REPORTING HERITAGE DESTRUCTION

Edited by

Bijan Rouhani, Bill Finlayson and Timothy Clack

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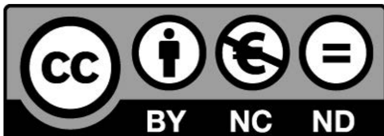

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List of Contributors

Authors

Alula Tesfay Asfha is an architect, academician, and cultural heritage expert with a PhD in World Cultural Heritage Studies from the University of Tsukuba, Japan. He is currently a Gerda Henkel Fellow at the Frobenius Institute, Goethe University Frankfurt, and an assistant professor at Mekelle University. Asfha has led a variety of conservation projects, including the restoration of Gundagundo Monastery and post-conflict heritage recovery in Northern Ethiopia. He advocates for co-creation approaches to preserving Africa's heritage, emphasising the dynamic relationship between architecture, culture, and community. Alula also heads the Tigray Heritagescapes Restoration Initiative Project.

Mona Azarnoush is an architect and researcher who obtained her PhD in Architectural and Urban Heritage Conservation. Her in-depth research focused on identifying the historic context of a small city, utilising Grounded Theory to explore the relationships between the historic fabric and local communities. Acknowledged for its distinctive contributions to the field, her dissertation received support from the Ministry of Interior of Iran. With a strong passion for Iranian indigenous architecture and heritage pathology, she studies the factors disrupting the relationship between people and their heritage. Her experiences and publications are predominantly dedicated to this important research area. ORCID: 0000-0002-7382-5279

Ammar Azzouz is a British Academy Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. Azzouz is the author of *Domicide: Architecture, War and the Destruction of Home in Syria*, published by Bloomsbury in 2023, with a foreword by Lyse Doucet, the BBC's Chief International Correspondent. He is currently conducting research on art and culture in exile with a focus on the Syrian diaspora. Azzouz has written for a wide range of platforms, including *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. He has been invited to speak at over 150 events globally, from Mexico and the US to Germany, the Netherlands and Qatar.

Kristen Barrett-Casey is a DPhil candidate in Archaeology at Hertford College, University of Oxford. Her research focuses on post-conflict reconstruction of heritage sites and the politics of its funding by international actors. Geographically, she has written on Iraq, Afghanistan, Mali and Bosnia, and is currently researching China's influence on Uzbekistan's heritage-production and management. More broadly, she is interested in the mechanics of soft power, and its relationship with heritage management and security.

Karima Bennoune is the Lewis M. Simes Professor at the University of Michigan Law School, where she teaches courses in international law and human rights. She served as UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights from 2015-2021. Her 2016 report for the General Assembly developed a human rights approach to the intentional destruction of cultural heritage. She carried out related missions to Cyprus, Serbia and Kosovo. Bennoune was also appointed an expert by the International Criminal Court during the reparations phase of The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, concerning destruction of cultural heritage in Mali.

Eleanor Childs is a third-year doctoral candidate at the Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, Australia. Childs has a background in International Relations, focusing on the Middle East, with research and professional experience in the areas of (post-)conflict society, refugee and diaspora politics, decolonisation, and systemic violence against marginalised communities. Her thesis examines the absence of gender dimensions in multilateral responses to the mass destruction of heritage sites in Syria and Iraq by the Islamic State, and applies feminist International Relations theory to securitised and human rights-based heritage discourses.

Timothy Clack is the Chingiz Gutseriev Associate Professor in Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Oxford, UK. He is also an Associate Fellow of the Centre for Historical and Armed Conflict Research (CHACR). Tim's research concerns the drivers and aftermaths of conflict, with current focus on areas such as identities, cultural destruction, information/ propaganda, and climate change. His recent co-edited books have included: *Climate Change and (In)Security* (Routledge 2024); *Archaeologies of Cultural Contact* (OUP 2022); *Cultural Heritage in Modern Conflict* (Routledge 2022); and *The World Information War* (Routledge 2021). He is Co-Founder of Oxford University's Endangered Cultural Heritage of the Global South Hub.

Mark Dunkley is a Visiting Fellow at Cranfield University, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and an Associate of the Security Institute. He is a Field Officer in the British Army Reserve where his interests encompass understanding the exploitation of cultural heritage across the spectrum of conflict. He has worked at the NATO CIMIC Centre of Excellence in the Hague and the US Army War College. He has published widely on the relationship between culture and warfare and is co-editor of *Cultural Heritage in Modern Conflict* (2023) and *Heritage at War* (2024).

Mohamed W. Fareed is an architect and researcher with professional and academic experience centered on reinterpreting built heritage in the Middle East. He is an active member of various working groups and scientific committees in ICOMOS. He holds a Master's degree in world heritage studies from Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus-Senftenberg. He also has a postgraduate diploma in urban heritage strategies from the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands. He obtained his bachelor's degree in architecture from Helwan University in Egypt. His primary focus in both research and professional practice revolves around the digital reinterpretation of architectural heritage in the Middle East.

Bill Finlayson is the Director of the Endangered Archaeology of the MENA region (EAMENA) project at the University of Oxford, documenting archaeological sites and providing training to national heritage staff throughout the region. He was Director of the Council for British Research in the Levant, based in Amman, from 1999 to 2018. His research at Beidha within the Petra World Heritage Site, has included site conservation, the public presentation of the site for the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Petra Development and Tourism Regional Authority, and a socio-economic study of the local communities and their relationship to cultural heritage. He is Co-Founder of the Endangered Cultural Heritage of the Global South Hub at Oxford. ORCID: 0000-0002-0330-8006

Elly Harrowell is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Peace and Security at Coventry University (UK). Her research explores the relationship between peace, conflict and cultural heritage, and asks how interventions to safeguard cultural heritage can be harnessed to support peace in communities affected by conflict. To this end, Harrowell has carried out research in a range of contexts (including the occupied Palestinian territory, Mauritania, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan), provided consultancy support to organisations such as ICCROM and UNESCO, and has published widely on this and other topics related to post-crisis reconstruction.

Afifa Khan is a Research Assistant working in GIS and survey for the Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia (MAHSA) project. A major part of her job has been working with collaborators in Pakistan, organising and editing legacy data and ground-truthing sites. She has previously worked on documenting sites in Kyrgyzstan for the CAAL project and, before that, as a field archaeologist in the commercial sector in the UK. Her interests mainly lie in reassessing legacy data in Pakistan and how systematic surveys can impact the depth of data across the landscape.

Paul J. Lane is the Jennifer Ward Oppenheimer Professor of the Deep History and Archaeology of Africa at the University of Cambridge. A former President of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (2008-10) and Director of the British Institute in Eastern Africa (1998-2006), he has over forty years' research experience in Africa. His interests include landscape historical ecology, the origins of farming and herding in eastern Africa, the archaeology of ivory in Africa, and post-colonial and Indigenous archaeology. He currently directs the Mapping Africa's Endangered Sites and Monuments project aimed at developing digital sites and monuments registers for sub-Saharan African countries.

Ashish Makanadar is a civil engineer, designer, and urbanist specialising in urban planning, experimental design, technology, and policy innovation. His research spans cultural heritage, urbicide, sensuality/aesthetics and the politics of spatial representation, with notable contributions, including *Poverty Porn or Poverty Planning?* and *Digital Surveillance Capitalism and Cities: Data, Democracy, and Activism.* Currently a Project Research Associate at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Makanadar employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating computational tools with urban and regional planning, environmental design, and urban sociology. His work bridges technology and design, advancing new paradigms in sustainable urban development and the city-society nexus.

Stefania Merlo is a Senior Research Associate at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological research, University of Cambridge, which she joined in 2020 to manage the Mapping Africa's Endangered Sites and Monuments project, aimed at developing a shared online repository of sites and monuments for sub-Saharan African countries. Prior to this she was a Senior lecturer in GIS at the University of the Witwatersrand and a Lecturer in Computing Archaeology at the University of Botswana. Her research integrates GIS, remote sensing, and participatory approaches to explore African landscape histories and make them available to different publics.

Carolyn Morris recently completed her Master's at the University of Oxford in Migration Studies within the Department of International Development. After graduating from university, she moved to Malaysia to work with a community centre, where her role involved co-launching a livelihood programme with Rohingya women. Afterwards, she worked with the IRC in a refugee community in the US, also engaging with the Rohingya community there. Morris's experiences revealed a gap in anthropological research on Rohingya heritage. This has inspired her involvement in grassroots organisations, story-telling projects, and academic initiatives focused on preserving and revitalising Rohingya cultural and religious identity post-genocide.

Elena Perez-Alvaro, PhD in cultural heritage and a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellow in underwater cultural heritage, is affiliated with the University of Guam, the University of Hawaii, and Universitat Pompeu Fabra. She has lectured on Cultural and Natural Heritage at UNIR University in Spain and served as a Research Associate at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa. Perez-Alvaro plays a significant role in international heritage organisations. She is an Expert Member of both ICOMOS International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage and the ICOMOS International Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Her leadership extends further as she chairs the Underwater Heritage Working Group of the UK Blue Shield. Among her key works are *Underwater Cultural Heritage: Ethical Concepts* and *Practical Challenges and The Hidden Hand of Underwater Cultural Heritage*, exploring the ethical, practical, and geopolitical dimensions of submerged heritage. ORCID: 0000-0003-1594-6563

Cameron A. Petrie is Professor of South Asian and Iranian Archaeology and Principal Investigator of the MAHSA Project at the University of Cambridge. His research primarily focuses on the rise of social complexity, the social and economic aspects of state formation, and the impact that the growth of states and empires has on subjugated regions. Much of his work considers the relationships between humans and the environment, and makes use of landscape archaeology and GIS-based approaches. He has extensive field and research experience at archaeological sites dating from the Neolithic up to the medieval period in India, Pakistan and Iran, and either has co-directed or is co-directing projects in each of these countries.

Thomas Richard holds his PhD from the University Clermont-Auvergne. His work focuses on identities and cultural problematics in the Middle East, particularly in times of conflict. His dissertation was awarded the Michel de L'Hospital Prize, and has been published by LGDJ-Lextenso and the Presses de l'Université Clermont-Auvergne under the title *Du musée au cinéma, narrations de guerre au Moyen-Orient*. He has presented his research both in France and abroad, through conferences and articles about war memories, cultural representations of the borders, and identities as seen through films. His most recent work deals with filmic images and terrorism, militant cinema in the Middle East, cinema circulation, postcolonial memories, and museums in the Middle East. Associate Researcher at the Centre Michel de l'Hospital at University Clermont-Auvergne, he teaches political science and cinema studies at universities Paris-8, Paris-I, Lille and ESPOL.

