

Raze to the Ground! / Politics of the Playgrounds

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Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts (MFA)
“Public Art And New Artistic Strategies”
Faculty: Art and Design / Gestaltung
Bauhaus-University Weimar

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Foreword

*I think leaving the space empty would be the most effective remembrance. It's like Berlin. You see the devastation. There are areas of Berlin that have not been built upon [since the bombing of World War II], and that's much more potent than any stupid monument you could build, because you have this real sense of what happened*¹.

1.Erika Doss, "Remembering 9/11: Memorials and Cultural Memory," OAH Magazine of History , Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 27–30 At: doi: 10.1093/oahmag/

'Are you from the place where Bin Laden was killed'? I have been asked this question a few times when people have recognized Pakistan as the location of his death. The first time someone asked me this question my immediate reaction was 'no', because I had never been to Abbottabad before: I live on the opposite side of the country- in the south, almost 1500 kilometers from Abbottabad. But then my answer changes to 'yes'. Incidents like these make you think about your own identity from a completely different perspective. In the same way, living within a different culture gives you the opportunity to see your own culture from a different perspective.

When dealing with your own country's negative past, living outside of the country is also critical. However, one thing which motivated me to deal with the Bin Laden site is its international importance; my aim was to deal with it as a global issue, not only as a country-specific one, and coming from Pakistan can be used as an advantage. 'However different and site-specific the causes may be, this does suggest that globalization and the strong reassessment of the respective national, regional, or local past will have to be thought together'.²

'Raze to the Ground/Politics of the Playground' is small artistic research project, where I tried to document the ongoing discussions regarding the specific topic of how to deal with the death site of Osama bin Laden in a regional, national and international context. Have the the decisions made in Pakistan been the right way to deal with the site? And sometimes, monuments are not needed to make a site memorable-emptiness can offer a place for more effective remembrance.

2.Andreas Huyssen, "Twin Memories: afterimages of Nine/Eleven" in Present Pasts, ed. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries, ed. (Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 158-163.

Abbottabad: a historical perspective

Abbottabad is a city situated about 110 km north of Islamabad, the federal capital of Pakistan. The city, which lies in the Orash Valley, carries importance for three reasons: tourism, military establishments, and its close proximity to the capital. It is located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northeastern Pakistan.

The city is also close to other major cities such as Rawalpindi (130 km away) and the provincial capital, Peshawar (15 km). According to the 1998 census, Hindko is the most spoken language in the city with approx. 94.2% speakers, followed by Punjabi (2.3%), Pashto (2.22%) and Urdu (1.05%). As Urdu is the official and national language, it is widely understood and spoken fluently by the majority of the residents, and is used in markets, offices and formal gatherings. English is spoken as a second or third language as it is widely used in business and educational environments.

According to the last conducted census in 1998, the population of the city is 106,101, but according to Wikipedia statistics³, it is as high as 1,430,238. The city's economy largely relies on tourism. It is known for its leafy gardens, church bells, and wide streets in the Old Cantonment which evoke memories of the British colonial era.

The city was named after Major James Abbott, who founded the town and district in January 1853. He was also the first Deputy Commissioner of the Hazara district during the period of 1849-1853. The town was the headquarters of the Hazara District under the British Raj. In the early 20th century, Abbottabad became an important military cantonment.

In October 2005, Abbottabad experienced the most devastating earthquake in history in which many buildings were destroyed as well as many got injured and lost lives.

The city came into the global limelight on May 2, 2011, when American forces invaded a compound located in the city to capture Osama Bin Laden, who, according to the various reports, has been living there for several years. Bin Laden was captured and killed during the operation.

3. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbottabad>

Origin and background

The global war against terrorism officially started following the 9/11 terror attacks in New York City, United States, but the origins of terrorism in Pakistan can be traced back to the 1970s, when US fought a war against Russia on the soil of Afghanistan, the country which shares a border with Pakistan's north-western province, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pakistan served as an ally of the United States during the war. The war, which was started in 1979, lasted for nine years, finally coming to an end in 1989. To support the US, Pakistan trained hundreds of Mujahideen soldiers, for which it received billions of dollars from the US, the UK and Saudia Arabia. The war ended with two long-term consequences for Pakistan and for the world: firstly, millions of victims from Afghanistan crossed its borders and settled in Pakistan and Iran, a huge refugee population that both of these countries then had to deal with. Secondly, the Mujahideen were never disarmed. The Mujahideen continued to gain strength in various groups. The leading group among them was Al-Qaeda, the group that had allegedly undertaken the 9/11 attacks in the US.

The twin tower attacks were one of the major terrorist activities that had been conducted by the same armed group. Following the incident, the US declared war against the Mujahideen and invaded Afghanistan. With limited options available to them, the government of Pakistan, which was at that time a military one, decided to side with the US in the war. As a result, the Mujahideen declared war against the US and its allies.



Raze to the Ground

*This is a monument now. The whole world will come to see it.
This could be dangerous for us because anything could happen.*⁵

On May 2, 2011, American Special Forces conducted an operation in Abbottabad, Pakistan. In the operation Osama bin Laden, who was the head of the Al-Qaeda and the mastermind of 9/11, was killed. According to CIA intelligence reports, he had been hiding there since 2005. One of the most elite academies of the Pakistani army is located just a kilometer away from that house he was residing in. The US government expressed concern that the Pakistani intelligence agencies must have known about the Bin Laden's presence in Pakistan, which was the reason why the operation was conducted without any collaboration with the Pakistani army.

During and after the operation, as the site became an attraction for national and international journalists, locals were also curious to know more about the incident. There was a great struggle to believe the news that was coming out. There is no doubt that the place has turned into a site of importance, the hideout of the world's most wanted terrorist. The operation was also being observed live by President Obama and his colleagues sitting in the White House. However, one must bear in mind that Bin Laden was, or still is, a hero for many living in Pakistan and Afghanistan, or at the very least, that people have sympathy for him and for others who had been killed during the raid.

'Last year, several foreigners were briefly detained for trying to see it, including the Danish ambassador and his wife'⁶. Initially a macabre tourist attraction, Bin Laden's house has been under strict intelligence surveillance in following months; several foreigners, who attempted to visit it, including French and British journalists and the Danish ambassador, were detained⁷ before being sent back to Islamabad.

There were a few images published in different newspapers, such as one showing a mother taking a picture of her daughter outside the compound, or another where a woman is taking a picture of a family in front of the site. Authorities believed that this behavior may have stopped after some time, but the chance existed that if the compound had been left in its current state, it would have continued to attract visitors.

5. 'The Telegraph, 'Osama bin Laden killed: the fourth day, as it happened', 05 May 2011.

6. The Huffington Post, Osama Bin Laden's House In Abbottabad Destroyed, 27 Feb 2012.

7. The New York Times, 'Pakistan Razing House Where Bin Laden Lived', 25 Feb 2012

As I was looking for debates or dialogues relating to either to the preservation of the compound or its demolition, I realized that I didn't remember any of them. Finally I found one article discussing the 'call to preserve Osama compound for sake of history', "You can't change your history by demolishing buildings," the esteemed historian Dr Mubarak Ali told Dawn while opposing the proposed demolition plan of Bin Laden's compound. "Germans have preserved Hitler's era torture cells and have learnt from their history," Dr Ali observed⁸. The article also cited other experts (who opted not to be named) who were opposed the demolition of the compound, as there were rumors that authorities were planning to raze the compound to the ground.

