

Imagining Spatial Geographies: Architecture of poetic terrains in the artificial islands of Bahrain

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Abstract

Spatial geographies are both real and imagined. Architecture as a transformation of a site emerges from the real and simultaneously suppresses its reality. It imposes imaginations upon the real and fuses with its geographical existence to construct images to incite re-imaginings and augmented imaginations. The geography of the site is thus the archetypal contour of such imaginations. But how does architecture imagine spatial geographies in a site that is fluid in which to anchor spaces and places for habitation.

In Bahrain and generally in the Arabian Gulf, architects have recently been challenged to imagine poetic terrains in water in the creation of artificial islands for human habitation and dwelling. While some islands are often geometrically and metaphorically shaped and remain dislodged from the contours of the seas to imaginations of their own, some remain curiously connected to the sites yet unimaginable as an emergence of the site.

This paper examines the sources of geographical forms of the artificial islands of Bahrain and how they connect or disconnect to the geographies of the sea or the adjoining lands. By taking three case studies, it divulges the conceptualisations and imaginations of the spatial geographies of these islands and maps out their architecture. Although sometimes in the absence of differentiated spatial geographies on the surface, the seas struggle to produce forms and shapes on their own, distinct and decisive forces remain underneath that determine the configurations of the Islands. The paper discusses the links between the sites in water, the imagined geographies, and the architecture of the artificial islands of Bahrain. In so doing, it will *also delve into the nuances of culture and geography as manifested in place.*

Keywords: *Artificial islands, Bahrain, Spatial geographies, Gulf, Reclamation*

Introduction: Architecture and Spatial Geography

Although inherently manifests, the relationships between architecture and geography remain theoretically unarticulated. Production of architecture is an articulation of a spatial geography for habitation and making of a lived world. Tuan pronounces this eloquently when he says that ‘people inhabit places’, ‘geographers study places’ and architects ‘create places’¹.

Geographies of sites manifest into territories through external interventions that bring powers to act; human and otherwise. In the traditional societies and cultures, natural geographical spaces acquired divine states of existence through the powers so manifested. In articulating how the geography of mountains influence the people for example, Burnaum writes that ‘the power of such a mountain is so great and yet so subtle that, without compulsion, people are drawn to it from near and far, as if by the force of some invisible magnet’ⁱⁱ. Often geographical locations are powers unto themselves and attain states of being as sacred sites which then reside as existential footholds for identity and sense of belonging. Navajos of the American Southwest for example attribute supernatural powers to various mountains, buttes, springs, and other distinctive geographic featuresⁱⁱⁱ. As Rapoport shows, Australian aborigines throughout their ancient history had derived their sense of identity from the geographical landscapes^{iv}. In fact, these associations still continue in different forms in the modern world. For example, Prorok (2003) shows how migrants transplant sacred sites and their geographies in new lands as a means of ‘anchoring individual existential quests to fleeting ships of collective selfhood’^v. Architecture as an emergence from sites thus inherently anchors itself in geography and generates geographical experiences. Often however, architectural geography is reduced to mere representation. If context is a powerful force upon which the architectural forms gain their manifestations, then architects would better acquire the mastery of their art if they can recognize the architectural geographies of the milieus in which they act.

Lees Loretta argues that ‘architectural geography should be about more than just representation’ and that ‘geographers have had relatively little to say about the practical and affective or ‘nonrepresentational’ import of architecture’^{vi}. She suggests that a ‘more critical and politically progressive geography of architecture’ should be constructed and challenges the geographers to ‘go beyond contemplative framing of architectural forms towards a more active and embodied engagement with the lived building’. Although Loretta focuses on the building, this should indeed be extended further, to the sites and perhaps more. Indeed, the geography of architecture must not be confined to the built-forms; rather encompass both the material and non-material existences that give rise to that form—in the words of Rapoport, culture, materials, climate, and technology^{vii}.