Rebecca Roberts is an archaeologist with a longstanding interest in communicating information about archaeological heritage to audiences outside of academia. Her research interests include human-environment interactions in prehistoric Kazakhstan through archaeobotanical analysis. She has previously been a Curator and Research Associate at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for an exhibition of Iron Age Saka-Scythian goldwork from East Kazakhstan. While at Birmingham Archaeology, she worked on building databases to manage archaeological data in both the UK and Qatar. She is currently Project Coordinator for the Arcadia-funded Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia project, based at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge.

Bijan Rouhani is Senior Researcher at the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford, and the Deputy Director of the Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (EAMENA) project. He holds a PhD in the History and Conservation of Architectural Heritage from the University of Rome, La Sapienza. His research focuses on the conservation and protection of built heritage, risk management for heritage sites, post-conflict reconstruction, and the application of new technologies for heritage documentation and preservation. Rouhani is Chair of the Cultural Emergency Response (CER) Board, Vice-President of the International Scientific Committee on Risk Preparedness (ICORP) of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), a member of UK Blue Shield, and Co-Founder of the Endangered Cultural Heritage of the Global South Hub at Oxford. He is an editor of *Managing Disaster Risks to Cultural Heritage: From Risk Preparedness to Recovery for Immovable Heritage* (Routledge 2024). ORCID: 0000-0003-0773-2469

Mou Sarmah is currently a Research Assistant with the Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia (MAHSA) project, focusing on the discovery, documentation, and conservation of endangered archaeological sites. Her research interests include using geospatial analytical methods to study South Asia's cultural landscapes through

landscape archaeology. Previously, Mou collaborated with the Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (EAMENA) project, gaining expertise in mapping and assessing at-risk heritage. Her Master's dissertation investigated Post-Harappan archaeological sites in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Additionally, she acquired practical skills in geophysical surveying and field excavation during her time in commercial archaeology.

Saqib Sheikh's work centres on advocacy, social inclusion and educational access for refugees and stateless people. He serves as Project Director for the Rohingya Project, a grassroots initiative for the empowerment of the Rohingya diaspora using blockchain technology. He is also a co–founder and adviser for the Refugee Coalition of Malaysia, where he focuses on creating formal pathways for refugee placement in higher education institutes in Malaysia. Sheikh is currently a doctoral researcher at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, researching Rohingya identity, statelessness, and assimilation strategies.

Aparna Tandon is a leading expert in disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and post-crisis recovery for cultural heritage. With over 25 years of experience in heritage conservation, she designs capacity development activities for heritage based disaster risk reduction, climate action and peacebuilding. At ICCROM, she leads the First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis (FAR) programme, an international flagship initiative focused on protecting heritage from conflicts, disasters and the climate crisis. Under her leadership, the FAR programme has provided critical training for heritage professionals, disaster risk managers, emergency responders, and local communities, empowering them to protect and recover heritage in the aftermath of complex emergencies.

Favour Chukwuemeka Uroko is a doctor of religion and cultural studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and also a research associate at the Department of Religion Studies, University of Pretoria, South Africa. He has published in the areas of religion, culture, and development. Currently, he is a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, contributing to scholarly discourse and mentoring the next generation of leaders. He is a passionate advocate for community development; he collaborates with faith-based organisations to address societal challenges.

Sebastian Usher has been reporting from across the Middle East for more than thirty years - on its political, social and cultural shifts. His interest in the region was sparked by holidays in Lebanon with his grandparents when he was a child. That led him to take a job at the American University of Beirut straight after university where he was witness to the kidnapping of colleagues and friends. For the past twenty years, he's worked for the BBC as a reporter, editor and analyst focusing on the Middle East. Most recently, he's been reporting from Israel, Lebanon and Syria on the tumultuous events that have occurred since the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

Vaneshree Vidyarthi is a Research Assistant for the Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia (MAHSA) project and a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge. Previously, she worked as a field archaeologist for the Cambridge Archaeological Unit. She holds an MSc in Archaeology from the University of Oxford and a BA (Hons) from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. Her main research focus is on the archaeology of South Asia, with a special interest in the Palaeolithic of the region. The aims of her work include bringing South Asia more firmly into the fold of global archaeological debates.

Jessica L. Wagner is a Captain, Heritage and Preservation Officer, with the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne) 38G Program. The 38G/6V is a revitalisation of the WWII Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Unit, focusing on fulfilling the requirements of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. She completed her Master of Arts at the University of Manchester, Centre for Museology: Institute for Cultural Practices, focusing on heritage spoliation and restitution. Her research explores the interplay of cultural property protection and humanitarian crimes. Wagner serves as the Preservation Subcommittee Lead for the International Collaborative Committee for Sudan Heritage Preservation & Advocacy.

Working Group Members

Several working group members contributed as authors to this publication; their biographies are included in the list of authors above. These members of the working group are: **Ammar Azzouz**, **Timothy Clack**, **Bill Finlayson**, **Bijan Rouhani** and **Sebastian Usher**.

Sussan Babaie is Professor in the Arts of Iran and Islam at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. She has published widely on the arts, architecture, and urbanism of the early modern Safavid period, including *Isfahan and Its Palaces* (2008), and the co-edited *Persian Kingship and Architecture* (2015). Most recently, she has turned to the

study of Food and Art and the link between sensory experiences of taste, smell, and seeing. Sussan is currently the lead scholar on Mongol Connections, a Getty Connecting Art Histories Project (2024-2027), and is co-curating with Shane McCausland (SOAS) an exhibition on the art of The Great Mongol State for the Royal Academy of Art, London (2027).

Robert Bevan is an independent journalist, academic, and heritage consultant who has written extensively on material culture and conflict including *The Destruction of Memory* (2006/2015) and *Monumental Lies* (2022). He is a member of ICOMOS and Blue Shield UK.

Jacob Davey is Director of Policy and Research at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, working to counter hate, disinformation and extremism. His work focuses on analysing and responding to online hate speech, hate crime, and the extremist movements which drive hate globally. He has published widely on these issue areas and regularly provides media and advice to senior policymakers on these phenomena.

Faisal Devji is Professor of Indian History and Fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford. He is an intellectual historian who works on political thought in South Asia and the Muslim world. Devji's publications include books on Al-Qaeda's global militancy, Gandhi's non-violence, Pakistan as a political idea, and the rise and fall of global Islam.

Stephanie Grant is the Director of the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund, which was set up in 2016 to protect heritage at risk due to conflict in the Middle East and North Africa. Since she joined in 2019, Stephanie has expanded the fund's geographical reach into East Africa and South Asia and increased the remit to protect heritage at risk due to climate change. Stephanie has an extensive background in funding across culture, heritage and arts, including roles at the EU's Creative Europe programme, Arts Council England and as a freelance development consultant for cultural organisations.

Cécile Fabre is Senior Research Fellow in Politics at All Souls College, Oxford. She holds degrees from La Sorbonne, the University of York, and the University of Oxford. Her research interests include theories of distributive justice, the rights we have over our own body, and the ethics of foreign policy. Her books include *Cosmopolitan War* (OUP 2012), *Cosmopolitan Peace* (OUP 2016), *Economic Statecraft* (Harvard UP 2018), and *Spying Through a Glass Darkly* (OUP 2022). Her current project is on the ethics of preserving cultural heritage. She is a Fellow of the British Academy.

Charlotte Hanson is the Head of International Cultural Heritage Protection at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, UK Government. Charlotte manages partnerships and grants which support the protection of cultural heritage at risk from conflict and climate change. These include the Cultural Protection Fund in partnership with the British Council and with UNESCO, the AHRC, UNODC and the OSCE. Charlotte has worked in DCMS since 2020 and, prior to this, was a Conservator, with roles at UK museums, including the Imperial War Museum and Royal Air Force Museum.

Richard Hughes is a past President of ICOMOS-UK and presently is internationally engaged with the application of culture and cultural heritage as 'engines' and 'accelerators' driving sustainable development, while retaining societal values and resilience, also supporting responses to global climatic change and degradation of the historic cultural landscape. He works on preparedness and management for cultural heritage assets where there are increasing water, fire and man-made hazards, thus addressing vulnerability, societal and economic losses, and practically effective mitigation options. He has provided conservation and management plans for integrating heritage remains within large scale commercial development projects and on World Heritage Sites. He provides expert heritage support to Arup and international organisations regarding 'access to all' for adapted and new cultural venues. Part of his remit is in assessing social, scientific and economic value of cultural heritage assets to determine the financial and commercial viability of development and conservation impact mitigation undertakings and more broadly promoting cultural sustainability and celebration of the historic environment.

Maev Kennedy is a journalist who has written for *The Irish Times* and served as a special writer and arts and heritage correspondent for *The Guardian*. She is a regular contributor to *The Art Newspaper* and a former columnist for *Museums Journal*.

Eliya Lucks is Communications Officer, Policy Engagement Team, University of Oxford.

Lynn Meskell is Penn Integrates Knowledge Professor at the University of Pennsylvania. She is Richard D. Green Professor of Anthropology, Professor in Historic Preservation at the Weitzman School of Design, and curator in the

Middle East and Asia sections at Penn Museum and serves as AD White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University. She holds Honorary Doctorates in Rome and Bergen, and Honorary Professorships at Oxford and Liverpool universities, Shiv Nadar in India and the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Since 2011 Lynn has conducted an institutional ethnography of UNESCO World Heritage, tracing the politics of governance and sovereignty and the subsequent implications for multilateral diplomacy, international conservation, and heritage rights culminating in her award-winning book *A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace*. She is currently examining the entwined histories of colonialism, internationalism, espionage and archaeology in the Middle East. Other fieldwork explores monumental regimes of preservation in India.

Vernon Rapley is the Director and Principal Consultant at Vernon Rapley Ltd, a consultancy service for the heritage sector. He's the Chair of the ICOM International Committee for Museum Security. A Fellow of the Antiquarian Society and an active member of the OSCE Heritage Crime Task Force. Until October 2024, he was the Director of Cultural Heritage Protection and Security at the V&A Museum, where he created and directed the V&A's Culture in Crisis Programme and the Culture in Crisis Portal. Before joining the V&A he served as the head of the Art and Antiques Unit at New Scotland Yard.

Introduction:
Can Reporting Heritage Destruction Be a Double-Edged-Sword?