In February 2012, the Pakistani government demolished the house after completion of the investigation carried out by the Abbottabad judicial commission. There were a few reasons for the demolition reported in the news, from official and unofficial sources. Firstly, the site was seen as a symbol of incompetence for Pakistan's powerful military and intelligence agencies; the second theory being that it could have become a shrine for Bin Laden or Al-Qaida followers. This was a genuine concern of the authorities and Army officials as they were aware of how easily places are converted into shrines: this is a centuries-old tradition and culture in south Asia. A friend who helped me with the filming of the site also mentioned during a conversation that he 'was working on one project for the army, while communicating with General Haroon Pasha' (who was a service general at the time). I asked him why they had demolished the compound; he told me that there was no doubt that Bin Laden had been there but when I persisted with the question, he told me that people would create 'Mazar' (shrines) and make 'ziarat' (pilgrimages) there. German history provides an example of this: "One slight elevation marked the remnants of Hitler's SS guard, which after having been reopened once the wall came down was soon sealed shut again by city authorities to avoid making it into a site of neo-Nazi pilgrimage."⁹

"But while the three-storey building in which Bin Laden was killed has since been knocked down to prevent such pilgrimages, his memory lives on"¹⁰. A very common phenomenon is that if we want to forget about something, we erase all of its signs, symbols and impressions. When I was talking with a friend about what his opinion regarding the government's decisions concerning the Bin Laden site, he said that he thought it was normal; that if we erase the traces and visible symbols of the site, then after some time we would forget it. Then what is the question? What is the aim of this discussion?



A Pakistani woman photographs her daughter at a gate of the compound where Osama bin Laden was killed. Photo: AP¹¹



A Pakistani family poses for photographs in front of the final hiding place of al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad. Photo: AFP¹²

8. (<http://www.dawn.com/news/626632/call-to-preserve-osama-compound-for-sake-of-history>).

9. Andreas Huyssen, "Voids of Berlin", in *Present Pasts*, ed. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries, ed. (Stanford University Press, 2003), page, 56.

10. Mail online, 'Welcome to Bin Laden Land! Pakistan plans £19million amusement park with zoo, mini-golf and ski ramp in town where Al Qaeda leader was killed', 05 Feb 2013

11. Mail online, 'Welcome to Bin Laden Land! Pakistan plans £19million amusement park with zoo, mini-golf and ski ramp in town where Al Qaeda leader was killed', 05 Feb 2013

12. The Sunday Morning Herald, 'Al-Qaeda compound facing the wrecker's ball', May 8, 2011

If erasing a physical symbol is the answer to everything, or the correct way to deal with this specific site, then how can we explain this image? If one compares the photographs with the compound still standing with the one after its demolition, somehow the image without the compound seems more powerful than the photographs with it. While discussing this image with Professor Buden, he described it as ‘like an invisible monument’, a strong presence of something with an invisible monumental significance.

Through studying the phenomenon of monuments and memorials, I researched similar sites and how they had been dealt with. I found ‘Ground Zero’ to be a good starting point, where I analyzed the strategies that had been used to deal with the site after the 9/11 attacks, keeping in mind the differing circumstances owing to its significance. On the one hand, 9/11 was a traumatic event which resulted in a great loss of human life: a politically-charged attack which the government had unsuccessful at preventing. However, it started a discussion among different groups (victims’ families, the general public, artists, architects etc.) on how to commemorate it, how to remember. On the other hand, there was not as strong a debate, as this was something dishonorable, which the public did not relate with (at least not openly)-the perpetrator was someone who did not belong to them. To erase the site was the only solution which seemed correct and acceptable to everyone, whereas in the article “Remembering 9/11 in New York”, ‘New York Times asked artists and architects how they might commemorate 9/11’, artist Shirin Neshat objected, remarking that “it would be absolutely cruel to build a building on the site. In order to remember the loss of lives, you need a certain amount of emptiness. If you build, it’s like you are covering up the tragedy and will forget it”. Artist Joel Shapiro also commented, **“I think leaving the space empty would be the most effective remembrance.”** And **“We don’t need a monument. You see a monument and you don’t think of anything”**¹³. In his opinion, leaving the space empty is more effective than building a monument. In case of the Bin Laden site, the photographs taken by ‘tourists’ are even more powerful with the demolished compound than with the buildings still intact. Is the act of demolition in order to erase a physical symbol (which can aid in forgetting events) the wrong way of dealing with this particular site of global importance?



A father taking a picture of his daughter on the demolished Bin Laden site.¹⁴

I think leaving the space empty would be the most effective remembrance.

To take it further, Joel Shapiro mentioned post-WWII Berlin as an example to justify his statement: ‘I think leaving the space empty would be the most effective remembrance. It’s like Berlin. You see the devastation. There are areas of Berlin that have not built [since the bombing of World War II], and that’s much more potent than any stupid monument you could built, because you have this real sense of what happened¹⁵. Jochen Gerz¹⁶ also used absence as a strategy in his artworks, examples of which include the Harburg monument (against fascism, war and violence) or ‘Square of the Invisible Monument’.

13, Erika Doss, “Remembering 9/11: Memorials and Cultural Memory,” OAH Magazine of History,

Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 27– 30 At: doi: 10.1093/oahmag/oar018

14. The Telegraph, “Osama bin Laden’s Abbottabad home being sold off brick by brick”, 30 Apr 2012

15. Erika Doss, “Remembering 9/11: Memorials and Cultural Memory,” OAH Magazine of History , Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 27– 30 At: doi: 10.1093/oahmag/oar018

16. Bojana Pejic “Jochen Gerz: Working with the ‘Negative Past’,” in Where is Abel, thy brother, exh. catalogue, ed. Andra

Politics of the Playground

'You have already demolished the biggest potential tourist attraction'¹⁸

18. The Express Tribune, 'Government plans 'amusement city' for Abbottabad', Readers Comments, Observer, 04 Feb 2013.

This was a comment on an article, 'Government plans 'amusement city' for Abbottabad', two years after the Bin Laden incident in 2013, when the tourism ministry of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa announced a plan to build an amusement park in Abbottabad, along with various other touristic attractions nearby. The plan involved an investment of \$30 million and included a zoo, adventure sports facilities, a heritage center and artificial waterfalls. After the announcement, it was suddenly linked with the Bin Laden incident, and was seen as a way to improve the image of the town. The amount of money to be used for the project is also being discussed. The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa tourism and sports minister Aqil Shah denied all accusations that the project was connected to the Bin Laden incident, and claimed that its aim was only to improve tourist attractions and boost the tourism industry in the region.

The topic at hand here is the Bin Laden site, a location of international significance: how we should deal with it as a nation- whether we preserve it, demolish it or make any other decision- will have worldwide impact. However, there is a difference in how 'others' relate to it on different levels. Because of international terrorist attacks and its connection with Al-Qaeda, aid from developed countries is being spent on the war against terrorism, money taken from countries' own taxpayers.

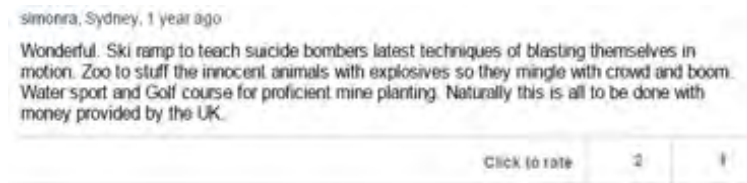
Meanwhile looking at different international newspapers, I found very interesting headlines from various international newspapers like, "Welcome to Bin Laden Land! Pakistan plans £19million amusement park with zoo, mini golf and ski ramp in town where Al Qaeda leader was killed"¹⁹, 'Forget Disney World... Abbottabad, Pakistan theme park is the place to be...' ²⁰ and 'Abbottabad Amusement Park: Bin Laden Death Town Attraction Planned By Pakistan'²¹. Furthermore, the articles have attracted imaginative and sarcastic comments from readers, 'To be called 'the Al-Qaida Experience' fun rides including 'dodge the suicide bomber''²². One of the comments on tourism minister's justification of amusement park in Abbottabad was that "we are working to promote tourism and amusement facilities", contains in the comment section "Must have got the spellcheck wrong, presume they mean terrorism instead of tourism?" ²³

19. Mail online, 'Welcome to Bin Laden Land! Pakistan plans £19million amusement park with zoo, mini-golf and ski ramp in town where Al Qaeda leader was killed', 05 Feb 2013

20. Pix II, 'Forget Disney World... Abbotabad, Pakistan theme park is the place to be...', <http://pix11.com/2013/02/05/abbotabad-pakistan-theme-park/>, 05 Feb 2013.