John Habraken in his seminal book, ‘Transformations of the Site’ makes lucid observations of the connections between sites—geographies—and architecture^{viii}. He writes that between the images of what ought to be there and the actual presence of the objects imagined, there is the perilous journey where we seek to obtain right form. He argues that the objects and spaces imagined rise from the powers that reside in the site. In other words, the imagined spatial geographies are an outcome of powers, one of which, according to him, is a ‘live configuration’.

Architectural geography is indeed closely tied with the configurations, both horizontal and vertical. The sites manifest in both these directions upon which architecture is mounted. Configurations define the insides and outsides through the lines of configurations; often recognized as the edges and boundaries that in turn define the territorialities of space. Architectural geography is thus not the innocent presence of configurations in the sites and buildings. It is the powers invested in those configurations and the powers that control them that are manipulated and articulated by architecture.

Habraken writes that ‘Control of space is the control of boundaries. There are gates that can only be entered by consent of the power inside... territorial power can keep things out and determine what goes in...the landlord may not allow his borders to bring dogs into the house; he controls a territory’^{ix}. Architectural geography must then devise and offer means of understanding the powers in sites and how manipulation of its configurations transform those powers, upon which the inhabitants overlay their own powers of being and becoming through

everyday lives. The powers however are not only those brought into boundaries by people to transform them into territories. They may reside in the shapes, forms, contours, scales, and proportions as well as the geo-body and its multifaceted manifestations.

Architects have in the past had mild and sensitive techniques and ways of applying power and transforming sites and their geographies. However, as Meiss writes, ‘methods of transforming the topography have become monstrous’^x. Meiss argues that the contemporary architectural practices are bent on ‘disfigurement’, which comes from a lack of understanding of the relevance and meaning of the architectural geographies. In fact, he suggests that in order to achieve meaning in the re-configurations, ‘...we must change the tools at our disposal; maps, aerial photos, and topographic models are only props; they do not show values, nor the objective weight of the elements in the sites’^{xi}. To create architecture; that is to create poetic spatial geographies, the underlying values of the sites in as much as the values of the people inhabiting them have to be more fully understood.

Land Reclamations and the Creation of Poetic Terrains.

Bahrain, a conglomeration of small islands in the Arabian Gulf has for some time, been reconfiguring its land mass in pursuit of modern developments. Bahrain as a nation is defined by its relationship with water. Its name means ‘two seas’ in Arabic, reminiscing on the historical presence of springs of sweet water in the sea^{xii}. In fact, it suggests that the focus of the country is not on the island’s landmass, but the water that laps its shores. As history shows^{xiii}, the shallow water lapping Bahrain’s coastline has always prompted inhabitants regularly to ‘reclaim’ pieces of land, filling in the gaps between sand bars as if there was land in the water. Reclamation is seen as a ‘winning back of lost territory’ implying that the sea has been their country proper as defined by the name itself.

The sweet-water springs and the date palm trees together with the sea have underpinned its 4000 years of settlement, the layers of which are exposed in rich archaeological sites in the form of burial mounds that have been scattered around the island. The island is said to have had a reputation for ‘eternal life’ that attracted people from afar, whose burial mounds had invested its lands with a man-made undulating topography that no other country can claim to possess. Indeed, the burial mounds ripple much like the water in the seas as if the geography of the land has also been generated from water. The springs and the sea had also ensured the growth of most lustrous of pearls Bahrain had been well known for—the trade which has helped build the island’s early status of wealth before oil as one of the richest in the world^{xiv} and have been one of the most often employed sources of architectural form.