Bijan Rouhani, Bill Finlayson and Timothy Clack

The idea of this volume began with fundamental questions about the reporting of heritage destruction: who is reporting, what is being reported and how, and what are the implications of such reporting? In an increasingly globalised world inundated with headlines from international news outlets, as well as the relentless flow of social media and user-generated content, how are threats to cultural heritage perceived, documented, and disseminated, and what are the broader consequences of this reporting? If cultural heritage can serve as both a trigger and a casualty of conflict, hinder stabilisation, and foster peace-building – with its role continuously shifting between exploitation and protection within different military strategies, threats, and interventions (Clack and Dunkley 2022) – how does the act of reporting influence this dynamic, and in what ways does it shape heritage's evolving function?

The necessity of putting this book together arises from the urgent need to critically examine the complexities of heritage destruction reporting. The destruction of cultural heritage in conflict zones has, in recent decades, gained considerable international attention. As stressed by the former United Nations' Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, access to, and enjoyment of, cultural heritage is a human rights issue (Shaheed 2011). Reporting such destruction raises public awareness, mobilises responses, and influences policy decisions. However, the way in which these events are reported and the heritage that receives the most attention can serve political and ideological agendas, at times exacerbating conflict dynamics rather than alleviating them. The emergence of digital media and the rapid proliferation of information channels have further complicated these issues, allowing for the simultaneous documentation of destruction, dissemination of misinformation, and even the weaponisation of cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage is integral to identity, history, and human dignity, making it a frequent target for political or ideological agendas. If not handled carefully, reporting on such acts can inadvertently amplify extremist ideologies or, conversely, be used to justify military interventions and potential neo-colonial initiatives. Western media has disproportionately focused on the destruction of ancient pre-Islamic heritage in the Middle East, despite it being only a fraction of the broader heritage devastation carried out by ISIS, which also targeted mosques, churches, and temples of various faiths (Stein 2022: 178).

Research on militant and terrorist organisations shows that deliberate destruction of cultural heritage has been an important means for spreading their propaganda, recruiting new members, and expanding their networks (Smith *et al.* 2016). In response to the deliberate destruction of heritage in Syria and Iraq by non-state actors, the UN Security Council and UNESCO redefined such acts as significant threats to international security and stability, but have been hesitant to apply similar measures against their Member States (Meskell and Isakhan 2024).

Although UN agencies and heritage organisations provide extensive documentation and monitoring frameworks, there is a lack of ethical guidelines specifically addressing media reporting on heritage destruction. While many international news media and international councils have ethical principles for reporting on war, terror, and emergencies (e.g. BBC Editorial Guidelines 2019; Council of Europe 2022), these guidelines do not adequately consider the cultural sensitivities surrounding heritage. This oversight neglects the crucial role heritage can play in conflicts, particularly when it is contested or used as a tool for political and ideological agendas and propaganda. There is also concern about the extent to which media reporting accurately represents local perspectives and narratives, particularly those of marginalised communities.

Understanding the patterns and media formats of reporting heritage destruction over time is crucial, as it reveals how narratives have been shaped, amplified, or manipulated in different historical contexts, providing insights into the evolving role of media in influencing public perception, policy decisions, and heritage protection efforts today.

The editors of this volume seek to address these issues by fostering an interdisciplinary dialogue that brings together archaeologists, heritage scholars, media professionals, policymakers, and human rights advocates. Their

goal is to provide a nuanced understanding of how heritage destruction is reported and the ethical considerations surrounding these reports. They also aim to develop a framework that can guide heritage professionals and media practitioners in more ethical and responsible reporting.

The project took shape through a series of carefully coordinated efforts. Initially, a working group was established to define the key themes and concerns related to heritage destruction reporting. This was followed by a scoping workshop, in Oxford, on 6 December 2022, where a select number of media professionals, government and policy officials and heritage scholars discussed critical issues, shared expertise, and outlined possible ethical guidelines. This workshop led to the planning of a large online conference, which took place on 15 November 2023, designed to expand the discussion to a wider audience, including global policymakers, non-government organisations, and academics.

The online conference was structured around three major themes: Who Owns and Values Cultural Heritage? Cultural Heritage as a Human Right; and Media Reporting and Heritage Destruction. Keynote speakers and selected scholars presented their research and case studies, leading to in-depth discussions on the impact of heritage reporting in various contexts. Panel discussions provided a platform for critical engagement with these issues, addressing not only how destruction is reported but also how these narratives shape international responses and funding for heritage protection and reconstruction.

The project was initiated by Oxford's Endangered Cultural Heritage in the Global South Hub (ECHGS), which engages scholars from various disciplines. The ECHGS[1] is an initiative led by the Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (EAMENA) at the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford in collaboration with other Oxford-based scholars from Anthropology, Geography, and other disciplines. It undertakes interdisciplinary research on how cultural heritage is created, identified, valued and protected both by local populations and by international agencies, experts, and academics. The ECHGS also considers how heritage is currently threatened by conflict, climate change, and development. The longstanding relationships between the Global North and the Global South make cultural heritage both a critical focus for decolonisation debates and actions, and central to highly topical discussions regarding UK (and international) Official Development Assistance programmes.

The volume moved forward with a call for chapters, inviting contributions from a diverse range of experts and communities. Each submission underwent a rigorous peer-review process, with at least two reviewers evaluating each chapter to ensure academic integrity and coherence with the overarching theme of the volume. The chapters selected for inclusion offer a wide-ranging analysis, from historical case studies of heritage destruction and propaganda to contemporary challenges posed by social media and digital reporting.

A key outcome of the project is the development of a set of ethical recommendations for reporting on heritage destruction, presented at the end of this volume. These recommendations, informed by discussions within the working group and inputs from conference participants, aim to provide practical recommendations for journalists, researchers, and heritage professionals. They emphasise the importance of context, the need for accurate and responsible reporting, and the potential consequences of misrepresentation. These recommendations highlight the need for greater collaboration between media outlets and heritage experts, establishment of clearer ethical standards for reporting, and the role of international organisations in supporting responsible heritage documentation. By engaging with these issues, the book seeks to provide a critical resource for understanding and improving the ways in which heritage destruction is reported and addressed on the global stage.

Our own experience of working in the cultural heritage sector, as academics, practitioners, policymakers, or journalists reporting on heritage has made it very clear to us that not only is a local perspective vital, but it is not singular – and that in conflict situations we have to tread very carefully, not least to ensure we do not increase the risk to people or their heritage. We have inevitably been dealing with many journalist enquiries since the start of the current Israeli/Palestinian conflict, but are being very cautious about what we say, and who we say it to. As **Sebastien Usher** said in our workshop, we are not always sure how what we say will be used or abused. Our priority is with the agencies who have stewardship over heritage.

We start from the perspective that cultural heritage requires people – the people who create, curate, and identify themselves through what we describe as cultural heritage. Cultural heritage goes beyond the inanimate objects.

[1] https://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/echgs-hub-15-nov-2023-online [Accessed 03 March 2025]

The chapters collected here may appear quite eclectic, providing many different examples and contexts, often, as with **Lane and Merlo**, reminding us that the reporting can be selective. They make it very clear that reporting cultural heritage destruction is not a neutral act, perhaps most visibly in **Richard**'s insightful analysis of sophisticated Russian media reporting and **Dunkley**'s account of the use of cultural heritage as a force multiplier, but this theme recurs throughout the book. **Saqib and Morris**, as well as **Makander,** discuss the misuse of heritage itself, but within a context where it may be seen as minor compared to loss of human life, but where the cultural context is fundamental. However, what comes through constantly is the importance of cultural heritage, notably as a human right as discussed by **Bennoune** and **Barrett-Casey** and in **Wagner**'s stark analysis of how cultural heritage destruction can be an advance warning of genocide. **Usher** recognises the importance of reporting, although he sees hazards in the process and argued that journalists need to get better at telling the story. The same applies to all of us, but it is clear from all the chapters and especially **Wagner**'s that cultural heritage destruction must be reported.

A topic that comes up with increasing frequency in cultural heritage, especially regarding the Global South, is the issue of ownership and value. Initially expressed as a concern with universal value being dominated by Western ideals, readily visible in the remains of the Roman empire and other former conquerors. More recently, approaches have begun to emphasise a bottom-up construction of cultural heritage and its dynamic nature – a theme picked up by many of our contributors.

Ammar Azzouz in his keynote for the theme *Who Owns and Values Cultural Heritage?* made this immediately relevant to our discussion with his concerns about the reporting of heritage as stones in ruins creating faceless wars. This abstraction of heritage from real people makes heritage of considerably lesser importance than human lives. The political nature of what is reported – as seen in the current Israel/Palestine situation – leads to apparent biases in coverage – with some identities being written out of history. A more bottom-up narrative, or many narratives, provides multi-vocal stories, and our contributors discuss many local stakeholders. That of course does not remove heritage from the political, and no one at our conference argued it could be.

Elly Harrowell and Aparna Tandon expand the identification of voiceless actors. Using the evocative term "heritage bearers" they note that people-led approaches have the potential to not only be more ethical, but more effective. Despite many critiques of a top-down, Western-dominated approach, this has not yet fed very well through on the ground. One recommendation they make is that heritage institutions need to listen to local voices and learn more to move away from their current expert-led paternalistic mode of working, echoed by **Karima Bennoune** in the need for learning, saying lessons had been learned on the risks of inflaming context and providing weapons through recognising partisan cultural heritages, and the need to maintain some universality to see the totality. **Harrowel and Tandon** described the need to amplify local voices through the much more complex process of co-creating projects. One of the great things they report is the development of practical tools to help achieve this bottom-up approach.

Paul Lane and **Stefanio Merlo** bring in further dimensions, one being that destruction is only reported from high-profile conflicts. There are conflicts that fall below the threshold of international news (a point raised again by **Mark Dunkley**, or as **Azzouz** said – conflicts can become forgotten). They explore the challenges of defining and addressing heritage endangerment in Africa. Their chapter critiques the global focus on monumental heritage destruction during conflicts while neglecting the incremental loss of archaeological sites due to urban expansion, mining, climate change, and poor heritage management. Through their case study on Mapping Africa's Endangered Archaeological Sites and Monuments (MAEASaM) project, they analyse these gaps by using remote sensing, archival research, and local partnerships to document and monitor heritage sites. The authors highlight issues such as the "tyranny of monumentality," data mismanagement, and legal shortcomings that contribute to Africa's heritage vulnerabilities. The chapter advocates for a more holistic, landscape-based approach that prioritises local perspectives and sustainable heritage protection strategies. Again, we are back to who owns and values the heritage – where it fits onto national and international priorities and policies.

