

REDEFINING CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

Culture and identity are the interwoven aspects that altogether helps to create integrity and uniqueness in the community and architecture. In this era of globalization, there is an urgent need for the establishment of a skyline that is a representation of one's unique culture and thereby forms their identity. This relation can help to form an architecture that represents one's cultural identity.

The paper uses a qualitative approach to obtain that various parameters of architecture can be together used for maintaining the cultural identity of a place, region or a community that would generate the sense of place for the people. Art and architecture are the two main components that have one of the aims of depiction and representation. The culture that forms the core of the society needs to be given significance in one or the other way. Culture thus forms the intangible aspect of our daily life. If architectural identity gets described in culture and tradition, the unique identities of every place or region would be maintained. The research would explain the use of architecture as a physical tool for the conversion of intangible aspects of culture into a tangible one giving significance to the traditions and beliefs that we might have forgotten.

Place include the people's sentiments, feelings, emotions, memories, may be future and history as well related to the space. So, in order to create a sense of place it is mandatory that people relate to the region or place through its architecture even in the foreign land, which will connect them to their culture and thus forms their identity.

Keywords: Culture, Identity, architecture, cultural identity, tangible and intangible, nationality, place.

INTRODUCTION

Architecture as a matter of fact reflects the culture in every form in a society through its interaction with historical, structural, political, economic and social aspects of a society. Art and architecture are the two main components that have one of the aims of depiction and representation. The culture that forms the core of the society needs to be given significance in one or the other way. Culture thus forms the intangible aspect of our daily life. Globalization scours away the very identity and uniqueness of each one of us with the result as a similar skyline of cities and nations.

So, if architectural identity gets described in culture and tradition, the unique identities of every place or region would be maintained. The research would explain the use of architecture as a physical tool for the conversion of intangible aspects of culture into a tangible one giving significance to the traditions and beliefs that we might have forgotten.

To analyze the intangible aspects of culture and redefine them through the tangible form of architecture to create a cultural identity.

Objectives of research

- To analyze various **definitions** of culture, identity and their relation with architecture for interpretations of **cultural identity** and its formulation through architecture.

- To study the **various parameters of architecture that define a cultural identity of a region.**
- To indulge into the study of concept **of place and space** in urban culture & its effect on the person's feelings and sense of belonging.

The need of the research can be explained by the fact that architecture acts a tool for representation of culture and society. The buildings should not be mere aesthetics-based buildings or structure rather it should have a meaning for the people with a sense of belonging to them. Globalization has led to the spectrum of more or less same skylines of various cities and countries thus losing the main aim of architecture.

The identity of culture and region leads to unity and integrity of the building thus allowing to retain its uniqueness. Contemporary buildings just focus on the use of different structures, materials, forms and colour palette without considering the multifaceted socio-cultural aspects of people and place. The architecture is something that forms a public figure by means of its representation and thus requires a cultural identity.

What is culture?

“The total equipment of ideas and institutions and conventional activities of people”.(House Forms and Culture 1969 - Amos Rapoport | Human | Society.)

Culture can be defined as a set of ideas, customs ,beliefs ,traditions ,social activity that a particular group of people or clan have been following since ages or for a very long period of time. (Refer to Appendix I)

Culture can be considered as the context in which we can situate ourselves as it is only by the virtue of interpretations, orientations and values that are provided by our culture , that we formulate our identities and say who we are and where we come from. Culture is a representative communication.(Rapoport, 2005) (Refer to Appendix I)

The symbols may represent a group's activities, nature, information, values and goals. The meanings of symbols are learned and conserved and maintained in a society through its institutions. Culture forms the designative way of life or an individual or a group of people which they might be following over generations on the basis of their religion, caste, cue or sects etc.

1 Manifestations of culture

Cultural differences manifest themselves in different ways and differing levels of depth. (Culture definition, n.d.)(Manifestations of Culture | Value (Ethics) | Rituals, n.d.)

Symbols represent the most superficial and exposes the deepest manifestations of culture. Symbols can be copied by various regions and religions due to which they form an outer periphery of the circle and they are not permanent. (Culture definition, n.d.) (Refer to Appendix I)

The core of a cultural manifestation is formed by values. ((PDF) The Role of Culture in Promoting Architectural Identity, n.d.)(Culture definition, n.d.)