Land reclamations and extending its geographical boundaries have been happening throughout its history but has acquired an unprecedented scale immediately after the discovery of oil in the 1940s. Although its initial programs have been predominantly aimed at simply extending the land mass, the more recent reclamations have deeper objectives; to also create attractive land parcels which offer greater opportunities for interactions with the sea. In other words, it seeks to create poetic terrains charged by the charms of the quiet sea fronts, alienate them from others to derive greater privacy required by Arabic cultural practices and produce habitable places for affluent life styles indulging in consumption at will. Its northern boundary has hence been extended many a times; moving the old pier and the Souq inland and locating its identity symbols of the past in the midst of unknown lands and alien structures. Bab-Al Bahrain, its most revered identity symbol of architecture for example had once abutted the seas but is now sandwiched between the Sheraton car park and the old souq yearning to earn its due place as a public space.

Ansari classifies land reclamations that had transformed the urban geography of the Island into three; incremental, large scale and island^{xv}. The historic small incremental reclamations altered little of the geography of the land. However, the large scale reclamations re-configured the island distinctly and simultaneously extended its boundary. In fact, the most recent wave of reclamations in the shapes of 'islands' has produced intriguing geographical forms by themselves upon which fascinating structures have been erected. The new Bahrain Financial Harbour for instance rising from such reclaimed land appear to be holding back the sea. A plethora of new islands have added to the already existing conglomeration of 33 islands and have reconfigured and redefined Bahrain's perception of itself^{xvi}.

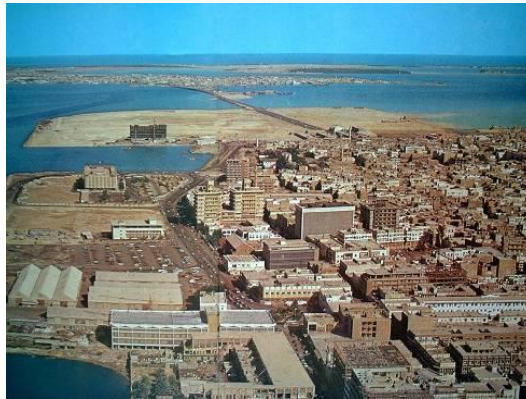


Fig. 1: Large-scale reclamations of north of Manama to construct the Diplomatic Area in the 1970s, Source: (Gerard, 1973)

Unlike the previous reclamations prompted by the needs for extra space for expansions emanating from the natural growth, the recent 'island reclamations' are based on conjectured needs and imagined growth buttressed by the technological prowess and economic powers. To be more precise, they are a product of the fascinations of the elites of the contemporary society; to live on the edges of the island away from its traditional core, to belong to and not belong to Bahrain simultaneously, and to construct thrilling and glamorous lifestyles. In other words, some of the newly reclaimed islands are aimed at creating worlds unto themselves.

Undeniably, land reclamations and building islands have become the trend in the Gulf. Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha and Muscat all have grand projects to claim land from the sea, which others want to imitate. However, only Bahrain can claim a truly integral and deep connection between the land and the sea^{xvii} and having a legitimate right to yearn for a reconnection. At the Venice Biennale 2010, Bahrain showcased to the world this deep connection and the identity defining vernacular of the island that exists on its shores in the form of fishing huts. Titled 'reclaim', the entry won away the Golden Lion prize for the charms offered by the rudimentary huts and the attention drawn to the dwindling shores available to the public as a result of the reclamations and reconfigurations, and the loss of connection between the people and the sea as manifested through the geographical transformations. Despite having been an island, and having relied on the geography of the shore, it now laments that none of that connection is left for the present and future inhabitants. Sh. Mai Bint Mohammed Al Khalifa bemoans,

"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...where is the sea to be found today? And where are the coasts that still live in our memories but have physically vanished from our maps, replaced by the urban sprawl that has robbed us of our cherished sea"^{xviii}.

