

Memory and History

There is a big difference between history and memory; history is supposed to be a record of events of public importance; while memory is more of a personal matter; it may be a group connection to past events or to a collective life experience important to its members only. Memory therefore is a strong feeling that ties people together through the sharing of an experience that had left an impact on their lives and perceptions. And because the human mind is usually more interested in reliving the good moments rather than the bad ones, memories become emotional; therefore they are often unable to tell the truth or paint an actual picture of past events the way history usually does. This makes memories, particularly the personal ones, attempts to maintain strong connections to happy life experiences or to certain moments in certain places and times where the experience had happened or thought to have happened. And this, in turn, makes memories either attempts to condemn past tragedies or an elation to relive happy moments.

Arabs tend to think of the past as a collective memory, not history. As a consequence, most written history of the Arabs has become more fiction than facts. The Arabs' understanding of history in general and their connection to the past in particular is emotional rather than factual, subjective rather than objective. Arabs tend to talk about "the golden age" and to yearn for moments no one had ever lived, and may have never existed as imagined. Yet Arabs who put so much emphasis on the history of the past and so much emotional investment in it do not seem to worry much about the need to make the history of the present as glorious; to make it a history worth telling by their children and grandchildren.

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