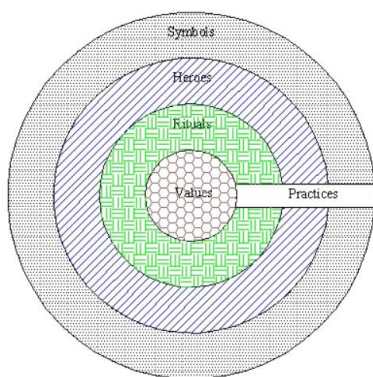
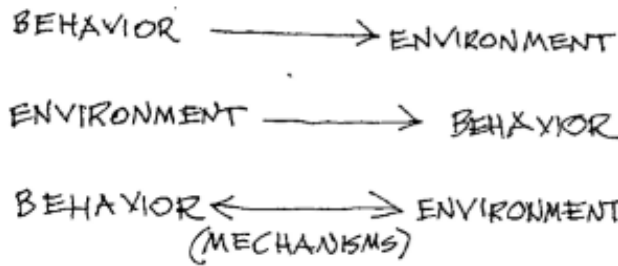


Figure 2. 1-Manifestation of culture (Culture definition, n.d.)(Rapoport, 2005)

The nature and role of Environment Behavior Studies



Tangible aspects of culture

It is possible to create spaces with variable

- Spatial organization,
- Street pattern,
- Landscaping features, etc.,

Cultural identity has major intangible aspects that can be reinterpreted or redefined into tangible aspects through architecture (Rapoport, 2005). These all mechanisms together get integrated to form an image or identity of a place that creates a memory. We associate ourselves with reference to these aspects.

Identity

Identity literally means image or recognition. It refers to the uniqueness of an object or place. The distinguishing character or personality of an individual can be associated with the identity of that individual. (Neill, 2003)

Identity refers to how an individual or group of people or a clan is different from the others. It determines the uniqueness of the thing and its property of being unique or separate from the other place. The paper discusses upon the identity of a place or a building in terms of culture. (Refer to Appendix I)

The various basis of distinction may be as follows:

1. Social behavior
2. Important landmarks.
3. Cultural practices
4. Local traditions
5. Political aspects
6. History of place
7. Religious identity

Many kinds of cues are used to identify a place or a city (in urban context) such as color, senses, touch, visual, smell, memory, shape, motion or polarization of light etc.

Identity of a region is not fixed or constant, rather it is a variable that keeps on changing according to the users experience or association of it over a period of time. (Neill, 2003)

The landmarks of a place also add to the identity of a place that makes a memory at the back of mind and acts as a backdrop of the memories and experiences. The identity of a place can also be constructed by various aspects of like music, specific dance forms or food or a cultural dress. (Refer to Appendix I)

The generation might be a great reason for this change as well. This represents identity and culture at generational level. Identity of a place may be different for every person in terms of type of association or period of association with that place. Identity is always exclusively formed and is always in a continuous process. (Neill, 2003)

The change may not be major but there are always crucial changes in details and experiences. According to Hall, sameness can threaten our identity and cause us to hate. It may be said that the more strongly a person seems likely to us or same as us, the more menacing it becomes to be like each other. There might be major discord on this basis so a unique and distinctive identity must be maintained. (Neill, 2003)

2.3 Architecture as symbol of culture

Architecture is not only concerned about aesthetics rather it should be looked upon as public figure to depict the culture and mental opinion of the society. Architecture forms that embodied segment of nature or society that illuminates the inner self of the people and their lost sentiments and feeling towards their own history, past or renowned culture (religion, nation or ethnicity etc.).

Architecture forms that fragment of the body of society that acts as its mirror with the absolute representation of all the other fragments that altogether make up the society and the world. The role of architecture in nation building is significant and should be deeply understood to have a meaningful skyline of countries and regions.

Table 1: The model of the relationship between culture and architecture (Shayan, 2011)

Architecture and culture	Architecture	Scope of culture
Functional	As a result of social components interaction	Sociology
Conceptual	As an artistic product that includes an end elevation of the mind	Aesthetics
Functional Conceptual	As a matter of human's life and includes and effective on actions	Anthropology
Perceptual	As a result of mental attitude to the surrounding built environment	Psychology

Figure 2. 2 -

relationship of culture and architecture(INDIAN CULTURE - Cultural Symbols of India - Vastu / Vaastu shastra & Indian Astrology, n.d.)