Reclamations and the transformation of the land configuration and its spatial geography through the new wave of island-making however have been devastating. Despite the intention to create poetic terrains defined by undulating land forms, geometrically articulated edges and boundaries and definitions of nodes, landmarks, vistas and seascapes above the ground, the underlying seabed has been traumatised behind the eyes of the public. As Friend says,

“In Bahrain, the “ecologically diverse seabed, [and] the shallow waters have been systematically infilled and destroyed by offshore steel dredgers continuously scavenging sand for landfill and reclamation. The impact has been enormous, once clear waters and abundant seabed are turned into muddy underwater wastelands covered by kilometre-long dredging silt plumes. The resultant land reclamation has broken the Bahrainis connection with the sea and in some cases pushed the coastline several kilometers further out”^{xix}.

In the eyes of the developers and the general public however, this geographical devastation of the sea bed is worthy of the island mounted atop. In fact, the transformation of the sea into a land of fauna and flora is seen as bringing the geographical beauty of the seabed onto the surface^{xx}. Indeed, the fascinations generated by the island’s geographical formations have caught popular imaginations and have prompted joyful acceptance. Unlike the shapeless reclamations of the past, the islands are distinctly formed, instigating visual delights on aerial views and maps, thus creating a sense of exhilaration on being able to construct man-made geographies of cheerful shapes in proportions and compositions that had not been hitherto imagined anywhere in the world, except in the Gulf. As is often claimed, the new wave of reclaimed geographies is conceived to create ‘world-class urban living to meet the beauty and tranquility of an island’^{xxi}.

Artificial islands

A number of such islands have been reclaimed from the sea over the past decade in Bahrain among which the Amwaj Islands, Durat Al Bahrain and the Diyar Al Muharraq stand out as the most notable for their distinct spatial formations. Amwaj Islands was the first such in Bahrain and set the new trend of geographical formations derived from meanings over and above the geology and oceanography that often underlay the land reclamations in the past. Their architecture has risen derived from the geography of the islands which themselves have been derived from the geography of the sea, the needs of the people and the imaginations buttressed by the cherished meanings of the Bahrainis.

Amwaj Island

The Amwaj Islands situated on the north eastern end of Muharraq between the Arabian Gulf and the Bahrain Sea explicitly constructs a series of interconnected islands that in turn is bridged across to the main island. In Arabic, Amwaj means waves and in conceptualizing the semantics, an immediate metaphorical connection with the sea has been struck. Its present forms and shapes however have little to do with sea waves. In fact, its configuration has been guided more by the technological workings of the laying out of geotubes underneath and the nuances of achieving greater frontages for the habitable parcels of land^{xxii}.



Fig. 2: Reclaimed islands: The Amwaj Islands
Source: Gulf House Engineering

One of the key elements of the design and construction of the Island has been the use of sand filled geo-tubes to form its perimeter for the containment of 12 million cubic meters of dredged sand. The basic platform has thus been geometrically rectangular. The perimeter has been made with hydraulically filled geo-tubes dredging sand from proposed navigation channels and marinas serving residents and businesses on the main island. Moreover, the Amwaj Island perimeter stretches to create as many beach front properties as possible for hotels, restaurants, recreation parks, theatres, and marinas. The edges of the islands are desperate for sea fronts while the interiors demand geographical formations of undulating lands for a golf course. Its wavy plan configurations provide for these aspirations underlying the economics of the developments and the desires of the people.

A collection of parcelled land plots, each lot in the Amwaj Islands has been purposely mapped out to provide a view of the sea and the lagoons with easy access to the artificially constructed sand beaches. The smaller lots gain just the common beach or the sea-view but those for the more affluent are able to claim a private beach or even a private marina. Constructed with 3 to 4 bedroom villas often in two stories, a roof area and garden and garage, the larger lots even accommodate swimming pools and sprawling gardens. The manager of reclamations writes,

"The lagoon shape would offer an inspiring vista, with long, sweeping sight lines. Many other factors then came into play, which moulded the final shape - including the existing seabed depths (bathymetry), the prevailing wind and wave direction, environmental issues, water quality criteria, the locations of existing boat channels, and so forth"^{xxiii}.