21 The Huffington Post, 'Abbottabad Amusement Park: Bin Laden Death Town Attraction Planned By Pakistan' http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/04/abbotabad-amusement-park-bin-laden-death-town-pakistan_n_2614332.html

22, 23 .The Telegraph, Pakistan to build amusement park in Osama bin Laden town '<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/9847231/Pakistan-to-build-amusement-park-in-Osama-bin-Laden-town.html>



When I was looking at these articles and comments from their readers, which we enjoyable to read due to their creative nature, I felt a sense of distance and insensitivity regarding the issue and the local residents. On the contrary, in Pakistan's print media the same news reported with these titles, 'Government plans 'amusement city' for Abbottabad'²⁵, Promoting tourism: Govt plans 'amusement city' in Abbottabad"²⁶. On Wikipedia, a website providing instant information related to everything, it is mentioned how 'in February 2013, Pakistan announced plans to build a R265 million (\$30m) amusement park in the area, including the property of the former hideout."²⁷ My aim here is not to prove certain parties to be right or wrong, but rather to observe how news can be manipulated, or at least how the chances of manipulation can be increased, especially in cases where the audiences of such news sources are distanced from the realities of the places and systems being dealt with. While working on this issue, being from Pakistan, I felt myself to be an outsider of this region as I was born and brought up on the opposite side of the country. I asked myself: how important is this question to me? Should I travel there, to get a real feeling for the site and the issue I am dealing with, so that my audience doesn't sense a distance between what I am telling them as an insider?

24. Mail online, 'Welcome to Bin Laden Land! Pakistan plans £19million amusement park with zoo, mini-golf and ski ramp in town where Al Qaeda leader was killed', 05 Feb 2013.

25. The Express Tribune, 'Government plans 'amusement city' for Abbottabad', Readers Comments, Observer, 04 Feb 2013.

26. The Express Tribune, 'Promoting tourism: Govt plans 'amusement city' in Abbottabad', 05 Feb 2013.

27. Mail online, 'Welcome to Bin Laden Land! Pakistan plans £19million amusement park with zoo, mini-golf and ski ramp in town where Al Qaeda leader was killed', 05 Feb 2013

*Now there is birdsong at the site and the sound of boys playing cricket.*²⁸

There is no strong public debate on this issue in Pakistan; generally, the public seems not to be particularly interested in talking about it (at least nowadays). The sensitivity of the issue and the social and political problems surrounding it mean that people don't usually focus on these smaller details. I remember how in the summer of 2014 I was in Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina, researching public opinion about a monument erected in the city center for the Pakistani Army, who served there during the war as part of United Nations Peacekeeping Forces. One man told me, "there are lot of things in our country that you are actually not familiar with, I think a lot of people have no idea what's happening, after the war and after all these things that happened here, people actually think I don't care, people don't care because we are looking how to survive". In my country the case is very similar and maybe even worse, because the strategies have been used especially in the last decade in the name of the war against terrorism, either for surveillance or for the use of non-profit organizations for the wrong reasons; the trust level of the public has been shaken. 'Doubts about whether Bin Laden was really hiding out for years in the city of Abbottabad are also common across Pakistan, a country where conspiracy theories often have more weight than fact'²⁹. During my personal conversations with art students, friends and other people I met, most people still don't seem to believe that there was a Bin Laden presence in Abbottabad and have doubts about the story told by Pakistan and USA Governments.

However, this May was the fourth anniversary of the incident, and every year on this anniversary, something new comes to light: new reports, new revelations, so the issue is still under discussion. The military involvement and its role is questionable; the three possibilities being that the army didn't know about Bin Laden's presence, they were involved in hiding him in Abbottabad, or that the operation was fake and both parties were involved.

28. Dawn, 'Death threats for Osama compound demolition man', 02 May 2012.

29. Dawn News, Little audience for 'Zero Dark Thirty' in Pakistan', 20 Feb, 2011

This is a bigger discussion topic in than media than what should be done with the site. But still local government is dealing with this issue and is as soon as possible trying to convert the empty plot into something which can help in forgetting the bad memories associated with the site . According to one article³⁰ recently published in on 2nd May 2015, locals recommend converting the 38,000 square foot plot into a girls' school, and have mentioned that since the plot has remained empty for almost three years, it has been used by local kids to play cricket. "Everybody in this area wants this place to become a playground. We like playing cricket here and we want the government to build a playground," said 12-year-old Jamaluddin³¹. According to the article there are more chances of the site becoming a playground.

This is not the first site, which has been suggested to turn into a playground because of its bitter or negative past, but there were suggestions "turning Ground Zero into a playground for culture and art"³². Interestingly, when I searched that what happened with the site where Adolf Hitler committed suicide, I found the article with the title, 'The Site of Hitler's Suicide Is Now a Playground'³³. I live in Weimar, in the student dormitory Jakobsplan, which is just opposite Weimar Atrium, the biggest shopping mall and entertainment center in Weimar. This center was formally part of the Gauforum constructed by Adolf Hitler in the same era as the Buchanwald Concentration Camp. Because of its history, the Gauform has controversial status in Weimar as a cultural city, and to convert the complex into an entertainment center was also seen as an attempt to get rid of its past- to make it acceptable for the residents and to recover Weimar's image as a cultural center. In my opinion, going back to the problem of the Bin Laden site, the authorities chose to demolish the compound as it was the easiest option to take. This may or may not prove to be the solution to the problem. However, what should be built on the site, if not a playground?

30. The Express Tribune, Four years on: 'Bin Laden hideout will likely be turned into playground', 02 May 2015

31. Dawn, 'Little audience for 'Zero Dark Thirty' in Pakistan', 20 Feb 2013.

32. The Express Tribune, 'Four years on: 'Bin Laden hideout will likely be turned into playground', 02 May 2015.

33. Dawn, 'Death threats for Osama compound demolition man', 02 May 2012.

<http://www.vice.com/read/the-site-of-hitlers-suicide-is-now-a-playground>



Practical Part/Artistic Strategy

Initially, when I started work on my thesis proposal in November 2014, my research only consisted of analysing newspaper articles, electronic media and news clips. My first plan was to analyze sites in Germany and use the Bin Laden site as something with which to contrast these. On December 16 2014, 144 students including teachers were killed in a terrorist attack³⁴ in Peshawar. Peshawar is the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the same province as where Abbottabad is located. The incident changed the whole scenario: the efforts against terrorism were doubled and the government launched new military operations in sensitive areas. Because of the threat of attacks of the same magnitude in different schools, a lot of security measures were taken by schools, colleges and universities, along with other governmental and private institutions. But at the same time, terrorism, Jihadists and fundamentalists are not only the problem in Pakistan. There are other issues going on simultaneously, which are more relevant to my situation- specifically freedom of speech, and which questions which can or cannot be asked. Pakistan is a country run by its military- it does have a democratic government but it is the military which leads the country. In a scenario where the army's and intelligence agencies' role is in spotlight because of failures relating to the Bin Laden incident, the hundreds of unexplained missing person cases in Baluchistan linked to security and law enforcement agencies, and after almost a decade of war on terror, the situation is getting worse. In last few years, a lot of investigative journalists, political, social, civil rights activists, professors have been killed and attacked, with the public showing its concerns regarding security and law enforcement agencies' involvement in these killings. In this situation, going to Pakistan and working on the Bin Laden Site itself was a difficult decision to make.

My position was also critical because I am going to talk about something which is not a proud incident- Pakistan's military was heavily involved and I worked on it while studying outside of the country. The very first question everyone asks you is, 'why are you are working on this issue?' 'Were you asked to by your university or it was your own decision?' 'Who is funding you?' or 'are you getting any funding for this work?'