Eleanor Childs focusses still more on the under-represented, here in particular the place of women in cultural heritage. She critiques the exclusion of gender in international heritage protection mechanisms, arguing that heritage destruction disproportionately affects women but is rarely analysed through a feminist lens. She highlights how UNESCO and global governance structures fail to integrate gender-sensitive approaches, treating heritage destruction as a security issue rather than recognising its cultural and human rights implications. Drawing on feminist International Relations theories, she examines ISIS' (*Da'esh*) systematic destruction of cultural heritage and its gendered impacts, including erasure of minority identities and exacerbation of women's insecurity. Childs

calls for integrating feminist perspectives into heritage protection to address these gaps and ensure inclusive policymaking.

Most of our discussion focussed on the terrestrial heritage that tends to spring to mind immediately. **Elena Perez-Alvaro** took us to the relatively neglected domain of underwater heritage, pointing out it has a similar history of use and abuse. Indeed, sometimes its impact can be very significant, as in the 2022 Ukrainian sinking and immediate registration as cultural heritage of the Russian warship Moskva. Perez-Alvaro observes that this is part of an ongoing campaign where both sides in the conflict are using maritime heritage as a political tool. The underwater record is full of direct evidence of past conflicts and networks of economic power, and maritime conflicts from the South China Sea, piracy in the Red Sea, and disputes about maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean are all ongoing. Maritime conflict is especially important in many of today's hybrid conflicts and underwater cultural remains are routinely used to argue ownership, frequently via social media. The media manipulation of maritime heritage to manipulate public opinion and provoke conflict leads **Perez-Alvaro** to argue that the international community must be vigilant in conserving maritime heritage and saving it from geopolitical exploitation.

Kristen Barrett-Casey's chapter examines Iraq's post-conflict legal system and its role in the conservation of cultural heritage, arguing that the legal framework both protects and endangers heritage. The 2005 Iraqi Constitution, influenced by the U.S. occupation, established a power-sharing system (*muhasasa*), which fragmented heritage management along sectarian lines. This legal structure commodifies heritage, treating it like oil and gas, prioritising revenue generation over preservation. Through case studies of religious sites such as the Al-Askari Mosque and the Shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel, Barrett-Casey illustrates how sectarian endowments undermine national heritage by privileging specific religious identities and enabling commercial exploitation. She discusses embattled humanity and the need to mainstream the advances made in the UN human rights support system. Like Lane and Merlo, she raised other issues of heritage destruction – why is some heritage reported more than others?

The interest in human rights is developed further by **Karima Bennoune,** who was the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. In her keynote for the theme *Cultural Heritage as a Human Right,* Bennoune makes a powerful call for the importance of cultural heritage to all humanity, beyond the specific links between some heritage and groups of people. Cultural heritage is not important just for itself but for other rights, such as freedom of expression or religion, and economic development. Bennoune is in no doubt that protecting cultural heritage is protecting human rights. She critiques the UN Security Council's counterterrorism focus, calling for a more integrated human rights perspective across international policies. Additionally, she highlights the risks faced by cultural heritage defenders, urging stronger protections for those safeguarding heritage under threat.

Jessica Wagner makes a strong case for the importance of cultural heritage as a human right through direct association between cultural and biological genocide. Cultural property is viewed as mere materiality, negligible when compared to safeguarding human lives. Wagner makes a number of important points, firstly that attacks on cultural heritage can serve as advance warning of genocidal violence. Secondly, that culture shapes a group's collective identity. Culture is people, so when cultural heritage is destroyed, people are destroyed, the fabric of a culture is eroded, and the structure of a group becomes weak, making it far easier to eradicate in genocide. She argues that **c**ultural property protection (CPP) acts as a safeguard through forewarning, resistance, empowerment, and reconciliation, making it essential for preventing genocide and preserving human rights.

Sheikh Saqib and Carlyn Morris in their chapter on *Rohingya Narratives Beyond Victimhood* start from the point that the denial of a cultural life can appear minor in the face of genocide – but that of course such a genocidal campaign is often targeting and othering a specific (ethno)cultural group – the target is to some extent the cultural life and heritage. Victimhood can become an important part of identity, used externally, while the suffering felt is expressed more internally. Cultural heritage may be put aside in order to focus on the basic needs for survival, or cultural heritage may be subverted in the need to establish greater identity boundaries as part of the process of survival – what is Rohingya and what is not. Rohingya heritage faces existential threats not only due to destruction in Myanmar but also due to assimilation pressures in diaspora and refugee contexts. Heritage is both neglected in crisis situations and sometimes redefined as a survival strategy, reinforcing or reshaping Rohingya identity. They argue that reporting on cultural heritage destruction should be reflective and responsible, avoiding simplistic narratives that perpetuate passive victimhood.

Ashish Makander picks this up in a global approach, observing a politisation of the cultural landscape, deliberate destruction of plural histories, and in consequence a need to help build new dialogues that do not succumb to the negative use of heritage to support majority hegemonisation, the use of culture to provoke conflict. Rather, we need

to take the many cultural identities and learn to weave them into a resilient and inclusive form. He examines urbicide as a deliberate strategy to erase plural histories and consolidate majoritarian control. He critiques colonial and legal frameworks that enable this destruction and argues for reconstructing heritage narratives through inclusive and community-led approaches. The chapter also highlights the role of memory and architecture in countering erasure, making it vital that architects, civil engineers, and policymakers engage in heritage discussions.

In her case study on the historic city of Shiraz, Iran, **Mona Azarnoush** examines the role of media in safeguarding the city's historic fabric amid threats posed by urban development and religious tourism. She explores how a strategically coordinated news dissemination campaign mobilised public awareness, engaged experts, and pressured authorities into action. Through media-driven activism, the campaign temporarily halted destruction and ultimately secured the registration of Shiraz's historic context on Iran's National Heritage List, making its demolition a criminal offence. The study underscores the necessity of accurate, neutral, and legally supported heritage reporting, emphasising the importance of building trust with local communities. However, for such reporting to be effective, governments must separate heritage destruction coverage from political controversies and ensure comprehensive legal protections for journalists and reporters.

Timothy Clack explores the intricate relationship between media reporting and the destruction of cultural heritage in conflict zones. Using the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine as a focal point, the chapter highlights how cultural heritage is both a casualty and a weapon of war. The discussion extends to other global conflicts, demonstrating how media coverage varies, often shaped by geographical proximity, conflict complexity, and editorial agendas. The chapter underscores that media reporting can amplify or suppress awareness, influence public sentiment, and even shape the strategies of conflict actors. It draws lessons from counter-terrorism reporting, emphasising the need for ethical guidelines and media literacy to balance public interest with the risk of incentivising further destruction. This chapter serves as a bridge to the next theme on *Media Reporting and Heritage Destruction*, which delves deeper into how media narratives influence perceptions of heritage loss, international responses, and policy-making.

Under the theme *Media Reporting and Heritage Destruction*, **Sebastian Usher** brought us onto the core theme where the issue is one of superficiality and depth. The story of a single tree in the UK and its media impact gave people in the UK an insight into the importance of things. News editors and reporters must constantly judge the balance between conveying the human cost of conflict and the material destruction in a short, immediate response. While newsrooms have benefited from the democratisation of recording conflict through mobile phones, this has created new challenges over authenticity and propaganda against the flood of information – much of which is out before professional journalists can verify it. The destruction of cultural heritage by ISIS was as prominent a part in their propaganda as the beheading of their captives. The observations made in the preceding chapters indicate that the dichotomy between culture and life should not be over-stated – indeed following Wagner's point that cultural heritage destruction is often a forewarning of genocide, cultural heritage destruction should be reported at an early stage – but this still leaves the question of how to avoid providing propaganda points. Sebastian Usher explores how cultural destruction has historically been used as a weapon of war and how modern conflicts, particularly in Gaza and Ukraine, highlight its ongoing strategic use.

Bijan Rouhani examines the narrative patterns surrounding the destruction of cultural heritage from ancient times to the digital age, focusing on how such destruction has been reported, interpreted, and instrumentalised. In his chapter *Sowing Salt and Cultivating Fear*, he explores how these narratives have historically served propaganda purposes, reinforcing power structures, ideological dominance, and nationalist movements. This is evident in examples ranging from Mesopotamian inscriptions and Roman triumphal arches to revolutionary iconoclasm, wartime destruction, and digital-era media strategies. In modern conflicts, heritage destruction has become a strategic objective, with state and non-state actors leveraging digital media to shape public perception. The chapter argues that while new media democratise information and facilitate rapid dissemination, they also amplify propaganda, exacerbate the spread of misinformation, deepen ideological divisions, and transform heritage destruction into a consumable spectacle.

Mohamed Fareed reports a tendency in state media to emphasise government efforts in heritage preservation, portray cultural destruction as a threat to national identity, and downplay any potential involvement of state authorities in neglect or destruction. Fareed examines how state media in Egypt portrays heritage destruction, emphasising government-led preservation efforts while downplaying state involvement in demolition or neglect. He contrasts this with non-state media, which expose how modernisation projects, real estate interests, and selective heritage policies contribute to cultural loss. The state glorifies Pharaonic heritage for tourism and nationalism, while Islamic, modern, and politically sensitive heritage is often side-lined, despite a potentially greater connection

to ordinary Egyptians. Heritage destruction is framed as a trade-off for development, with independent voices challenging this narrative by documenting loss, gentrification, and erasure.

Bijan Rouhani and **Bill Finlayson** in their chapter on *Cultural Heritage in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)*, examine the extensive yet largely overlooked destruction of cultural heritage during this conflict. Despite its immense impact on historic cities, monuments, museums, and intangible heritage, the war received minimal international attention regarding cultural property protection. The authors compare this neglect to the heightened global concern in later conflicts in the region. They explore factors such as the absence of media coverage, limited archaeological engagement, strained ties following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the lack of international intervention, and the absence of "strategic value" from the perspective of superpowers, all of which contributed to this disparity. In addition to external factors, aside from the work of government specialist agencies, there were no vocal heritage activism movements dedicated to reporting and protecting cultural heritage during the war in either Iran or Iraq.