It is claimed that 'the final shape [of the island] is a response to many influencing factors and has also addressed the need to optimise the number of waterfront plots to meet a clear demand for such properties'^{xxiv}. A distinct architecture dubbed 'aesthetic-Arabian style' with modern day convenience and privacy have transformed the landmass into an adobe of luxurious spaces and places for human habitation that had hitherto not existed on the main island. These spatial geographies are super-imposed with apartments and condominiums of high rise flats expected to lure more modern families both from Bahrain and outside. The poetry of the geography of Amwaj Island is simultaneously complex and clear; it creates a series of land masses that maximise the sea frontages by means of constructing elongated, curved strips of lands sandwiching narrow strips of the sea. Upon this land mass are constructed idyllic, modern villas to bring the historical lifestyles of living next to water.

Diyar Al Muharraq:

Diyar Al Muharraq is a similar island city reclaimed from the sea offering housing for urban living for a community across all strata of society. Located on the northern shores of Muharraq, it differs to produce a cohesive mix of residential and commercial properties with housing opportunities for over 120,000 people in around 30,000 housing units^{xxv}. Indeed, a city unto itself, Diyar Al Muharraq provides the cues for the complex geographic imaginations emerging in island-making in Bahrain.



Fig. 3: Diyar Al Muharraq Island,
Source: Gulf Housing Engineering, Bahrain.

Previously known as the ‘Two Seas project’ deriving its name from the very meaning of Bahrain, the first configuration of the island had taken the shape of a seahorse. However, its land-use opportunities had been deemed too limited in such a configuration and hence have given way to a design of a main island with five smaller islands, forming a long rectangular shape. Its boundaries cover an area of 12 square kilometers measuring 4 km by 3 km of a rectangular reclaimed under-sea plot, upon which the complex collection of islands had been formed.

By being the first development with a dedicated focus on providing a variety of housing options, Diyar Al Muharraq has opened up new and exciting real estate ownership opportunities across all groups of society. It creates around 40 kilometers of waterfront, together with sandy beaches—among the most extensive publicly accessible waterfront in the Kingdom—as well as all the elements one expects from a vibrant community, including schools, medical centers, parklands, sports facilities, a shopping mall, banks, a business district, hotels, local services and modern infrastructure.

Again, one of the main attractions of Diyar Al Muharraq is its waterfront that stretches 40 kilo meters seeking to create walkways, sea-facing parks, sandy beaches and a marina. The waterfront is to be transformed into a promenade with cafes and restaurants for residents and visitors to imagine a contrasting land to sea connection that had not existed even in the nostalgic past of the island. The developers produce a vivid image of a fantasy island when they write,

“An extensive shopping mall will offer a variety of retail outlets, including an anchor food store. In addition, there will be a network of smaller community-based shopping zones, including some in the plaza style, where shops open onto the street. Large scale car parking allows ease and speed of access to convenience and service outlets such as bakeries, grocers, hairdressers and pharmacies. A series of small community shopping centres will serve as a focal point for Diyar Al Muharraq’s local communities as a place to meet friends and neighbours as they shop”^{xxvi}.

In fact, these ideas have been greatly celebrated in Bahrain as a means by which the lost connection to the seas can be re-invigorated. 'Life is going to be a beach in Bahrain' wrote the Gulf Weekly^{xxvii} making an indirect reference to the close relationship that had existed in the island between the geographical characteristics and the life styles and the desire to create a modern more profound one. Mr Hejres, the CEO of Diyar Al Muharraq claims,

"Diyar Al Muharraq will set a benchmark for how new communities should be developed and how they should look. Our aim is to ensure that the city will fulfil its promise to offer a new way of living, one which is ahead of its time and unlike any other Bahrain has seen until now^{xxviii}."