As my project developed, I considered the possibility of visiting the site in order to ask and gather information; without doing so, I would feel distanced from the site while talking about a place I had never visited. The first thing for me was to tell my father that I was working on the Bin Laden site as a thesis project and to ask whether there was any possibility of me coming to Pakistan and visit it. I already knew that he would have concerns relating to my decision to work on this topic, and as I expected his first

34.The Express Tribune, '132 children killed in Peshawar school attack', 16 Dec 2015. however as far as your work is concerned, try to connect anyone local who can help you there, don't try to go to the site alone, again it's risky.

reaction was, 'find a site in Germany to analyze and just try to finish your masters'.

I then told him that I had already started work on this topic, that my decision to travel was not a final one, and that if he could, he should just ask some of his friends from Abbottabad what the situation is like and how feasible it would be to work there. Then he agreed to ask and let me know his findings; he then later told me that the compound was demolished and there was nothing, telling me 'my father and his friends had the same concern, it's an empty site an empty plot that you could find anywhere' and that taking the risk to go there and see the site made no sense. I told him that when on-site, I could decide on my options, which from Germany I was unable to do. For me now the whole process was more important: the questions, reactions and the concerns. If it's just an empty plot of land, then what are the risks?

Then I also start talking to friends from Pakistan living in Weimar, especially those who are from places near to Abbottabad, so that I could get an idea of what kind of risks and problems I could come across. Mostly people responded that I was fearful simply because I was not familiar with the place and that it was a nice touristic town.

'According to Jochen Gerz, the artist is simultaneously an outsider (as a subject who regards his or her own culture as an "object", or as an "other" and an insider (as a subject who belongs to his or her own "subject matter", and therefore is him- or herself an "other"). For Jochen Gerz this movement between his own "outsidness" and "insideness"-the interplay of being at once present and absent – is the condition for making art, and doesn't necessarily result in an artwork the embodies the cultural obsession with materiality, solidity and visibility'³⁵.

To take this approach, where I am questioning my own culture, putting myself in uncomfortable situation to check, I asked myself whether the questions and concerns I had were real or just in my mind. Since studying for my undergraduate degree, I have been involved in activism, participating in different youth activism groups: South Asian Youth Network, World Youth Network group and Global Art-Activist Network. I thought that the skills I had learnt during my participation and the connections I had developed in those events would help me with this project. At the same time, I was also worried about the end product- how should I document my trip? And if I got to the site, what would be my approach to working there?

35.Bojana Pejic "Jochen Gerz: Working with the 'Negative Past'," in Where is Abel, thy brother, exh. catalogue, ed.

Andra Rottenberg, (Warsaw: Zacheta Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1995), p. 11.

How to Forget or the Fear of Remembering

‘His own responsibility to relate to his country’s past and to its guilty conscious about that past; and the attempt to memorize (and therefore accept) the past, which includes in itself a certain resentment of it.’³⁶

While traveling and staying in different places, I did an exercise to test to what extent the whole incident is part of our memory. I asked the question, ‘do you remember when you watched the news, what came to your mind, if something is still part of your memory?’ ‘A day to remember’ (2005) is piece of video work by Chinese artist Liu Wei, who tried to recall the incident of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre by asking the question, ‘do you know what day it is today? His belief is that there is an ongoing effort to erase the incident from both historical record and cultural memory, but here the case is little different- we should forget, not ask too many questions or try to investigate the matter because this is better for our greater national interest. I recorded a few accounts of people, those I selected from my conversations, starting with myself.

I was in Karachi, (which is the biggest city and economic hub of Pakistan), when the Abbottabad incident happened. As I tried to remember the day, when I woke up in the morning it was all over the TV, not only on national news but also on the international networks. From Pakistan’s governmental army to the public there was nothing to celebrate about, but it was moment to worry because the government and army had to answer to the public how exactly someone from outside can come and attack, contravening international law and the integrity of a sovereign country. On the other hand, the government had to answer to the USA about how Pakistan was unaware that Bin Laden had been hiding there for the last five or six years. And among the public, the major concern was that there would be a retaliation from the Taliban which they alone would be the victims of.

On the other hand, my sister was in US when the incident happened, and shared her experience: “On the May 2, 2011, I was sitting with a bunch of Pakistani and Afghan Graduates and PhD students in a university apartment belonging to one of them in a small town of Fort Collins, USA. It was around evening, I don't remember the exact time though. I remember, we were playing cards and sipping tea when one of us received a call from Pakistan. The call was about something has happened in Abbottabad and US Army is involved. The caller wasn't sure what had happened- nobody was. Someone immediately started switching channels on the TV and soon found and stopped at CNN. It was a developing story. The anchor at CNN was

36. Bojana Pejic “Jochen Gerz: Working with the ‘Negative Past’,” in *Where is Abel, thy brother*, exh. catalogue, ed. Andra Rottenberg, (Warsaw: Zacheta Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1995)

shouting that an operation had been conducted in a city of Pakistan, Abbotabad, a city very close to the capital, Islamabad. I don't remember exactly if they had broken the Osama Bin Laden news yet. But I do remember that there was a mention of an independent operation by the US army being conducted in Abbotabad which, according to CNN, is next to the capital. I remember that some of us were angry that CNN was twisting the location and making it sound as if an operation has been conducted within the capital. I remember that there was a wait for Obama's official speech on the matter and then he spoke and broke the news that the US army had found and killed Osama Bin Laden in a closed compound in Abbotabad. We all were in 'awe', in disbelief. 'This can't be happening' was the common reaction in the room. Everyone was commenting on the situation, 'Osama was found in Pakistan? He cannot have been there', 'there is a conspiracy behind this', 'there is no way the Pakistani establishment (military or political) was unaware of this' 'of course they must have known, they are not admitting to it'. We sat there for hours. We used to do that a lot. But on that night it was tense. We all were aware that we were currently sitting in a country whose army had just invaded a house in a country we belonged to. I decided to leave at 2 in the morning, it was the usual 7-minute walk for me to my dormitory, that I could easily take any day. In fact, I had done many times. But that night, I asked a friend to accompany me on my way back. I wasn't scared but I had a feeling of discomfort. I entered my dorm and everyone was discussing one thing- the Bin Laden incident. Everyone was watching the news. It was, of course, very unusual for them too. It was an undergrad dormitory and not many of them were part of the news-fanclub. When I entered my hall, all of my friends were gathered in the hallway. They started telling me stories about how they had reacted to the news upon hearing it. According to them, one of my friends and neighbors, a sophomore, jumped out of bed and came out from the room screaming, 'we finally did it and the US finally got justice for the victims of 9/11 and for the whole nation and Obama is a hero'. They were my friends and were telling me these things without realizing that I belonged to the country which was being discussed here- inside I was feeling guilty that I was a citizen of a country which was being accused of betraying the world by keeping the most wanted terrorist. One of my strongest memories also involved walking to my class the next morning and looking at the campus newspaper (for which I was interning at the time) with the headline of the incident lying on the benches and coffee tables inside the student center. While walking, I was thinking: how would my classmates will react? How would I face them? How would my professors treat me from now on? As I entered my class, however, I realized that it was just a normal day like any other. US citizens have well-internalized the value of keeping the state and citizens separate and simply were celebrating the news.

(Written record by Sofia Saeed, 26, Coordinator at Karachi Youth Initiative).

