geographical resource, rather than as an economic resource, or as a food resource with fish and water. Post-oil Bahrain looked to produce an output not from within the sea but without; by replacing the sea with soil to make land. Sea in this case was a site: in the words of Habraken, a space in which to act and to build.

The earliest of these 'reclamations' took place again on the northern shores, extending the existing coast particularly close to Manama. Elshestawy points out that 'in 1965, in addition to the 676 km^2 of existing land, a further 274 km2 … were gained by reclamation' (Elsheshtawy:196, Bar, 1965: 95). While early reclamation took place close to the pier in Manama, to expand the port and facilitate shipping, suburban areas of Manama such as Hura, Muhaz and Gudhaibiyyah owe their existence to the successive reclamation work (Bar,1965).

4.2.2 Sea as a View

Ansari (2009) points out that due to the reclamation of lands, the communities were almost completely separated from the sea. He argues that the sea has been disregarded to such an extent that it merely serves as a view from a point of a private land. However, Hayward (2015), argues that "if a place's status as an 'aquapelagic assemblage' is to be sustained, then the living, social connection between land and water must be maintained. Yet the things we do with our coastlines change, and economic circumstances may argue for the creation of new coastlines to serve new uses – for new users"**.** The creation of this new land indeed accomplished two important possessions of the modern Bahrain; land for expansion of the city, and views from those lands. It is notable that until the discovery of oil, and the subsequent west-dominated urban developments, the notion of the sea as a 'provider of exotic views' had hardly existed. As evident from both Muharraq and Manama, houses and other buildings had neither come into being orientated to the sea, nor have had large apertures exposing the sea to the interiors. As the Islamic tradition goes, building interiors were more concealed from outside in order to provide 'privacy' for the inhabitants and thus the traditional architecture of the island had no connection with the notion of sea views, which post oil architecture had produced. The notion has gained so much currency today, that at the school of architecture of the University of Bahrain, most design projects will choose sites adjacent to the sea and locate and organize spaces in order to provide the ubiquitous views.

4.2.3 Sea as a Source of Sustenance – Fish, the Staple Food

In Bahrain, sea has been always seen as a source of sustenance, providing at least a major part of the everyday needs for food. Although agriculture was possible in some parts of the island, sea provided a huge variety of fish that was abundantly available without having to toil for their making. Belgrade writes that 'much of their food came from the sea which provided quantities of fine fish of many different kinds (http://journeymart.com,2016). As Journeymart notes, 'The staple diet comprises of fish' (http://journeymart.com,2016). The significance and influence of fish in the diet of the Bahrainis is aptly visible in the domestic architecture, where the houses usually have an 'outside kitchen', which is meant for the cooking of fish.

4.2.4 Sea as Trade Giver – Globalization and Cosmopolitanism

As mentioned earlier, throughout history, Bahrain has been a trading post but more so in the immediate past. First with the pearl industry and as a port in the maritime route from Basra to India, Bahrain has been connected to the outside world through which it generated its trade. Belgrave notes that from the very early days, Bahrain accommodated a cosmopolitan community particularly in Manama. He writes 'the population of Manama town is a mixed one and includes Indians, Baluchis, Irakis, freed negro slaves, and a small but influential community of wealthy Persians' (Belgrave,?). He also adds, (in 1930s) 'Manama had a quiet and peaceful air, and was filled with a gaily dressed, cosmopolitan crowd of Arabs from all parts of the Gulf, as well as Persians, Hindus and a few Jews from Baghdad' (Belgrave,1966). This was indeed an outcome of its increasing involvement in international trade and links with the outside world, particularly other states of Gulf and India. Fucarro points out that 'by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bahrain's tribal communities had become predominantly merchant seafarers' (Fuccaro,1999). Moreover, in the 1920s, a building which stood in place of the current Bab-Al-Bahrayn [Bahrain Gate] provided direct communication between the port and the suq; it housed the newly created department of Police, Customs and Mixed Courts and the Postal service' (Fuccaro,2000). With the discovery of Oil, these activities have rapidly progressed transforming Manama to one of the international financial hubs of the region thus paving way to become a global city occupied by a highly cosmopolitan population.

4.2.5 Sea as the Backyard

Despite these continuous associations with the sea, the immediate past of Bahrain also shifted it to be the backyard of the emerging human settlements. Particularly in the post-oil developments, and in 1960s, modern residential quarters started to be developed in the outskirts of the city and … Manama port lost its importance as a result of the opening of a new port along the eastern coast of the city (Fucccaro,2000). Since the establishment of the Awali camp, a number of settlements have emerged in the hinterland, in Hamad Town, in Isa Town and indeed in Riffa, which had also been a traditionally significant village. As Noor Al Nabi points out, 'the establishment of the Ministry of …….and since the construction of the first house in Awali in 1934, the urbanization trends have shifted the populations from small hamlets and villages to the newly created urban centres, so that in 1971, 75% of the Bahraini population are concentrated in seven towns and of these three of them, namely Manama, Muharraq and Jidhafs, contain almost 64% of the total population' **(**Noor Al Nabi,2012;27)