Returning to the issue of cultural heritage as state propaganda, **Mark Dunkley** discusses the propaganda uses of cultural heritage destruction reporting. Dunkley notes that the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) recognises that the protection of cultural property in conflict can preserve and enhance the UK's reputation locally and globally, maintain the ability to influence those amongst whom the UK operates, and even contribute to force protection and freedom of manoeuvre. Expanding on this, Dunkley explores how Cultural Heritage Intelligence (CHINT) is now formally recognised as a tool within military strategy, enabling armed forces to understand how adversaries might exploit heritage for political, economic, and military gain. The chapter highlights NATO's evolving approach to cultural heritage protection, linking it to broader human security objectives. Dunkley also presents the wargame Exercise HORIZON STRIKE, a training scenario designed to test how military forces engage with cultural heritage in conflict zones. The exercise demonstrates the complexity of balancing cultural property protection with operational demands and highlights the necessity of integrating CHINT into strategic planning to prevent heritage from being weaponised.

Afifa Khan and colleagues provide a review of how social media has developed its role within a wider media context, a fast-moving relationship again changed since the reelection of Donald Trump as president of the USA. Social media usage is not uniform in South Asia, with differences between countries, genders and urban/rural populations. Unsurprisingly, social media are being used actively by cultural heritage organisations and has proved successful in public engagement, including across borders. Unfortunately, its popularity has also led to its misuse. Khan and colleagues argue that although social media is not legally held to the same standards as traditional media, heritage professionals have a duty to report to these standards, bringing us firmly into the centre of the debate. They also recognise the political sensitivities that may arise while discussing the UK-based MAHSA project and the dominant use of English. Despite sensitivity to these issues, social media has been a substantial factor in amplifying friction between Muslim and Hindu communities and their cultural heritage. There have been other beneficial uses of social media, such as by the Kalash community, although the same information has been misused by tourists. The chapter highlights how social media both facilitates and threatens cultural heritage preservation, especially in politically fraught contexts. Heritage disputes, such as the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, have been amplified on digital platforms, spreading misinformation and increasing religious tensions. Meanwhile, grassroots initiatives have used social media to report endangered heritage, pressuring authorities into action, as seen in Pakistan's Buddhist heritage conservation efforts. The chapter calls for responsible engagement with digital platforms, urging heritage professionals to balance accessibility with ethical reporting while navigating the challenges of misinformation, political exploitation, and digital inequalities.

Alula Tesfay Ashfa examines the impact of the Tigray conflict (2020–2022) on Ethiopia's cultural heritage, detailing the widespread destruction, looting, and neglect of historic sites, churches, mosques, and manuscripts. This chapter explores how cultural heritage was weaponised – both as a target of violence and a tool of propaganda. Despite these challenges, grassroots efforts, remote sensing technologies, and international collaboration have played crucial roles in documenting and restoring damaged heritage. The chapter advocates for increased global attention, funding, and policy interventions to support Tigray's cultural recovery, emphasising heritage's role in resilience, community identity, and post-conflict reconciliation. The request for increased attention is a clear call for media reporting.

Favour Uruko describes the unusual Nigerian context, where traditional cultural festivals are vanishing in the face of terrorism. However, the terrorists are often sponsored by politicians to undermine their opponents, but then run out of control. Non-state actors often act with impunity, banning the cultural festivals. The chapter details how festivals like the Durbar Festival and Argungu Fishing Festival once united communities, boosted tourism,

and reinforced cultural identity. Their disappearance has eroded social cohesion and economic stability. Religious extremism, Fulani herdsmen conflicts, and the rise of insurgent groups have made public gatherings dangerous, leading to widespread fear and avoidance. The Nigerian government's inaction and occasional sympathy toward terrorist groups have further exacerbated the situation. Without intervention, these historic cultural traditions may be lost forever**.**

The engagement of Russian media on the recent Syrian conflict provides a very different context. **Thomas Richard** describes how Russian, especially private, media companies have managed an extremely successful narrative. In what has been explicitly described as an information war in the Russian media, Russian reporting has provided a counter to what they see as a biased Western viewpoint. Richard has analysed the Russian politicisation of reporting of Syrian heritage in a chapter that is at the heart of the discussions of this volume. The stories provided pick up directly from the former Syrian regime's use of heritage as symbolic of the nation's identity and confirming this value through interviews with ordinary citizens. This immediately identifies heritage destruction with the opposition and allows destruction by the regime or Russian forces to be side-lined and ignored, supporting the representation of the conflict as a battle between good and evil. It is suggested that the Russians were there to support the regime's protection of heritage, with the media focusing on Russian military police support for heritage protection, or Russian sappers undertaking mine clearance. This carefully curated media approach positioned Russia as the legitimate protector of Syrian heritage, further solidifying its geopolitical influence in the region.

During our conference there was discussion of the post-conflict uses of cultural heritage in the first steps towards peace. A paradox was identified where heritage has specific meanings for different groups, risking its deployment for partisan or majority uses, including state building where it can be seen as benign, against the need to recognise the common heritage of humanity and to transcend narrow identity boundaries. More specifically, reporting cultural heritage destruction prevents denial and allows rebuilding. Unfortunately, as noted by Usher, there is a need to invest in on the ground reporting in the aftermath of conflict when proper investigations can be carried out, but also at the point when public interest is waning.

The Oxford Recommendations on Reporting Heritage Destruction provide a framework for ethical and accurate media coverage of cultural heritage destruction, particularly in conflict zones. Developed by the ECHGS Hub at Oxford University and the Working Group, the recommendations emphasise cultural heritage as both a human rights issue and a critical element of community identity.

The objectives of the recommendations include ensuring responsible reporting, preventing heritage destruction from being exploited for propaganda, and promoting ethical journalism that respects affected communities. The document highlights that heritage destruction is often linked to broader human rights violations, war crimes, and ideological conflicts, necessitating sensitive and informed reporting.

Journalists must prioritise personal safety and ethical reporting, ensuring their coverage does not cause harm to individuals or communities. Reporting should avoid amplifying extremist narratives, misinformation, or justifying military interventions. Coverage should include diverse perspectives, particularly from marginalised and indigenous communities, to reflect the full scope of heritage destruction.

Given that heritage destruction is considered a war crime, journalists should document incidents carefully to support potential legal proceedings. Media coverage should not be limited to immediate reports but should follow up on heritage and community recovery. Social media must be used responsibly, ensuring verification of sources and countering disinformation.

These recommendations aim to bridge the gap between journalism, heritage preservation, and human rights advocacy, ensuring informed, respectful, and impactful reporting. The preservation of cultural property is a vital step in safeguarding against humanitarian crimes – and reporting cultural heritage destruction becomes as important as reporting on loss of life. This feeds directly into how cultural heritage operates as a human right. Clearly an imposed heritage, or one appropriated for purposes such as state building, has less resonance.

In conclusion, the chapters in this volume underscore the complexities inherent in reporting on heritage destruction, which present both significant advantages and potential drawbacks. On the one hand, such reporting raises public awareness, mobilises responses, informs policy decisions, and enables researchers and organisations to assess risks to cultural assets. Accurate documentation can also counter political and conflict propaganda, provide legally robust evidence where crimes have been committed, and ensure that victims' voices are acknowledged. Moreover,

it plays a crucial role in gathering evidence for legal prosecution and facilitating post-conflict reconstruction and/or memorialisation through community engagement. The destruction of heritage frequently serves as an indicator of broader socio-political crises, including ethnic cleansing and systemic violence.

On the other hand, reporting, particularly when biased, may be instrumentalised in serving political or ideological agendas, thereby exacerbating tensions and perpetuating conflict. If mismanaged, it can inadvertently incentivise further destruction, as well as contribute to the recruitment and financing of extremist movements. Additionally, heightened reporting can lead to the securitisation of heritage, prompting increased state or military involvement in its protection, which may have both protective and restrictive consequences.

An excessive focus on iconoclasm and ideological dimensions risks obscuring the deeper political, historical, or colonial contexts that shape heritage discourses. Furthermore, media narratives often privilege certain interpretations of heritage, frequently presented as "universal values" while marginalising or disregarding the specific needs and perspectives of local communities.

Note on the Cover Art

As editors, we decided that, in light of the central themes of the proceedings, an image of destroyed cultural heritage on the front cover was inappropriate. This could lend itself to accusations of insensitivity on the one hand and promulgating propaganda and extending the impacts of the destructive act on the other. Instead, we decided to use an abstract artwork which speaks to issues of violence, identity, emotion, threat and aftermath. We were at once fortunate and delighted to get permission from the artist, Doug Farthing to use his oil on canvas work, "Destruction of Heritage" for the cover (see Figure 1).

The background to the artwork makes it even more apt. Doug Farthing, who was trained at the Royal Drawing School, has held many successful exhibitions, including at the National Army Museum, Imperial War Museum and University of Oxford in the UK as well as overseas, including in Ukraine and the Falkland Islands. Formerly a soldier, he has for many years worked in the humanitarian sector. In summer 2024, having returned to the UK after spending nearly 18 months overseas working for aid agencies in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza and having seen the aftermaths of countless acts of heritage destruction, he produced this artwork and many others in an attempt to make sense of his experiences.

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Figure 1. Doug Farthing next to his artwork in summer 2024 (credit: T. Clack)

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SECTION I.
WHO OWNS AND VALUES CULTURAL HERITAGE?

Chapter 1.
Heritage Without People: On the Search for New Forms of History Written by the People

Ammar Azzouz

On the 23rd of October 2023, Justin Amash, an American lawyer and politician born to Palestinian and Syrian parents, posted a video on his social media account, X, and wrote:

> "In this video, provided to me by a relative on site, you can see the destruction at Saint Porphyrius Orthodox Church in Gaza. The ancient sanctuary remains standing, but the church annex, which includes offices and meeting spaces for the Christian community, collapsed from an Israeli airstrike, killing multiple members of three connected Orthodox Christian families, who are my relatives. They are my dad's first cousins and their spouses, children, and in-laws. May their memories be eternal". (Amash 2023)

This statement came after an Israeli airstrike hit the building immediately adjacent to the church on the 19th of October. The church, which is the oldest active church in Gaza and was established in the 5th century CE, was not only a place of worship but also a shelter and refuge for those in Gaza. The Guardian newspaper reported that hundreds of Christians and Muslims were sheltering there (Graham-Harrison 2023). Palestinians thought that the church would be a safe place, but where is safe in Gaza during the recent conflict?

The airstrike killed at least 16 people, four of them were children. On the day after, the killed Palestinians were laid out in the courtyard of the church for a mass funeral, wrapped in white sheets and surrounded by mourners and grieving Palestinians.