'I was in Karachi, I am telling you honestly, and I saw on TV news that a helicopter had crashed in Abbottabad. Ahsan (a friend of mine from Abbottabad) messaged me that 'something was going on'. But I didn't pay much attention, and I went to sleep. I had activated Facebook notifications on my cell phone, which at that time had just recently been introduced, and when I woke up in the morning my Facebook timeline was full with the news, 'Osama is dead'. I remember now, it was on Geo TV- a lady was giving an interview, I think she was a resident of Bilal town. I don't remember her name, it was either Nazia or Najia. After that I went back to bed, it was 1 or 1:30 am, and I just remembered what she was describing- a helicopter had crashed, there was a sound of gunshots. We don't have electricity here, and when I woke up my cell phone was full of notifications, 'Osama is dead, Osama is dead...'. Initially I couldn't comprehend the situation, but then I read about Abbottabad and the helicopter and I connected the whole chain of events. There is a guy, a software engineer named Shoiab, who live-tweeted the whole event, who was then taken by ISI but told them, 'I didn't know anything, I just tweeted what I saw'. The OBL commission report, which is not published yet, used his testimony as valid and credible because he live-tweeted the event. He came to Karachi in 2012 or 2013, I met him and he was planning to open a café, saying, 'someone suggested that I should name it 'Café bin Latten' (a word play on 'latte'). You should interview him; he is the right person. Ahsan also posted live updates on Facebook, but his account got hacked.'

(Recorded in Karachi, May, 2015, Muhammad Anas Ahsan Mallick, 21 years old, Associate Producer, Express News, part of Social Media Team in South Asian Youth Conference, Islamabad 2012).

'I was not here when incident happened, my family told me (we live in a three-story building, so you could see the Bin Laden site from the top of my house) that they heard the blast and there was fire on the site so they came closer, hearing sound of gunshots and shouting. My cousin tried get closer but they stopped him, but he had only gone there to help. Later he gave an interview to the BBC.'

(Recorded on Bin Laden Site, May, 2015, Abbottabad, Dr. Iraj)

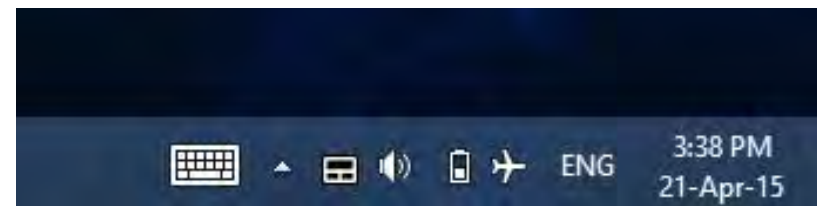
(Recorded on Bin Laden Site, May, 2015, Abbottabad, Dr. Iraj)

I have more accounts recorded, but I decided to share only those which I felt would give a glimpse of the overall situation. But in general, mostly people answered along the lines of, 'yes, we remember, we watched the news, but our first impression was that this was fake, made-up, that the whole operation was staged.' 'In the mean time we have to ask: how should even local, regional, or national, memories be secured, structured, and represented? Of course this is a fundamentally political question about the nature of the public sphere, about democracy and its future'.³⁷

37. Andreas Huyssen The introduction: in *Present Pasts*, ed. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries, ed. (Stanford University Press, 2003), page,



Journey to another Ground Zero



Airplane mode

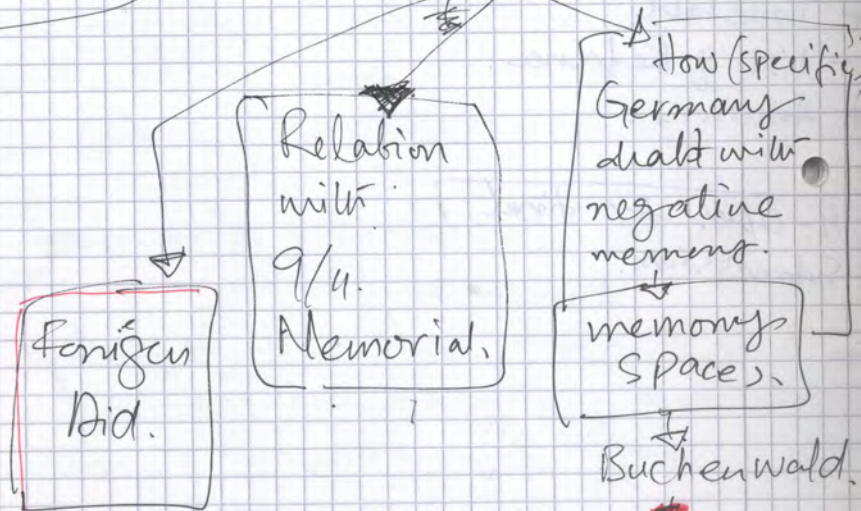
This is a documentation of selected material from my travels, starting from Weimar-Hamburg-Karachi to Lahore, and from Lahore to Abbottabad. This is a very important part of my work process, which includes the notes which I had been taking since I started working on my basic idea, along with other to-do lists which I made every other day to organize my tasks and my time before, during and after traveling. Other than that, the photographs and videos which I made during my travels and communication via emails, Facebook and over the phone. The biggest and most time-consuming part of my work was contacting relevant people who could help me in Abbottabad for my visit and the documentation of Bin Laden site.

The title is inspired by the Ground Zero, which was created after the fall of twin towers in the result of 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. The Osama Bin Laden operation has been linked several times to the 9/11 attack, by President Obama (in his May 1, 2011 speech) and by other government officials, the media and the public-both events are interconnected and are very important events in the same story. Now the demolished site of Bin Laden's compound seems like another Ground Zero, one which has been demolished intentionally.

The project I carried out in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the MFA-exchange program in summer 2014 in collaboration with students of Academy of Performing Arts Sarajevo was a motivating experience and seemed like a rehearsal for this project, both conceptually and practically. In comparison with the last project, 'I hope I am not under a wrong impression', I was searching for the sites which are part of my memory because of a TV serial, Alfa Bravo Charlie, aired on PTV Pakistan Television Network in 1998. The TV serial was about the Pakistani army and its operations in various places, one of the places being Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the Pakistani army was acting as part of United Nations Peacekeeping Forces during the war in 1992-1995. In that case I was searching for the sites which were part of my memory but which I didn't know existed in reality or not. This time, the case was little different- I was trying to access a site which I know existed but its accessibility was questionable.

Negative Memory → How to deal with Negative Memory.

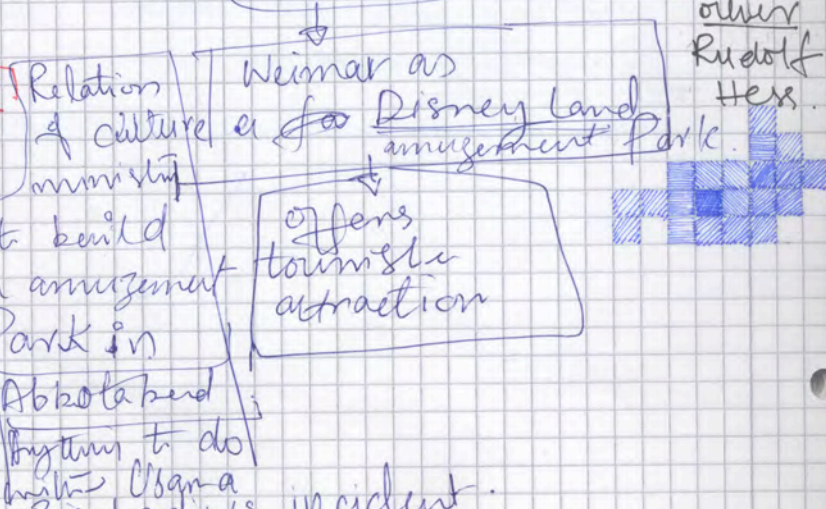
Memory Space →



Strategies →

Trace the history

References
Reality material



Who Can Erase the Trace?

Can we able to forget, if we ignore it.

who is allowed to take decisions for cultural/Memory spaces?

Future

At Tourist Attraction

Present Pasts

Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory
Andreas Huyssen
The voids of Berlin

Perra Nona
Site of Memory

HERMANN HESS

Rudolf Hess (Nazi commander)

e-mail → Bojana → ask for books retirement

→ Suden

→ Ask Danica Daleic →

waiting for the amusement city.

waiting for the playground.