Cultural Identity

Architecture is the tangible form of making cities and buildings to reinterpret the intangible or non-materialistic needs of people of the place.

Cultural (and Ethnic) Identity is central to a person's identity and how they see themselves and how they relate to the world. One's identity defines how a person views the world and acquit oneself in that very world. Cultural identity is some particular character or behavior of a group communication system that emerges in a particular situation.

In fact, it is difficult to imagine a space that cannot be defined as a place as it will be designated in one or the other way with a cultural setting.

- Community refers to a group that have some culture, geographical setting, governance or inter communication in common.
- Communication forms an important aspect of culture as the people of same culture have homogeneous way of communication.
- Various activities or conduct that are continued in a particular community over a long stretch of time for their sense of belonging becomes their own culture. These activities then lead to change of space and forms.

2.4 Concept of Space vs Place

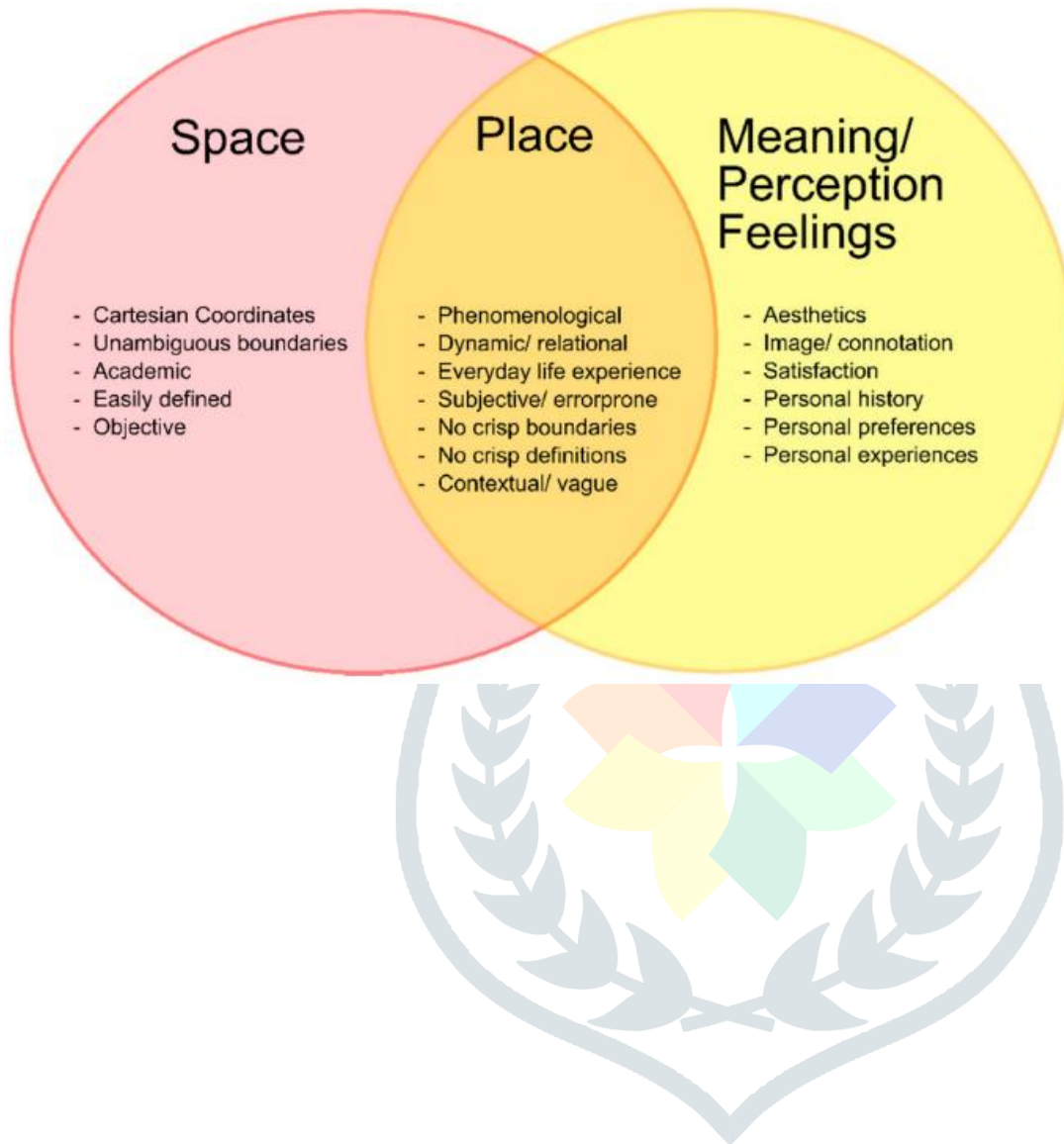
A space is a three-dimensional region that will not involve the functional aspect. It does not incorporate the association of people to the region. A space is a virtual area that does not have a physical setting. Place on the other hand is a place that has association of people. A Place is made up by the people and its inhabitants.