Durrat Al Bahrain

Durrat Al Bahrain, also called the 'Rising Pearl' or 'Pearl of Bahrain' is a residential, leisure and tourist resort and comprises a series of man-made islands covering an area of 20 million square meters, constructed upon six atolls (Coral lagoon islands); five in the shape of fish-shaped islands and six in the shape of petals affronting a crescent-shaped one. Durrat in Arabic means pearls and the semantics immediately make a connection with the historical past of the pearl trade, Bahrain has been well-known for. Indeed, the 'pearl necklace' as it is dubbed, has added a node on the south edge of the main island, creating a distinct configurational extension to its geo-body.



Fig. 4: Durrat Al Bahrain islands

Source: http://www.durratbahrain.com/page/Durrat_Al_Bahrain

Durrat Al Bahrain Island's conceptualization as an arc can be seen to come from the Arabic temptation to derive forms from internal geometries. The crescent is intrinsic to Islamic culture and rises often as a form giver in architecture and planning. Undeniably, its configuration also offers opportunities to create a vast community of villas with boat and beach facilities on extended frontages. Each atoll has a long beach-fronted land, while there is a separate private ladies beach island, accessible by bridges from the petal islands. The five petal islands also form an arc lined up with villas. The islands are connected along a circular bridge that connects to the crescent island making them the key link between the atolls and the crescent island. Together, they accommodate five-star hotels, a 18-hole golf course, 12 bridges and a marina; all orchestrated in tune with each other to fit into the pre-determined configuration to be seen from the distance.

One crescent island located at the heart of Durrat Al Bahrain, facing the central lagoon contains a series of beaches along a 2 kilometers distance comprised of cafes, restaurants, a shopping mall, shops, markets, beach centers, and a ferry terminal; all ingredients of super luxury living in international style. The conference and exhibition center

caters to the business community, while the 2,000 apartments, school, mosque, healthcare facilities, police and fire stations provide for the residential community. A hotel in a high rise with vistas across the sea has been positioned at the center with 300-600 rooms and suites, also having an aqua park, mega soft play zones, a nursery, water sports center and spa, a tennis and fitness club, and family restaurants.

Durrat Al Bahrain's 18-hole golf course is perhaps the ultimate of the imagination of poetic geographies in a desert land. Covering an area between 5 to 6 thousand square meters, the undulating golf course is surrounded by 258 villas and a 300-room five star hotel. Constantly fed with water to retain the lush green landscape to transform its geography, the golf course epitomizes the power of wealth and the determination of the elites that underpins the transformation of the sea bed into a land and then into a fantasy island. The island's marinas set in the man-made lagoons construct the image of the affluence accentuated by the constantly floating super luxury boats and their sails.

As the developers of Durrat Al Bahrain as a unique island of imaginations emerging in Bahrain's recent past claim,

“It's an island and a city, it's the desert and the sea, it's a holiday and a home, it's a place to be together, it's escapism and adventure. It's one world that offers you endless possibilities. It is a place like no other”^{xxix}

Conclusions

Geographical forms of the artificial islands of Bahrain simultaneously connect to and disconnect from its main island mass. Unlike the two previous layers, the present reclamation is a conscious formation of islands to create forms and formations of the greater Bahrain. The sea has been not only the geographical underlay of the islands, but also one of the sources of its forms. On the one hand, distinct and decisive forces have arisen from the sea beds underneath through the geo-tubes laid to differentiate and carve out the navigation channels to inform the islands' forms. On the other, sea itself has metaphorically lent inspirations, either through its characteristics; the waves, or through its products; the pearls that have determined the configurations of the Islands. The links between the sites in water, the imagined geographies, and the architecture of the artificial islands are all immersed in the history and culture of the island and aim to derive a renewed connection with the cherished past.