For PRINTING

max width

600-900 cm

(length - as much as you want)

EUROZINE →

Primordial existing at or from the beginning of time, primordial

consecrate make or declare something typically a church sacred; dedicated formally to a religious purpose

Present Parts Andreas Huyssen

"Urban + Essay" Twin Memories & Afterimages of Nine/Eleven.

Monumental memory:

Bamiyan Statues - Twin Towers

Historical trauma. (Page 13)

"culture of memory" (Page 15)

Politics of forgetting.

The political site of memory practices. (Pg. 6)

"However different and site specific the causes may be, this does suggest that globalization and the strong reassessment of the respective national, regional, or local past will have to be thought together."

"But what if both observations (Pg. 6) were true, if the boom in memory were inevitably accompanied by a boom in forgetting? (Pg. 12)

"imagined memories" Pg. 17

"fear of forgetting" Pg. 18

erasure
the removal of
writing, rec-
-ded material
or data.

the removal
all traces
of something
obliteration

Rampant
flourishing
or spreading
unchecked

Conjures
cause to
appear
by means
of a magic
ritual.

Infantile
Infant &
Child child

defiance
open resistance
bold disobedience

"how should even local, regional, or national memories be secured, structured and represented? Of course, this is a fundamentally political question about the nature of the public sphere, about democracy and its future. --- (Pg. 26)

§§§§

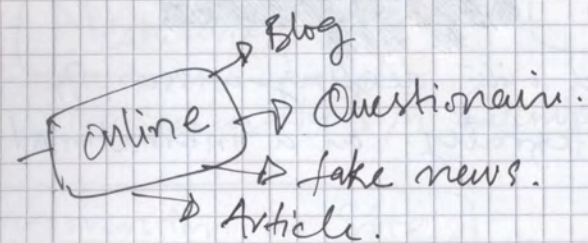
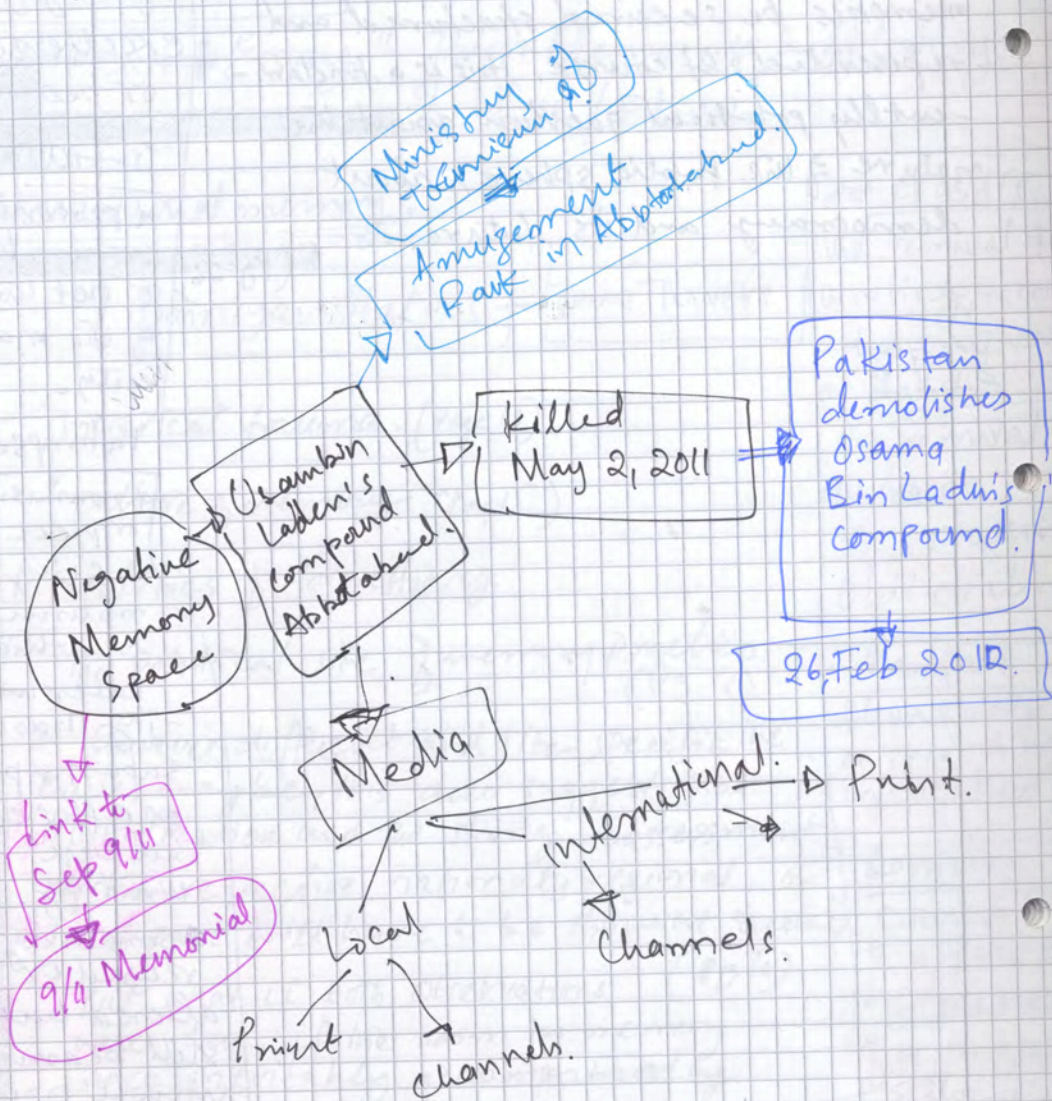
sublim
of very great
excellence
or beauty.

infidel
a person who
has no religion
is not what
of the major-
ity.

Palimpsest
a manuscript
or piece of
writing
material
on which
later writ-
ing has been
superimposed
or effaced
earlier
writing.

Something
reused or
altered but
still bearing
visible traces
of its earlier
form.

To try not to forget, we are trying hard to immortalize



Weimar

Reading text on site / poetry in local language.

Intervention on site,

Carpets on the floor.

it needs to be discussed



Chattage.

What kind of floor coverings used in Abbotabad

Play local sport on the site.

Talk to as many as people I can talk, and people from every walking life, worker, housewives, friends etc.

TEXT

⇒ How to deal with a issue of national integrity on international platform / Problems / Criticism.

⇒ A site has attraction without any visible, aesthetical appealing structures.
In consideration of images ---

⇒ If we convert a site into a ~~fun~~ amusement or

⇒ If we convert a site into amusement place, it will help to reduce it's negative element
Comparison → with Graffiti, Hitler's bunker etc.

Practical Part.

Constructing memorials → photocopy.

Mental images →

in Hallesche Straße
Bojana Kaschian Straße
Merseburger Str. 7
10823 Berlin
Ph - +49(0)30 7875 290
Mob - +49(0)178 1480621

Boris
Hermannplatz

Bani
Schudomast. 26

Hostel / Die Tabak.
Berlin Berlin Kreuzburg.
Schlesische Straße
18. 10997 Berlin

Grüne wald Straße
Berlin Julius Leber
Brücke.
Nahin Lutherstraße
Hauptstr.
Inn
near
Schönberg
541, 542, 545 Treppener
→ Bundesplatz, (Innbrücke)

1 May 2011 - 1 May 2015.

Intervention / performance / video / Interviews /
Presentations / discussion

This site
need to be
discuss
carpets on the
ground

with curators,
artists, ministry
of culture (Pakistan
National Council
of Arts.)

Organize /
Presentations
in different
galleries etc.

On Site on
1 May 2015
invite curators
artist / culture
ministry people
and locals.