4.3 The Present: Global Coastal Urbanism in the Gulf

Oil wealth and its transformations of Bahrain as an island has however not been simple constructions of new settlements inland and a shift away from the shores. In fact, not only did Bahrain evolve in the shadow of the oil wealth, but the entire region: almost all other gulf countries more so. As Katodrytis write, 'Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf are home to some of the world's most controversial settlements that since the 1960s, have grown into major economic and global hubs following rapid urban transformations' (Katodrytis,2012;161). These transformations have been buttressed by new technologies, telecommunications, and mega-structures. Underlined by addictive, prescriptive and awe-inspiring phantasy, the transformations of the Gulf region have been driven by a desire to 'link the past with a future of mythological interpretations: large scale, vista rendering, remote destinations, exclusive islands and escapism. The classic example of this is the case of Dubai, which has promoted the idea of what Katodrytis calls 'hydro suburbia' (Katodrytis,2012;162) island is the smallest form of spatial organization and that is what Dubai has capitalized on-creating islands.

4.3.1 Sea as a Visual Spectacle

This phantasmagoria created by what may be called 'Gulf Urbanism' has also captured the imagination of Bahrain albeit in a smaller scale. Dominated by intertwined duality of coast hugging sprawl and spectacular form making, Bahrain in the present has embarked upon creating new islands of the two main islands while also elaborately extending and constructing upon the northern shores and its towns and cities. Thus, both Manama and Muharraq and to a lesser extent, Budaiya have scores of new high-rises and islands competing for a slice of the sea. This time however, it is neither the pearls nor the fishes that are driving the developments, but the sea itself: Sea as a visual spectacle. For example the coastal belt of Manama was scheduled to be occupied by 40 mega structures creating an atmosphere like a theme park selling the Arabesque, the tropical, the oriental and the international; all fused into one. As Katodrytis says, in these developments, 'the morphology of the landscape and seascape is becoming fabricated to the point that it may soon be difficult to differentiate between the natural and the constructed' (Katodrytis,2012;165). Added to these are the ever increasing tourist hotels that are banking on nothing else other than, the spectacular views. As Al zayani adds, '"Many of our tourists opt for sea-view facing hotels. With that in mind, we are encouraging investment in more of these hotels to attract visitors' (Al Zayani,2016)

4.3.2 Sea as a Playground – the Yachts

This renewed interest in the sea as a visual spectacle combined with the oil-wealth and leisure made available for the wealthy has re-constituted the sea as an arena through which greater joy can be harnessed for adventure and play. The younger and wealthy Bahrainis have thus ventured into shamble the waters with the machines, replacing the pearl and fishing vessels with the toys of the rich. Today, the jet skis, wake boarding, kayaks, water skiing and other forms of water sports such as scuba diving dot the Bahraini shores sometimes more than the fishing vessels. Perception of sea as a playground of the rich has curtailed the public access to the beaches; so much so, there is an ongoing debate about the availability and control of the sea-front.

4.3.3 Sea as Backdrop for Solitude and Contemplation

As Ansari reports from his field research, 'the second most frequent was passive sitting' (Ansari,2009). Although hardly any attention is given to this activity in literature, one of the most decisive and joyful conversations with the sea indeed is in the opportunities it affords the people as a backdrop for solitude and quiet contemplation. Indeed Bahrain's beaches being quiet, shallow and without gushing waves, visits to the beaches are often family oriented outings or individuals and groups of friend who just

while away time sitting in front of the sea. Spaces for such activities had once been 'designed' and made available in beach fronts often called the 'cornice', that had come into being post–oil developments. However, only a few of them now remain. Ansari points out that there are 'public parks' as well as public beaches along the shores of Manama that promote such activities. Among them the Al Bahri-I and Al Bahri- II stand out as the most notable. According to Ansari, 'Bahri-II is a unique waterfront park in Manama; and is the only park that provides an urban beach in Manama'**.** Alternatively, there are the Al Seef Water front and……. Which are informal waterfront areas, where once again, people would come, sit and while away time in family gatherings, children's play and in quiet contemplation and solitude. (Ansari,2009;213)

4.3.4 Seas as a Place for Habitation

It is true that the traditional form of relationship Bahrani's had with the sea has diminished as lamented by the Ministry of Culture in its submission to the *Venice Biennale*. However, those now residing in Bahrain have not abandoned it totally. Instead of the culturally rich traditional anchor to the sea, the modern Bahraini community is in love with the sea, for its spectacular views and joys of expanse and fluid presence. For example, Ossisonline (www.ossisonline.com,2016) points out that most of the current leading private waterfront projects, which are taking place out of Manama, market themselves as areas where the future property owners can live right next to the water. This new trend marks the latest form of conversations with the sea; demand for and its popularity is exemplified by the fact that one of the Durrat Al Bahrain, an island that marketed as a place for waterfront villas sold 550 of its properties in one day [Bahrain Tribune, 2005b]. Sea is thus not just a border that defines the island, but an extension of the land itself; a platform upon which habitation is as possible as on land.