It is the perception of the people towards that place that makes it special or unique for them in fluctuating ways.(SPACE AND PLACE - Google Search, n.d.)

Association refers to the sense of attachment that the people of the region have with that space that in altogether makes it a 'place'.(Lipovac, n.d.)

Place include the people's sentiments, feelings, emotions, memories, may be future and history as well related to the space. In simple words 'a place can be defined as a space that has a meaning'. A person may feel associated to a space in various ways: "A place is context specific or it has a rich concept."(Space and Place | Nenad Lipovac - Academia.edu,)

One more important aspect that separates place from space is its unembodiness. Space has a boundary or a periphery in which its confined but place I intangible with no boundaries or limitation.



Aspects of Cultural Identity

Figure 2. 3-venn diagram showing the meaning of place and space(Space and Place |

Nenad Lipovac - Academia.edu,)

2.5 Nationality

Nationality refers to the status of belonging to a particular nation. Nationality is a lawful relationship between an individual person and a state(country).

National identity refers to the sense of relation and association to a particular nation, state or a region. There is no stronger identity of a social group than the national identity. The person is identified in some or the other way by his nation or the place of which he has the citizenship even if he does not acknowledge it.

The nation that one belongs to is one of the first and most fundamental ways one is defined. National identity is the transcendental, spiritual and unalterable phenomenon that has been here for ages which cannot be changed by a person by his choice or wish.



Figure 2. 4-globalization in the present world(globalization - Google Search, n.d.)(PDF) The Role of Culture in Promoting Architectural Identity, n.d.)

People adopt national identity by following the language, beliefs, practices that aligns with the practices of one's own nation. (Refer to Appendix I)

Winston Churchill famously said, "We shape our buildings, and afterwards, our buildings shape us."(How architecture shapes national identity and helps us understand history | Design Indaba, n.d.)

A huge part of previously colonized countries has their identities based upon the colonial history and so one can say that the structure which are still in presence or maintained forms a significant memory of that painful past and history. Thus history may be traumatic or harsh but it is what shapes us today as a being.(Neill, 2003) (Refer to Appendix I)



Figure 2. 5- *Rendering of the Ghana National Cathedral: Adjaye Associates*

<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/da-vid-adjaye-national-cathedral-of-ghana>

Parliament library in New Delhi.



Figure 2. 6-interiors of Parliament library, New Delhi: Central dome: jaali facades: interiors of auditorium(Raj Rewal – Indian Parliament Library, New Delhi – The Archi Blog, n.d.-a)



The 'focal center' dome in stainless steel structural lattice, to "reduce the heat loads of the building while providing views of the sky even when (visitors) are well below the surrounding ground level"(Raj Rewal - *How is Modern Architecture Influenced by Traditional Architecture* by 15.12anshu.aa - issuu, n.d.-a)

Figure 2. 7 -interiors of library showing statues of national leaders(India – Page 2 – The Archi Blog, n.d.)