Hegel → Only stone is innocent → Hitler - Bunker

Producting of Text / Kant

Boris Budem - Text (Formal-Radical
Philosophy)
The Children of Post Communism -
(Films)
Rossini (Italian film).
Year Zero (U-tube)

Thomas - demand
(Artist) Kitchen
Renaissance.
Thomas Bernhard
Wei Lili
A day to Remember.

Gerard Usama Bin Laden - Geromismo.

Julian Bonder. (Argentina).

Sony HDR-AS10V
 Action Cam
 Go Pro Hero 4 Silver
 Sony Action Cam mini
 Go Pro Hero Black
 Farah's book.
 Ticket print out
 Cleaning.
 Room add
 notes + laptop +
 Camera + chargers.
 Call insurance company.
 Step-
 Go to insurance office
 to submit summer unit.
 Transfer money to
 Santi.

TURKISH AIRLINES | WIDEN YOUR WORLD | English | Other

ONLINE SERVICES | TRAVEL INFORMATION | TRAVEL EXPERIENCE | CORPORATE CLUB | MILES&MILES | CORPORATE

Sofort Überweisung

Reservation Code **SYMBKC** Transaction Date: 10.04.2015 13:40

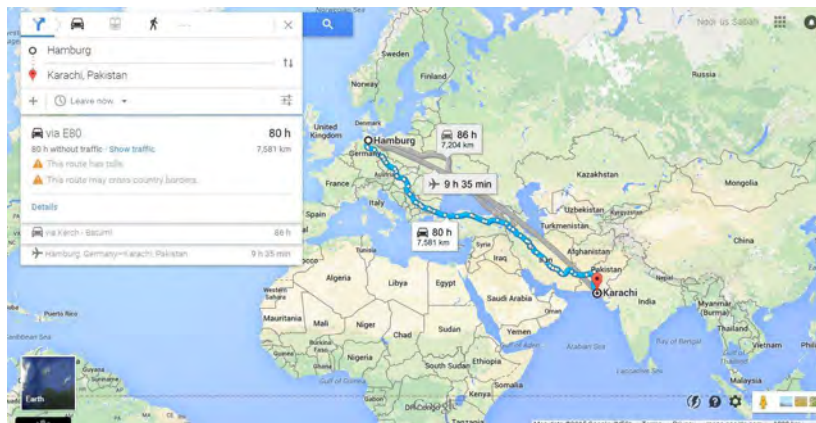
Dear **NOOR US SABAH SAEED**

Thank you for choosing Turkish Airlines.

Your payment has been completed successfully. Your electronic ticket has been issued.

Flight Details

Outbound: Hamburg-Karachi		Inbound: Karachi-Hamburg	
TK1666	Hamburg-Istanbul	TK0709	Karachi-Istanbul
Airline/Aircraft	Turkish Airlines Airbus A320	Airline/Aircraft	Turkish Airlines Airbus A330-200
Outbound	Fuhlsbüttel Airport 15:15 / 21 Apr 2015 / Tue	Outbound	Civil Jinnah Airport 05:30 / 27 May 2015 / Wed
Arrival	Ataturk Airport 19:20 / 21 Apr 2015 / Tue	Arrival	Ataturk Airport 09:30 / 27 May 2015 Wed
Cabin/Fare/Class	Economy / Flexible / L	Cabin/Fare/Class	Economy / Flexible / L
TK0708	Istanbul-Karachi	TK1665	Istanbul-Hamburg



From top to bottom: notes before traveling, plane tickets, map showing location of distance between Hamburg and Karachi.

Call abbottabad hostel.
 0321 9836353
 Silk view, hostel.
 check video from my.
 Camera and University
 Camera.
 Camera-
 Sony- Bx333
 Bx 232
 440.
 Sony action camera -
 HDRAZI -
 Sony- HDR CX220
 Replay XD Prime X.
 021-34121989 Nargis
 031-52223332

Conversation started April 28

Noor Saeed

4/28, 7:03am

hi, is there any update, or is there any possibility that I can meet him there and talk directly? and what about the team there? i also emailed DG ISPR, but there is very rare chances that they'll reply I did for my last project also but there was no response.

Noor us Sabah Saeed <noor.s.saeed@gmail.com>

Apr 28

to adprb

Brigadier Attique ur Rehman,
Director Public Relations ISPR,

Dear Attique ur Rehman,

Hope this finds you really well.

I am a visual artist, studying in the Public Art and New Artistic Strategies MFA program at the Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany. My subject is majorly dealing with the event/memory sites, commemoration and monuments in public space.

For my thesis project, I am dealing with Bin Laden site as an event (memory) site, and I understand that this is a sensitive issue. However, for my research work I would like to visit the place for firsthand experience, and I wanted to document (video/photograph) the space itself. I do realize that you can have concerns about it considering the sensitiveness of the subject matter, so you should know that my work does not at all deal with the event itself but the treatment of the site. In my earlier project, which was part of the MFA exchange program, I produced a video work in Bosnia, dealing with my personal memory through TV serial Alfa Bravo Charlie (produced by ISPR) and I also document the monument in Tuzla city for the Pakistani Army.

In this regard, it would be a great help if you could connect me to someone in your organization who would support me in conducting my research. Also, I would really appreciate if you could get back to me as soon as possible as I am here only for a very short period of time, and my Artistic research progress depends on your response. Any help would be much appreciated!

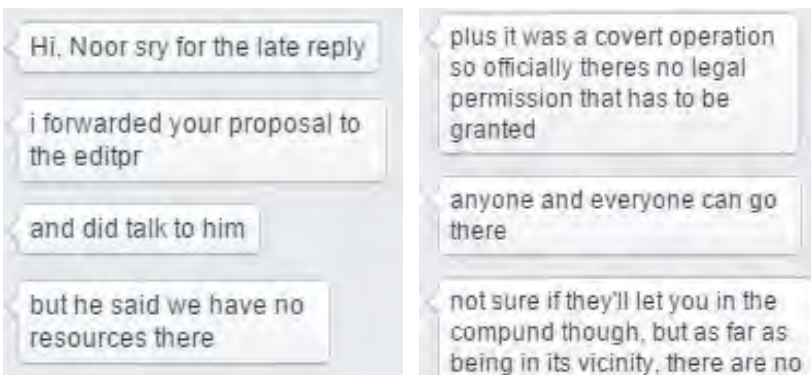
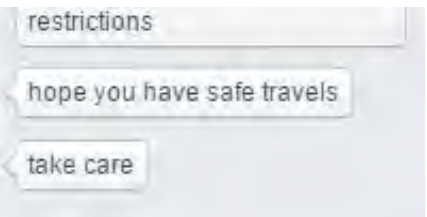
If you need further details related to my work, please feel free to reach out to me.

Warm Regards,

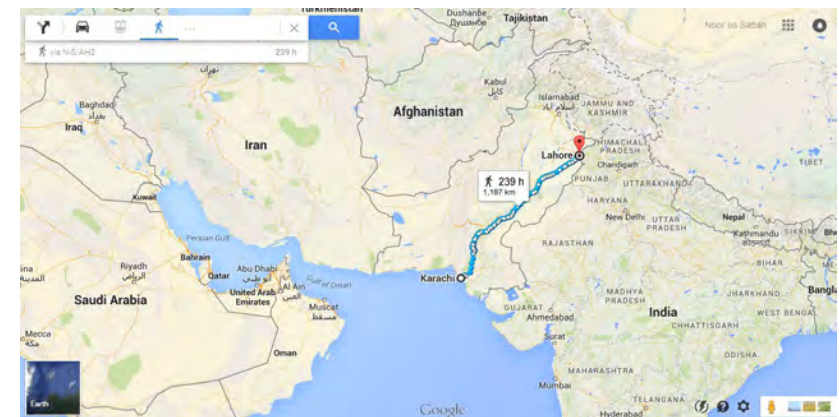
Noor us Sabah Saeed

Candidate, MFA-Program „Public Art and New Artistic Strategies“

Bauhaus-Universität Weimar
Fakultät Gestaltung
Master of Fine Arts
Geschw.-Scholl-Str. 7
99421 Weimar



From top to bottom: notes before traveling, plane tickets, map showing location of distance between Hamburg and Karachi.