On the 28th of October, Palestinian-American journalist, Daoud Kuttab, posted on his social media account, X, a photograph of a crowd of men, women, and children inside the church. He wrote, "collective baptism in Gaza, just in case their children are killed they want to be sure that they are baptised." (Kuttab 2023)

The destruction at the church, while it was being used as a sanctuary, is a clear example of where it is impossible to think about cultural heritage without thinking of the people within and around it who were killed and injured. However, my purpose here is to highlight how often we hear about the destruction of heritage without hearing about the people.

Of course, it is not only cultural heritage sites that are targeted in times of violence. The United Nations has reported that at the time of writing this chapter (November 2023), 43% of housing units in Gaza had been destroyed by the Israeli armed forces. The damage and destruction also includes schools, mosques, hospitals, and bakery shops, the very fabric of social life in Gaza that forms the everyday cultural heritage of the people.

You would think that cultural heritage advocates, academics, journalists, and institutions would be reporting this, and that they would be writing about the destruction of this church and the impact of this mass destruction on people's lives and their heritage. However, when I went to UNESCO's website, and searched for the church's name I only found two articles on it, both from 2015. One article was published by UNESCO on Gaza with a focus on schools. This made me wonder what kind of response this mass destruction would have received if it was in a different geography. Do international organisations value cultural heritage sites selectively? Indeed, do they value heritage selectively? And, if so, why?

As Angela Davis said in an interview in October 2023 "I just can't imagine that those of us who call ourselves scholar-activist... I can't imagine not calling for justice for Palestine. I can't imagine the whole agenda of social justice in the world not including Palestine" (Lamont Hill 2023). Indeed, it is impossible for those who call themselves scholar activists not to talk about Palestine, and moreover, it is impossible to think about heritage and destruction without thinking about Palestine.

In the last few years, I have been looking at the relationship between cultural heritage sites and conflicts, violence, dictatorships, and occupation (Azzouz 2023). Very often, I have seen how cultural heritage has been written about and documented without listening to the stories of the people who inhabit it. Consider the tragic destruction from Ukraine,

Yemen, and Palestine, to Syria, Iraq and Libya. I read academic papers without hearing the voices of people, I watch coverage of heritage without seeing the faces of local communities; I ask again and again, where are the people?

Faceless wars. Abstract wars. Wars that turn people into numbers, and peoples' struggle into a quick reportage or a superficial and shallow heritage project. And the heritage of the people is seen without people, what you see are only stones in ruins. I ask again and again, where are the people? When talking about the theme of 'who owns and values cultural heritage?', the letter of invitation to the conference from the organising team noted that "if cultural heritage is seen as a human right, however, it must be dealt with not as a set of monuments and artefacts but together with the communities in which it is located, who can then become part of the heritage that requires protection, becoming both part of its guardianship and benefitting from that protection." Yet, from the empty landscapes of the ruins in Palmyra in news reports, to the abandoned streets of Mosul in academic conferences, one can only ask, where are the people? I therefore wish to ask; can history be written from below? And are new forms of history needed?

First, **the need for writing a history from below**: In an interview published in September 2023 (Lamloum 2023), Professor Khaled Fahmy, a historian who writes extensively on Egypt, notes that in the dominant nationalist or Islamist discourses of the Arab region, history is understood as shaped by elites, statesmen and intellectuals and is focused on the development of state power. He explains that there are generally only small and marginal efforts to reflect on society. These histories, which do not focus on the citizens who compose society, create dire conditions where people, including those often marginalised, such as women, ethnic and religious communities, and even Muslim males, feel excluded and estranged. Citizens, therefore, do not believe that this history is theirs and instead feel disconnected.

I want to take Fahmy's thoughts and apply them to the study of cultural heritage. When we hear about the destruction of an ancient monument, or we read in the academic literature about the preservation and reconstruction of cities in ruins, we rarely hear about the people who live around and within these heritage sites, and we hardly ever hear an acknowledgement or about ownership of local knowledge. People are actively disconnected from their heritage by those who would protect it, and this contributes to new forms of intellectual colonialism. When we hear about the destruction of the heritage of Ukraine, Iraq, Palestine or Syria, it is reported separately from the suffering of local communities.

Second, **the need to search for new forms of history:** While history from below or people's history has a long academic tradition (e.g., Febvre 1932; Thompson 1966), this has had limited impact on the discourses of the Arab world, and even less on the narratives of cultural heritage, its ownership, and its destruction. If we need to discover a new form of history from below it is important for journalists, academics and researchers to look deeper and search harder for the voices of local communities and to find new ways to engage within the context of conflict and heritage destruction. Of course, 'local' has to include those who have been purposefully removed from their heritage, for instance diaspora and exiled communities who continue the process of making and remaking home from afar. In the Syrian case, which has been the focus of my research for the last several years, there have been several projects and festivals that aim to build an immaterial Syria that reconnects people to their heritage remotely, separate from the physical and tangible built heritage of 'home'. Examples include the Celebrating Syria Festival in Manchester, started in 2017, and the annual Syrian Arts and Culture Festival in London. Both festivals offer platforms for Syrian artists, architects, writers, academics and poets to share their artistic efforts in exile. Another example is the Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution, an online archive (https://creativememory.org/archive/) that has documented the revolution since 2013 with geospatial entries, allowing the archives to be searched by governorates, cities and towns.

I lived in a war zone. I know that behind every broken stone, there is a story. Behind every pile of rubble, there was a dream, behind every falling dome, every ruined minaret, every abandoned street, and every bombed bakery shop, there were lives. I struggle to write this as we witness a livestream destruction of Gaza. But as Angela Davis said last month, "of course there are moments when we feel extremely distressed, and this is one of the most tragic moments of our recent history.... But we have to believe that it is possible to make a change, and we can't give up, we can't give up, we can't not hope, because hope is the condition of all struggles". (Lamont Hill 2023)

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Chapter 2.
What Role for International Institutions in Promoting People-Led Heritage?

Elly Harrowell and Aparna Tandon

Introduction

Cultural heritage is at the heart of systemic and overlapping vulnerabilities – conflict, disaster and climate change. Of late, much international attention has been directed at the negative impact of these forces on heritage, from painful images of iconic heritage damaged by war in places such as Ukraine and Gaza, to the terrible toll inflicted on heritage by disasters (climate-induced and otherwise) which increasingly damage the vital links between people and the heritage that nourishes them. Heritage can also provide a powerful tool for communities seeking to resist and bounce back from such events, providing emotional and spiritual solace, connection to their communities in times of great hardship, and even economic support in the aftermath of crisis. This has led to a renewed focus on a perennial question - how can international heritage institutions best respond to these serious and overlapping crises? Situated at the vanguard of cultural protection efforts worldwide, international institutions such as UNESCO, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) - amongst others - appear uniquely well placed to lead international heritage work in times of crisis.

However, these same institutions face a number of challenges. The frequency and intensity of disasters, conflicts and humanitarian crises are significant and increasing due to the impact of climate change, placing an ever-increasing burden on already limited resources in the realm of heritage protection. Safeguarding of cultural heritage is not included within the remit of the international humanitarian aid system (replicated at national levels), meaning cultural protection remains underfunded, ad hoc and donor-driven. At the same time, heritage institutions have faced sustained criticism as to whether they are, in fact, best placed to lead this important work, having been variously criticised as paternalistic, Eurocentric and insufficiently inclusive of the voices and concerns of local populations and marginalised groups.

In this chapter, we attempt to address this debate and suggest one way forward. Drawing on the experiences of ICCROM's flagship 'First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis' programme (FAR-ICCROM), we argue that a 'people-led' approach to heritage can provide a pathway to more sustainable and equitable approaches to heritage care, particularly in times of crisis. People-led approaches to heritage are not only more effective, but also more ethical in their intent and impacts. We then go on to ask how such an approach can be moved from the realm of theory into practice, particularly in the context of international institutions. Reflecting on examples from FAR-ICCROM's practice, we identify a number of learning points that can help organisations seeking to integrate a people-led approach to their work, as well as identifying barriers to the widespread adoption of this approach. Finally, we reflect on what lessons could be drawn from this experience for media organisations seeking to report on crisis-affected heritage.

Given our focus on putting people and communities at the heart of heritage work, it is important to define what we mean when we refer to 'local communities' or 'heritage communities'. We understand this as 'people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations' in keeping with Article 2B of the Faro Convention (2005). The element of intention at the heart of this definition is echoed in non-Western interpretations that emphasise the mutually constitutive relationship between people and heritage (see Daes 1993, for example, or Janke 1998). However, it is important to heed the calls of indigenous and post-colonial scholar-activists to be cognisant of the power deployed in deciding who is deemed to be part of a heritage community (Hall 2023), and to conceptualise the notion in more inclusive and holistic terms (Daes 1993; Janke 1998). This means acknowledging the potential dissonance in heritage communities, and challenging the sometimes homogenising tendencies inherent in the term 'community' (Tauschek 2015; Valverde et al 2022). As Lehrer (2019: 259) suggests, moving to 'transcend the modern Western framework

of "possessive individualism"' when thinking about communities and their relationship to heritage opens up the space to understand the many ways in which people are implicated in heritage, and how this can shift according to time, context and identities. In practice, the work of FAR-ICCROM has largely focussed on people who depend on heritage for their livelihoods locally, or are directly impacted by damage or risks to it. Nonetheless, it acknowledges that people can be implicated in conflict or disaster-affected heritage in a variety of ways and that the notion of the 'heritage community' may be far broader than is first assumed. It is also important to note that one particularity of working with conflict and disaster-affected heritage specifically is that these communities can, in many cases, find themselves displaced by the impact of these processes and events, as refugees or Internally Displaced People, for example. This behoves those working with heritage to think inclusively about who is considered to be part of a 'local' or 'heritage community', including taking into account the tensions and competing priorities that may exist within this group based on their differing experiences of the crisis, or other salient identity characteristics.

Heritage Institutions and Their Critics

International heritage institutions and funding bodies have faced pointed criticism for their approach to defining and engaging with heritage in recent years. Such bodies have variously been critiqued as top-down, overly focused on the material and monumental, and insufficiently open to local or subaltern conceptions of heritage. As a result, influential actors in the field of international heritage protection risk excluding heritage bearers from vital conversations about what heritage should be valued and how it can be best protected, ultimately undermining the overall aims of heritage protection at the heart of these bodies.