Rewal explains that his aim in this project was to seek a low-key architectural expression signifying "sagacity, even spiritual elegance" rather than to "attempt to compete with the power of the Parliament"(Landmark library: a modern building with distinctly Indian roots | AÇ South Asia, n.d.) (Menon et al., 2002)

The external facade has red sandstone cladding and ... is reminiscent of the "geometrical patterns that abound in the Indian landscape" "Rewal has pulled off a remarkable feat; he has not only related its building to its immediate context, ... but to deeper strains of Indian culture and history. (Raj Rewal - *How is Modern Architecture Influenced by Traditional Architecture* by 15.12anshu.aa - issuu, n.d.-a)

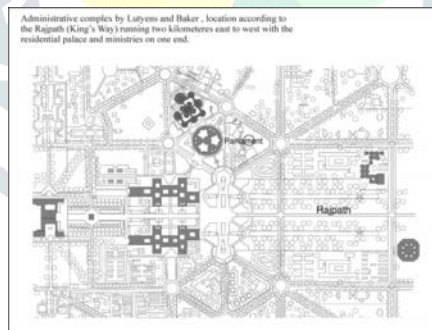
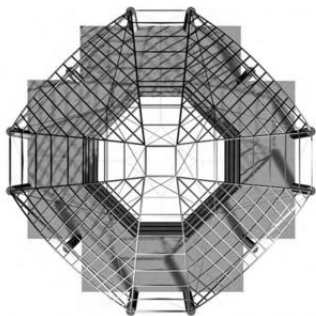


Figure 2. 8- roof plan: site plan(Raj Rewal - *How is Modern Architecture Influenced by Traditional Architecture* by 15.12anshu.aa - issuu, n.d.-a)

The plan of the building is inspired from the precolonial Indian architecture from the design of Taj mahal that makes it an example of national identity.(Parliament Library | Dome | Wall, n.d.)

Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to a feeling of belonging to a particular ancestry or origin. An ethnic group is formed or maintained whenever there is a common belief or practice that binds a group of people to unite them over a common goals and perspectives.(Ethnic Identity - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics, n.d.)

Ethnicity is often seen as an important part of identity but its eminence will change according to different situations and self-association.

Ethnicity connects to the sense of belonging to a unique and separate group or clan that share same traditions, ideologies, practices and may be physical appearances, and a sense of common values and beliefs.(Torma, 1991) (Refer to Appendix I)

The common values and beliefs lead to formation and emerging of various:

- Symbols,
- Color significances
- Various architectural detailing
- Folk motifs in paintings, arts and murals

Ethiopian architecture is one of the most monumental and unique in the world and dates back to the high antiquity. (Verkuyten, 2005)The architecture may not be so huge or still existing but it forms a very important part of their ethnicity as its elements are a derivative of what forms them, their beliefs and ideologies.

The language and dresses used by them depends largely on their culture and ethnic groups. The practices and activities performed by them leads to the formation of unique architectural spaces and elements that caters to their needs.

Religious

Religious identity refers to the association of people to a particular religion. Each religion has its own beliefs and expression. Religions can be expressed by their respective symbols, expressions, spaces, and elements. (Architecture - Religious architecture | Britannica, n.d.) (Refer to Appendix I)

Temple architecture-Hindu temple architecture is a synthesis of arts, the ideals of dharma, beliefs, values and way of life cherished under Hinduism that gives it a religious identity.

Religious identity also depends on a great extent on the region of architecture. As stated before, there is a stark contrast in temple architecture

Of north and south India. This includes the character of regionalism in forming an identity of a place. In a nutshell cultural identity of a place also depends on the region of culture. The architectural spaces and especially the elements vary considerably on the region of that building.(INDIAN CULTURE - Cultural Symbols of India - Vastu / Vaastu shastra & Indian Astrology, n.d.)

People can relate to the temple architecture of south and north different on the basis of their architectural elements. (Refer to Appendix I)

Religion forms that aspects that separates the people from each other yet unites them. Segregation is based on mere distinctiveness and uniqueness that the people of a religion carry with themselves while performing various rituals and activities related to the religion.

Beliefs and Tradition

Apart from the religious, national and ethnic identity that form the core of cultural identity another aspect is the beliefs and traditions among a group of people. The beliefs of certain groups vary a lot on various basis that leads to the formation of a separate identity that is an intangible aspect of culture.

Various beliefs that are prevalent among the people are the discrimination between men and women, differences among various caste, creed and status.

The traditions of these groups are contrasting and leads to separate activities and traditions. These activities lead to the formation of spaces in architecture and evolves their sense of belonging.