Interestingly, sea and its connection with the habitations of Bahrain have shifted albeit retaining its relations unbroken yet manifesting in different ways. Its earliest has been the Basrastis as living quarters constructed on its shores by the fishing community. These kept a distance to the sea but were constructed of palm fronds allowing sea breeze to pass through the alleys and also through the dwellings so that the heat could be calmed. Eventually when the Barastis gave way to more permanent dwellings, yet again constructed with the corals, material recovered from the sea, another form of dwellings arose, this time as temporary resting places from the fisherman. The fishing huts had dotted the beaches of Bahrain and continue to exist only recently re-discovered. The construction of these ad-hoc structures employed left over construction materials, yet created a language of its own that definitely had a strong bond with the sea. Later, when the oil economy has pushed the people away from the sea, the ocean villas have taken over now exquisitely crafted with fine green spaces adjacent to sitting rooms, overlooking the sea. Despite the nuanced shift in the manner in which the relation has been established, it has surely survived and continue to play a significant role in the habitations of Bahrain.

4.3.5 Sea as a Construction Site:

The most significant aspect of Bahrain's conversations with the sea now is its constant approach to pushing the sea away from the land mass, extending its landmass as much as possible. Ansari documents the numerous waves of 'land reclamations' or more accurately, the land extensions that had occurred since the discovery of oil, which have pushed the natural edge of the sea far away from where it used to be. In fact, starting from Bab-Al Bahrain, which is the heart of the island, sea has been pushed away by few kilometers, which continue to take place unabated. Ansari points out that the current shoreline in some places in Manama, are now 1.5 kms away from the shoreline in 1930s (Ansari,2009). Further, Saleh points out, that 'More than 70 km2 of coastal waters have been reconstituted into reclaimed land, and some estimate that the total landmass could increase the island's total size by up to 25% over the next 20 years' (Saleh,2016). The Bahrain 2020 vision and its projected urban development plans demonstrate this very clearly. According to the plans, the northern boundary of the island will be completely re-established with a series of land-extensions intended to provide the sites for new construction of cities, and urban habitats.

While a number of success phases of reclamation had extended the Bahraini Coast many a times, today sea as a site has gained a new momentum pursuant to the developments in place such as Dubai. Instead of extending the coast thus, contemporary approaches to the sea is underpinned by seeing the sea as a Site to build upon, leading to the creation of Completely Man-made islands such as the Diyar Al Muharrq and Amwaj Islands. There, the coast is an elite enclave, privatized, attached to the luxury residences for views and the launching pads of the yachts and other maritime-vessels for fun, leisure and enjoyment. This coupled with the expansions have indeed made the sea around Bahrain one of the major resources of progress development and the construction of the modern Bahrain state.

Fig. 6: Creation of Islands in the sea and the expansion of the coastline
Source: Bahrain 2030

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper analyzed the ways in which the evolution of settlements have been and continue to be closely associated with the sea that surround the island, and the nuances of the 'conversations with the sea' its inhabitants have had since its early habitations. As Ansari says, that prior to the building of the Ritz-Carlton in the Al Seef area in the late 1980s, there wasn't a single hotel in the main Bahrain Island with its own private beach' (Ansari,2009). Today however, there is a clamoring to get a piece of the beach and its view by hotels, residencies as well as offices. Artificial islands are to create another kind of 'Bahrain' dislocated from the mainland's, so that the geo-cultural rules and conventions of the traditional can be crossed and re-constituted (X,2012). Ansari points out three distinct patterns of these interventions: incremental, large scale submerges and Island formations (Ansari,2009)

This paper demonstrates that as an island, Bahrain has continued to have conversations with the sea in numerous forms and these are constantly changing. From the earliest when the sea brought the livelihood to its entire population through pearl, the spices and the fish, it has now come to define the global connections, the migrant home making and the opulence of the contemporary society. At another level, Ansari offers an interesting categorization of these conversations as touching the water, being above the water and seeing water. As an island, Bahrain will continue to converse with the sea in all those ways, yet the nature of these have changed dramatically over the years. The early, in the distant past, touching and seeing was not only possible but was an accompaniment to everyday living. With the fishermen and the boat builders as well as the pearl divers making a living while engaging with water as an extension of day to day living, and with the discovery of oil and the subsequent 'reclamations of the sea to create land' and the shifting of life away from activities that did not depend on water, these conversations have shifted to 'visiting the water for leisure' and often 'seeing on the side of the eye', driving along the many highways that have been constructed. Today, the conversations are far more heated up, intense and indulgent. On the one hand, there are those who want to live by the water as a spatial extension of their domestic space, while the elite are playing in the water for leisure. Simultaneously however, there are those who clamor and lament the loss of the connections to sea and sea life, as in the case of the submissions to the *Venice Biennale* as well as those who are politicizing the availability of access to the sea and the commercialization of the beachfront. As Saleh, says, the 'massive reimagining' of Bahrain in 2030 and beyond will reconstruct the coastline for elite, global and futuristic interests, perhaps abandoning the local and vernacular practices dispossessing its main inhabitants (Saleh,2016). Nevertheless, the nuanced conversations with the sea are bound to form the core of the culture of Bahrain as it has always been.

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