Criticisms levelled at these conversations have largely centred around three issues. Firstly, the promotion of a universalist heritage discourse, which, in actual fact, represents a specifically Western view of heritage. Secondly, the concern that this discourse, in fact, represents a continuation of colonial-era forms of dispossession and violence against countries and communities in the Global South. Thirdly, the effect of policies and practices enacted by international heritage institutions in the name of heritage protection effectively serves to marginalise local communities from their heritage. Whilst international institutions have taken some steps to address these criticisms, these have met with limited success. At the same time, increasing demands on heritage institutions to work with conflict-affected heritage has led to a further concern that these interventions may inadvertently fan the flames of further violence.

Criticism 1: Eurocentrism

Many writers have raised concerns that global heritage institutions are Eurocentric, reflecting a worldview based on European enlightenment values since their inception (Aikawa Faure 2009; Di Giovine 2008; Labadi 2005, 2007; Silva 2016). This, they argue, has led to the creation of a global heritage discourse that, whilst making claims to universality and value-free, is, in fact, intrinsically linked to a very particular worldview with particular understandings regarding the materiality and authenticity of heritage (Silva 2016). By consequence, this is exclusionary to other forms of heritage – a 'totalising discourse representing a global hierarchy of value' (Harrison 2015: 303).

Although steps have been introduced to try to address this Eurocentric view (see below), it continues to be reinforced and sustained by the creation of a global professional class of heritage workers that reproduce these values through their practice, and by the mutually reinforcing nature of texts, norms and practices disseminated through these institutions and professional networks (Silva 2016). What is more, it is argued that this system reinforces the dominance of rich, predominantly northern countries with the resources available to 'play the game' by winning funding, acquiring coveted heritage status, or influencing policy, reinforcing the primacy afforded to certain types of heritage (Meskell and Brumann 2015).

Criticism 2: Neo-colonialism

Some authors have further extended this critique of Eurocentrism, explaining the role and interventions of global heritage institutions in post- and neo-colonialist terms (Giblin 2015; Harrison 2015; Munawar 2018; Ndoro and Wijersuriya 2015).

As noted by Ndoro and Wijesuriya, 'The colonial heritage management systems appear to have also acquired a strong ally in the international and global institutions that seem to reinforce the heritage definitions, practice, and systems emanating from the colonial period' (2015:131). That is to say, systems and practices for heritage management and conservation emanating from European heritage traditions were imposed on many countries in the Global South during colonial times, overlooking the existence of local level or pre-colonial heritage management structures (Ndoro and Wijesuriya 2015). In the post-colonial era, these have been largely reinforced by international heritage institutions through their policies and guidance as well as through their role in training and forming new generations of heritage professionals.

This means that international heritage institutions face criticism for sustaining unjust colonial structures

and practices (indeed, some heritage interventions in recent years have been characterised as 'neocolonial interventions' (de Cesari 2015; Munawar 2018). In addition, scholars such as Giblin have argued that 'increasingly professionalised, authorised and ultimately colonising heritage practices' (2015: 315), upheld by international institutions, contribute to the appropriation of community heritage by states, experts and even the private sector. This, Giblin argues, represents the continuation of a tradition of colonial dispossession (often experienced as a form of violence by affected communities) in the post-colonial era.

Criticism 3: Marginalisation

This, in turn, leads to a third major criticism of international heritage institutions – that in practice, they have marginalised local voices and conceptions of heritage. This has occurred in several ways. Firstly, by privileging material heritage over intangible heritage (in keeping with traditional European conceptions of heritage) (Silva 2016). Secondly, by privileging conservation over development. As Ndoro and Wijersuriya (2015: 145) note 'local voices and aspirations unfortunately do not frequently coincide with the interests of global heritage discourses', and in this clash, it is most often the local voices that lose out. Thirdly, by privileging 'experts' over communities in defining what counts as heritage, and in deciding how it should be managed and preserved, and further reproducing the system through the training of future generations of such experts (Giblin 2015; Ndoro and Wijersuriya 2015). Finally, through their very nature as bodies that operate through and for states rather than at a community level, even when this is damaging (Fishman 2010; Logan 2002). Taken together, this has had the result of marginalising communities from their heritage, or failing even to acknowledge their heritage as such (Isakhan and Meskell 2019).

Institutional responses to criticism

Of course, these criticisms are not new – they have been raised in various forms over a number of years. In response, international heritage institutions have taken a number of steps to try to address certain elements of persistent critique.

In response to the charge of Eurocentrism, as demonstrated in the unbalanced nature of listings in UNESCO World Heritage for example, a Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced, and Credible World Heritage List was adopted in 1994 to try and facilitate recognition of a wider range of heritage sites across the world. Non-western countries pioneered the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguard of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 to combat the bias towards materiality and Eurocentrism in the way heritage is defined and valued in the international arena. Significantly, this expansion of the concept of heritage within the international sphere started to make space for greater recognition of the value of local knowledge.

Similarly, the adoption of the Nara document on authenticity (ICOMOS 1994), and its subsequent integration into other principles, represented another attempt to break the stranglehold of European values on international heritage policy and management that had previously held sway, and introduced the principle of cultural relativity to discussions of authenticity. The Burra Charter (2013) represents another interesting example of this trend. It is periodically reviewed by the Australian National Committee of ICOMOS, and acknowledges that cultural significance may evolve over time, and through patterns of use. Article 12 of the Charter underscores the importance of involving individuals and communities who have meaningful connections and associations with a specific heritage site, thus moving further away from classic European heritage ideals.

Whilst steps such as these have been recognised as a 'paradigm shift in the global heritage discourse' (Silva 2016), for many they do not go far enough to address the criticisms raised of the role and impact of international heritage institutions.

On the one hand, some have noted challenges in translating the progress made in the realm of policy described above into real change in terms of implementation. Ndoro and Wijersuriya (2015) describe challenges in implementing the principles of the Nara Document by national experts, for example, whilst Tandon (2020) observes the same issue with the implementation of the Warsaw Principles. On the other hand, there is a growing recognition that some of these unresolved issues are only growing more acute as heritage bodies are increasingly called upon to act in highly charged conflict-affected areas, and as contestation around cultural heritage has become front-page news.

Recent conversations regarding the impacts of climate change-induced disasters and conflicts on heritage highlight the urgency of reassessing heritage- what is significant about a place and to whom is it significant (Climate Heritage Network 2022). They point to the necessity of comprehending and honouring the functioning of communities at the frontlines of the climate crisis, including their methods of heritage identification. This understanding is crucial for effective climate change adaptation, using traditional/local knowledge and decision-making structures. Supported by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples (2007), there is an increasing acknowledgement within the heritage sector that place-specific Indigenous knowledge, which is crucial for adapting to a changing climate, must be interpreted within the customary system in which it has developed. Demonstrating respect for indigenous knowledge and culture involves familiarising ourselves with and adhering to local community cultural protocols.

Conflict and disaster risk – a fourth criticism

This leads to a fourth area in which international heritage institutions have faced increasing criticism – their potential to act in ways which worsen, rather than alleviate, the dynamics of conflicts and disasters.

In these cases, heritage institutions that are seen to perpetuate colonial relations and marginalise or overlook local communities risk negatively impacting violent conflicts or undermining disaster risk reduction strategies. This can be by intervening in ways that inadvertently exacerbate or shift conflict dynamics (Harrowell 2023; Tandon, et al 2021), or by legitimising jingoistic and exclusionary nationalism, or state-level attempts at cultural reification (Askew 2010; Isakhan and Meskell 2019; Logan 2012). Whilst the relationship between heritage and nationalism is certainly nothing new, it can be particularly dangerous, the argument goes, when given the weight of international institutions and the febrile atmosphere of conflict-affected societies. In a similar vein, it has been contended that 'cultural factors, such as religion, social systems and traditional livelihoods impede efforts to reduce the vulnerability of communities residing in regions prone to natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, or volcanoes' (Cannon 2008). However, this aspect has yet to receive adequate recognition in the international discourse on heritage.

As we move into the era of the so-called 'polycrisis', as the emergence of compound risk events, including interactions of conflict and disaster events, has been termed (UNDRR 2023), it becomes ever more important for heritage organisations to fully understand how their interventions may affect these complex dynamics. Interventions in the wake of disaster have often been perceived as less politically charged than those in the wake of conflict, for example (see Harrowell and Ozerdem 2018), even though both have profoundly political (and often overlapping) causes and consequences that should be taken into account. Responding effectively in these contexts requires appropriate tools, analysis, and consideration of the different timelines, actors and sensitivities that are implicated – something that heritage organisations have not traditionally been well equipped to do.

Given these well-founded concerns, the question remains: how can international heritage institutions respond to this? One answer can be by developing the tools and practices to enable a 'people-led' approach to working with heritage, even in times of crisis.

Such concerns have provoked a process of reflection within the First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis (FAR), a flagship programme of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). Established in 2020, FAR-ICCROM aimed to reduce risks to tangible and intangible heritage emanating from violent conflicts, disasters, and the climate crisis. The programme trains, supports in-field action, builds knowledge and sustains a community of practice with an overall goal to safeguard at-risk heritage, and leverage the processes involved to build disaster resilience, sustain peace, and enable just climate action. The programme was developed in response to a number of identified challenges related to safeguarding heritage from disaster and violent conflict. These included a lack of institutional support, systematic data gathering, or the presence of heritage professionals in the aftermath of crisis. What is more, there was a recognition that knowledge, information, and tools for assessing and mitigating risks to heritage were insufficient.

The programme has sought to respond to these critiques by developing a people-led approach to heritage protection in times of crisis. This approach is centred on a set of principles: understanding heritage as a socio-economic, political and cultural process with people at its heart; leveraging heritage processes for building peace; centring local voices as leaders and champions in heritage protection; and creating networks of diverse professionals and heritage bearers from the bottom-up that can help to address the multiple and interrelated challenges facing heritage during a crisis.

The Potential of People-Led Heritage

People-led approaches to heritage (or people-centred, as it is sometimes known) emphasise the human dimension of heritage as the starting point for all actions. A commitment to supporting people-led heritage affirms the knowledge, expertise and value of heritage in the eyes of the people for whom the heritage has cultural value rather than through the lens of external actors, often presented as the pre-eminent experts. This means listening to communities and heritage bearers about their beliefs, needs and expertise. Allowing them to set priorities, even if these run counter to 'best practice' of external experts. Creating tools, structures and capacities that support those 'living with and within the cultural heritage' in leading actions to care, restore and maintain that heritage (Chmutina et al 2021; Tandon 2021). At the same time, it is crucial to recognise power relations within a community that privilege one type of heritage

over that belonging to marginalised groups; or how cultural beliefs and traditional practices could be contributing to a community's vulnerability to conflicts and disasters (Chmutina et al 2019).