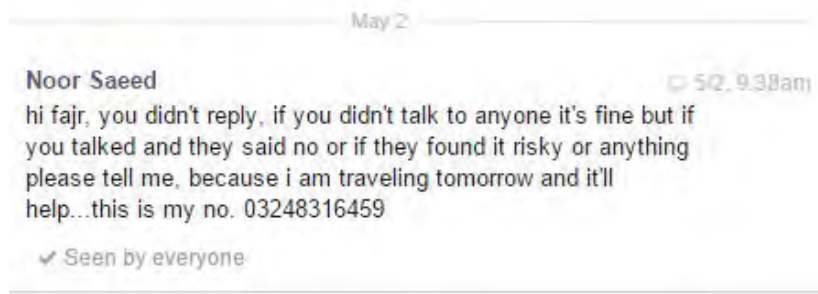
Map showing the travel distance from Karachi to Lahore



Taken on the train from Karachi to Lahore



Taken by the Niazi Express bus hostess



Recording :

Honorable ladies and gentlemen: assalam-o-aliakum. We welcome you on behalf of Niazi Express. We started our journey in Lahore and will travel by motorway to Haripur, Abbottabad and Manshehra. Our journey, InshAllah (with God's will), will be seven and half hours. We request for your safety that you fasten your seat belts. According to Pakistani law, smoking is not allowed on board the bus. If you feel nauseous, you can ask for sick bags. We are hoping for a comfortable and pleasant journey.

Journey to Another Ground Zero, Video 04:38 min



Map showing a location and distance from Lahore to Abbottabad.



Waiting for the Playground

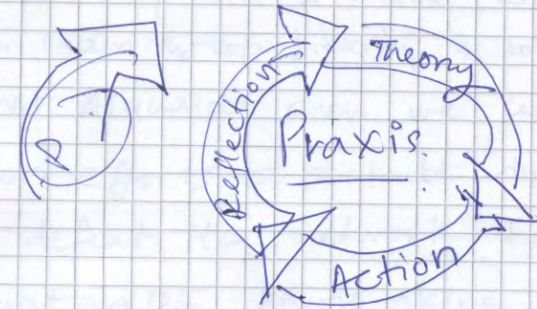
The video is an extraction from a still shot of Bin Laden site, I recorded on May 5, 2015, the original length of still shot is 22 46min.



The demolished Osama bin Laden compound, Tuesday May 05 2015

Developing a strategy requires:

- analysing the problem;
- identify your goal (for
- understanding your target -
- identify ~~your~~ specific forms of power you have over your target and how to concentrate that power to maximal effect.



actions

are measurable outcomes.

strategizing:

what was the ~~for~~ purpose of travel,
purpose of travel, ~~to~~ how my research got
benefited with ~~my~~ ~~of~~ travel.

How it benefited the work,
what statement it is making,

Conclusion

“This is an empty plot, why take the risk of going there?”, ‘You want to visit the site? There is nothing there anymore, they have demolished the compound’, ‘I was in Abbottabad to photograph its touristic sites. Yes, people see you as an outsider but they are welcoming. When I asked my local host about the Bin Laden site, he said it was on the other side of the city, and he hadn’t been there.’ ‘They demolished it, we never have never been there, and no one goes there without a reason’. ‘Why are you going that far and taking a risk? Just find an empty plot here (in Karachi) and film that instead!’ ‘Aunty this is an empty plot’ (said to me by children while I was filming at the Bin Laden site). The question that was constantly surfacing in my mind was, ‘am I the only one who thinks that this is not just an empty plot?’ By asking this question, I was trying to rationalize my whole process of work. Why was I interested in visiting an empty plot? If it was nothing more than an empty plot, then there shouldn’t have been any risk. Earlier in my work I discussed the use of emptiness and absence by artists as a strategy, especially when dealing with negative past events and memorials for victims, either in the case of war or of acts of terrorism, to provide an experience which allows for more effective remembrance. In the case of the Bin Laden site, where authorities considered the physical presence of the Bin Laden compound to be threat- an object which held the power to attract unwanted visitors- attempts were made resolve the problem by demolishing the compound. However, my decision to visit the site and film it put people into an uncomfortable situation; they didn’t understand why someone would be interested in visiting the empty site, and most of the time they assumed I wasn’t aware that the authorities had demolished the compound. According to a newspaper article,³⁸ the site will soon be transformed into a playground, published recently on 4th anniversary of Bin Laden incident on May 2, 2015. Why are authorities now intending on replacing the emptiness with another object? After going through the whole process of research, talking, traveling and visiting the site, my reflection is that the threat created by this emptiness is even greater than the physical presence of the compound and they wanted to fill the void with another object. Slavoj Žižek explains this phenomenon with help of Lacan’s concept of void, taking an example of cinematic experience of void through the first scene of the film Star Wars and explaining how a real object gives us relief from the horror of vacuum or void, ‘vacui’,

“The object-Thing is thus clearly rendered as a part of ourselves that we eject into reality... This intrusion of the massive Thing seems to bring relief, canceling the horror vacui of staring at the infinite void of the universe - however, what if its actual effect is the exact opposite? What if the true horror is that of Something - the intrusion

(The comments I mentioned are from my family and other people I met or asked for help during my project)

38.The Express Tribune, ‘Four years on: ‘Bin Laden hideout will likely be turned into playground’, 02 May 2015.

of some excessive massive Real - where we expect Nothing? This experience of "Something (the stain of the Real) instead of Nothing" is perhaps at the root of the metaphysical question "Why is there something instead of nothing?"³⁹

Why there is something instead of nothing? Or in this case why there is something when there is nothing?

My whole process of work was more about opening more questions related to this subject. Should I be asking questions about something which is an issue of great national interest, but which at the same time also belongs to my individual identity? Who is supposed to make decisions about sites which affect our national history, along with international history? How can empty sites be optimized for more effective remembrance? Is covering trauma with entertainment the right way of dealing with issues pertaining to traumatic events?

'Current literature makes a distinction between "monuments", built to commemorate victories, and "memorials," dedicated to grief and loss'.⁴⁰

According to the different surveys and reports, almost 50,000 Pakistanis have lost their lives during the war on terror, including army and police personnel and civilians, along with a similar number of people injured and large communities displaced from their homes because of military operations. Incidents such as LAL Masjid, the Army Public School massacre in Peshawar and suicide bombings in mosques and other religious places left a lot of places as sites containing negative memories. When interviewing people, I was not expecting it but a few said to me, 'yes, we should work on these issues- you should also take the Army Public School and LaL Masjid as sites of negative memory, document them too'. Considering the memorial debates for Ground Zero and its link with the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, I am also curious as to why there is no debate surrounding memorials for the loss of civilian lives and grief about the effects of these wars on their survivors and living conditions in these countries.

39.Slavoj Zizek, The Thing from Inner Space, September 1999. <http://www.lacan.com/zizekthing.htm>

40.Susana Torre, "Constructing Memorials," in Experiments with Truth - Documenta11_Platform2, eds., Okwui Enwezor et al. (Kassel: documenta and Museum Fridericianum, and Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz 2002), pp.343-360.

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Acknowledgements:

I would like to thanks my advisors Prof. Danica Dakic, Dr. phil. Boris Buden and Dr.des Bojana Pejic.

Special thanks to my father, Muhammad Saeed, my sister Sofia Saeed, Muhammad Anas Ahsan Mallick and Dr Eraj Khan for their generous support. My family and friends in Lahore, Karachi, and Weimar, especially Adnan Asim, Oliver Friedrich Engel, Jirka Reichmann, MFA colleagues and all the people who gave me their inputs and advices.