The irrevocable association between geography and culture are all but clear. As has been the basis of the Venice Biennale submission, the ‘geographical retracing of national boundaries has been accompanied by a more profound social transformation and a decline in sea culture in favour of more generic life stylesxxx’. Nevertheless, the intentions of some transformations have been to generate natural geographies (as opposed to overly geometric or iconic), to produce an archipelago of islands, internal lagoons and sea fronts with inspiring vistas and long sweeping sight lines. Existing seabed depths (bathymetry), the prevailing wind and wave direction, environmental issues, water quality criteria, the locations of existing boat channels and the very reclamation technologies have collectively buttressed the imaginations that have yielded both the configurations and undulations of the new lands.

Indeed a number of significant themes of the relations between geography and architecture emerge from the practices of island-making in Bahrain; geography as imagination, geography as an escape, geography as a mechanism for selective attachment and geography as re-rooting and re-anchoring. Geography as imagination plays out in full force in the very act of island making. To construct a land in the water itself is an act of imagination—a bold, daring and courageous one. At a more modest level, imagination is constantly at work,

enchancing and re-enchancing the imagined geography, and in the conversion of land into land-scape. A landscape in the end however is frivolous without moral weight which only imagination of spaces and places invested in the landscape through mapping the points of anchors, movements, and habitations have accomplished.

Such imaginations singularly and collectively are productions also of avenues for escape from the harsh realities of the real world. Bahrain is desert and its arid lands are becoming harsher with the ever increasing urban built-masses and intruding populations from across the world. Its cultural fabric underplays individualism for the greater good of the community and for the celebration of spiritual existence. Yet, the modern man is impatient—having been empowered to indulge in consumption of the luxuries at will—to enhance individuality and to occupy a corner of the earth for oneself surrounded by the things that enchant. The present land mass is no place and its geography is inadequate for such indulgence because that is infested with the virtues of tradition, religion and collective histories. The islands so imagined are the adobes for escape. There, the world is created anew with neither a layer of history, nor of culture. In the reclaimed island geography, new values can be cultivated and orchestrated spatial fabrics can be enmeshed. As Tuan puts it, ‘imagination can lead us into fantasy, the unreal and the grotesque... it is good to escape from raw and threatening Nature into the refinements of culture’^{xxxi}. Indeed living in the sparkling artificial worlds being created can feel curiously lightweight and unreal.

In so doing, and in being in an adjoining island, the inhabitants also engage in ‘selective attachment’ to the Nation the main island of Bahrain represents. The new island’s geographies are surreal fantasy adobes, with quiet water fronts for each villa, and with stunning vistas. In the outdoors, a sterilized landscape awaits with pristine land formations, pavings, landscaped gardens and delightful buildings. The entire ambience is that of another world; almost a western suburb, yet not exactly. The language of architecture of a refined Arabic style with burrowed Islamic geographies and elements of traditional buildings endow the islands with a sense of being in the Gulf region, a sense of affluence and a sense of quintessentially Arabic existence. Nevertheless, one is simultaneously transferred in to a space away from the everyday spaces of the Arab world with the clutter, the noise and the smells to a sanitized and purified imaginary world in which one may choose to anchor nonchalantly and light.

Despite all of these, the islands are also a re-invented mode of existence that calls for a re-rooting and re-anchoring. Of the core relationships that have been resurrected, the land to sea relationship has been at the heart of the Bahraini identity. Signified in the fishing huts and the rekindled memories of the elders, now to be the conceptual thrust of the new development of Bab Al Bahrain, the island reclamations re-enact the relationship permanently and irrevocably for all inhabitants and not just for the fishing community. Indeed, it is an inescapable relationship unlike for the fisherman, albeit in a new form. The residents of the islands partake in the visual of the sea from their living and dining rooms, and sometimes even from the toilets, although for the fisherman, this was an ephemeral yet immersing relationship rather than an ever-lasting visual one. Moreover, being in an island is the very essence of the existence in Bahrain. By reproducing the ‘islandness’ as collections of islands in every reclamation act, the intrinsic geography of Bahrain is being repeatedly reproduced for every inhabitant to become an islander: a true Bahraini—a man of the two seas.

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