These all beliefs in Indian context have been taken into architecture for building temples and elements as well as for spatial planning to form a place.

In foreign context:

- In china, curved roofs are believed to ward off the evil spirits which are believed to only travel in straight paths

- In Japan the northeast corner is dubbed as the demon gate (kimon) from where the evil spirits may enter, considering this superstition the north east corner is made free of windows and doors. For centuries gargoyles have been used to drain out water which are located at the sides of tall buildings and churches. These are also considered to have supernatural connotations is often very hard to say which come first vernacular strategy or associated folklore –“historical form and function stories can be hard to separate out”

History or past events

Collective remembering can lead to the formation of various cultural, ritualized and institutionalized forms. It can also be constituted spatially and be of major significance for urban planning and design. (Neill, 2003)

As Dolores Hayden reiterates “identity is intimately tied to memory”. An excellent example of representation of past or history through architecture is the Jewish museum by Daniel Libeskind (Neill, 2003) (Refer to Appendix I)

Jewish museum

“...which was to transform the entire structure into a discourse about German Jewish history”

Daniel Libeskind

Activity pattern or way of life

Various activities that have been performed over a long period of time forms a culture. This culture that have been evolved over a period of time forms an identity of a place. These activities can be depicted through architecture or architectural spaces can be designed in such a manner that they cater to those activities and way of life. (House Forms and Culture 1969 - Amos Rapoport | Human | Society, n.d.)

In some cases, architecture affects the living style and activity pattern of citizens whereas in others the culture or activities affects directly or indirectly the architecture of a place that itself forms the identity of a place. (Ashfina, 2015) (Refer to Appendix I)

“Festivals have always served as an occasion for affirming shared convictions and beliefs, identities in the life of city” (Browne et al.,)

Festivals

These events provide tangible expressions of social, cultural, religious, political and ethnic cohesion. These festivals develop a sense of identity of a place by their very significance in that region. The festivals that are performed after a regular period of time maybe a long time also integrate all together to form an identity of a region or city. (Browne et al., n.d.) (Refer to Appendix I)

Architecture acts as key element for the representation of the various activities like parading of elaborate ceremonial floats, construction of temporary structures and the appropriation of spaces that are reserved for other purposes but lead to dressing of the urban elevation when required and hence forming a separate identity of place. (Browne et al., n.d.)

The spaces assimilate both orderly and disorderly elements of architecture that collectively form the quintessence of self-belonging and association to the culture. (Browne et al., n.d.)

The study of festivals is significant in this research as the festivals though temporary act as an identity maker of place, festivals contribute as a narrative of the story of past events at a place and the reason for change of spatial experience for a particular period of time.

Festivals allows for multiple recognition, acknowledgment and simultaneous stories that helps the people of the place to associate themselves to it. (Rapoport, 2005) (Browne et al., n.d.) (Refer to Appendix I)

2.11 Climate and Geography

Climate has a tremendous role in the shaping of built forms as it directly affects the comfort of people of the region. Climate of a place leads to the construction of building in such a manner that the citizens may adapt to the

conditions of that region. ((PDF) Vernacular Architecture and Climatic Control in the extreme conditions of Ladakh ASPIRE-2013, n.d.)

One of the most common examples is the **Malay house** with a hot and humid climate in Malaysia.

Discussion and Conclusion

The literature study included the study of all the definitions of culture identity and its relation with architecture. The concept of place and space helps to create this relation among the three. The feelings and sense of belonging leads to the formation of place making the space useful and meaningful. This concept forms the philosophical and intangible part of this research. The tangible part of the research is framed by the various architectural elements that represents various aspects of culture to form their identity. The literature study helped to list out the parameters on the basis of which the case study analysis can be done and the recommendations for the research can be framed. The parameters include:

1. Site context
2. Form and massing
3. Concept behind the design
4. Spaces
5. Roof
6. Facades
7. Columns
8. Courtyards
9. Verandahs
10. Color scheme
11. Windows
12. Materials
13. Art and craftsmanship
14. Special details like statues, representation through symbol

The analysis would be done on these parameters and the combination of these elements helps to create an architecture or building form that is a representation of one's own culture and forms their identity.

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