Whilst these may be laudable principles, the challenge lies in how to implement them, particularly in contexts that are affected by conflict, disaster or crisis (and therefore often characterised by a state of urgency). Nonetheless, it is possible to discern a number of actions that can put this principle into practice. These include:

- The creation (ideally co-creation) of context-specific tools and strategies for heritage care, that respond to the needs of heritage communities.
- Skills development, and inter-generational skills transfer, so heritage care can be led and carried out at the local level.
- Amplifying local voices in decision-making fora and institutions – through structural change, and capacity building for advocacy.
- Building networks from the 'bottom-up' so best practice can be shared and develop communities of practice in people-led heritage protection.

A cross-cutting principle that underpins these actions is the integration of training and in-field action in order to identify skills gaps and needs in partnership with communities and respond quickly. Having identified these strategies for implementing people-led approaches to crisis-affected heritage, the following section will examine some examples of how these have been actualised within the FAR-ICCROM programme so far.

To a certain extent, the emphasis on people-led approaches builds on previous work within ICCROM in this regard, particularly within work on living heritage. However, the shift to a more people-led approach also represents a recognition of the messages emerging from on-the-ground experiences of project delivery, reinforced by the support of non-Western member states. Experiences providing technical support and training in the immediate aftermath of mega disasters and protracted conflicts in cases such as Haiti (2010), Nepal (2015), the Philippines (2013), and Syria (2011) have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of adopting more inclusive approaches to heritage protection in crisis-affected contexts. ICCROM's initial programme of 'First Aid' training for heritage practitioners, which predated the establishment of the FAR-ICCROM programme, further deepened this process (ICCROM 2018). The systematic feedback gathered from trainees within this initiative has repeatedly underlined the value of people-led approaches in their work. This has created a positive feedback loop supporting the value of people-led heritage work, within ICCROM and within Member States (where some trainees have gone on to influence cultural policy decisions at the national level). Complementing the message emanating from the field, ICCROM Member States from Africa (Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Benin), Asia (Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand) and Latin America (Mexico, Chile, Argentina) have been vocal advocates for a non-Western approach to heritage safeguarding which centres the voice of affected communities, and moves beyond a focus on the materiality of heritage or on its technique of fabrication.

Implementing people-led approaches in the FAR-ICCROM programme

A number of initiatives have been developed as part of the FAR-ICCROM programme with the aim of putting people-centred approaches to heritage in crisis into practice. These include field projects for developing tools such as the Community-based Heritage Indicators for Peace and inSIGHT; Capacity development projects such as Alliance for Cultural First Aid, Peace and Resilience and Net Zero: Heritage for Climate Action; and network-building activities.

(Co)Creation of Tools and Strategies to Support People-Led Heritage

The development of specifically tailored tools and strategies to support people-led heritage has been an important step within FAR-ICCROM initiatives in recent years. For example, in order to understand what role cultural heritage plays in the lives of local people, which vulnerabilities it increases or which capacities, FAR-ICCROM developed inSIGHT, a vulnerability and capacity assessment tool, using a participatory game approach. Loughborough University (UK) and the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield joined ICCROM in developing and field-testing the game in Upper Racha, Georgia, which borders the Russian Federation and is an earthquake-prone region rich in cultural and natural heritage.

Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA) are commonly employed tools in disaster risk reduction practices. They help in gaining a better understanding of people's perceptions of disaster risk and identifying prevailing social, economic, political, or attitudinal weaknesses hindering the efforts to reduce the impacts of disasters. Simultaneously, VCA assists in identifying available resources an affected community uses to cope with the adverse effects.

Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCAs), involving local communities in assessing disaster or conflict-related risks to heritage, have so far rarely been used in heritage conservation practice. Recognising this as a crucial gap, FAR-ICCROM

conducted a field test of inSIGHT in two municipalities in Racha in 2019. The objective was not only to understand the vulnerabilities and capacities of the communities but also to identify the most significant elements of cultural heritage for these communities and their role in creating vulnerabilities and capacities. The participatory mapping process empowers people by showcasing their perceptions of not just the locality and risks but also their relationships with services, products, policies, or even daily activities - including cultural heritage, in this instance. By offering an informal, playful, yet culturally sensitive mode of engagement, people were able to participate freely.

The field testing of inSIGHT Racha, Georgia, emphasised that cultural heritage cannot be understood in isolation; it is intricately connected to broader environmental, political, social, and economic factors (Chmutina et al 2021). Additionally, the way local communities perceive and value heritage may differ from the classification used by national heritage authorities. For instance, some participants identified a library and a community centre as significant heritage sites, whereas these may not be officially recognised as such in the region. In essence, heritage is a fundamental aspect of human identity deeply ingrained in people's daily lives. While it contributes to sustainable development and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), its importance to local communities may not always be immediately apparent or prioritised. Moreover, its significance evolves continually in response to various changes, including those brought about by disasters and their accompanying contexts. In this case, the use of a specific participatory VCA tool was a key first step in supporting the emergence of a people-led assessment of local heritage.

Amplifying Local Voices

The role of place-specific knowledge held by indigenous communities in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation has been increasingly acknowledged in research and policy frameworks (such as the Sendai Framework in 2015 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in 2007). However, despite this recognition, indigenous knowledge and practices for the sustainable use of natural resources and environmental protection are often overlooked in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation plans.

This knowledge gap was one of the motivating factors behind the development of the Community-Based Heritage Indicators for Peace tool. Aimed at supporting heritage actors who are increasingly asked to work in conflict-affected contexts, the tool aims to capture and amplify local knowledge about the links between cultural heritage and peace whilst also bridging the gap between peacebuilding theory and practice, and heritage, ensuring that heritage practitioners have appropriate and cutting-edge tools and approaches to address these challenges. Having been developed on the basis of the Everyday Peace Indicators methodology (Mac Ginty and Firchow 2014), the approach was adapted through a series of workshops with heritage practitioners experienced in working on conflict-affected settings, then trialled in projects in Myanmar, Kosovo, and Yemen.

Rather than relying on international or 'top-down' frameworks for measuring peace (and the way peace and conflict affect and are affected by cultural heritage), this approach works with community members to identify potential heritage-based indicators through a series of workshops, participatory voting and monitoring activities. The idea is to produce indicators that reflect the ways the heritage communities understand and experience peace. Basing the measurement of peace in heritage is also an important step in ensuring that ways of measuring and thinking about peace and conflict are culturally situated. These help to guard against over-generalisation, and make sure that these conversations remain meaningful and accessible to people on the ground, and reflective of their concerns rather than of the preoccupations of national or international actors.

Building Networks from the Bottom-Up

One of the most significant strands of work undertaken with the aim of addressing knowledge gaps and designing and implementing effective cultural protection initiatives has been through the development of networks from the bottom-up. Nowhere has this been more important than in efforts to enhance the engagement of at-risk indigenous communities in broader national and local plans for disaster risk reduction and climate action through the *Net-Zero: Heritage for Climate Action* project launched in 2022 (backed by the Swedish Postcode Foundation).

This transformative capacity development project brings together various stakeholders, including heritage professionals, climate scientists, peacebuilders, farmers, pastoralists, craftspeople, and representatives from government and non-governmental institutions, in five climate hotspots: Brazil, Egypt, India, Sudan, and Uganda.

Supported by robust scientific research and the lived experiences of traditional knowledge bearers, the initial outcomes of the project include:

- A culture-based heat action plan for the city of Jodhpur, India, integrating traditional knowledge and practices to cope with extreme heat.

- Flood risk mitigation through the planting of native species in Kasese, Uganda.
- Enhancement of soil fertility and the establishment of an early warning system for floods and storms rooted in traditional knowledge.
- Development of seed banks to bolster food security in Uba Tuba, Brazil.
- Documentation of traditional knowledge and its intergenerational transfer for sustainable community-led flood risk management and early warning systems on Tuti Island, Sudan.

The comprehensive approach adopted by FAR-ICCROM, including training of trainers, ongoing mentoring support, provision of seed grants for post-training field projects, and the systematic harvesting of insights gained from field actions, particularly those implemented during crises, has fostered the creation of a robust network that is self-sustaining.

For instance, FAR-ICCROM's partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Georgia, Egypt, and Iraq exemplifies this sustainability. These NGOs were established by former course participants who received training and support from FAR-ICCROM. Today, they play a pivotal role in developing capacities not only within their own countries but also beyond their borders. By leveraging their expertise and resources, these organisations contribute significantly to heritage preservation and disaster risk reduction efforts in their respective regions.

Skills Development and Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster or violent conflict, the loss of cultural bearers through death or displacement poses significant challenges for recovery and rehabilitation efforts in the short term, and to the intergenerational transmission of vital knowledge in the longer term. Leveraging its network of over 2000 cultural first aiders, FAR-ICCROM provides crisis training to enhance knowledge and skills. This ensures that those trained can effectively share their expertise with their local communities.

For example, amidst the ongoing armed conflict, FAR-ICCROM has formed a strong partnership with its alumni network in Ukraine to develop capacities to assess, document and stabilise different types of heritage, fostering intergenerational exchange of knowledge and skills crucial for heritage safeguarding in the frontline regions.

Acknowledging that disasters, conflicts, and cultural heritage are socially embedded, and that cultural drivers of conflicts and disasters tend to overlap, FAR-ICCROM has focused on enhancing local participation in heritage preservation and its risk management. This effort involves implementing cascading capacity development projects that blend remote and hands-on training with post-training field projects developed closely with local communities in order to foster skills development.

As part of the Alliance for Cultural Heritage First Aid, Peace, and Resilience project, which ran from 2020 to 2022 with support from the Aliph Foundation, FAR-ICCROM trained twenty professionals across the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Subsequently, sixteen field projects, supported by seed grants and distance mentoring, were undertaken by this cohort. These projects trained 262 cultural first aiders and involved over 600 local residents in eight countries in safeguarding various types of heritage vulnerable to intersecting risks of conflict, climate change-induced extreme weather events, and epidemics.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, participants successfully carried out their field projects. These initiatives ranged from archiving recordings of traditional poems and songs in Yemen (currently banned by the Houthis) to documenting traditional practices in South Sudan essential for food security, climate adaptation, and peace between cattle-rearing and farming communities.

Discussion

We argue that these examples of a people-led approach, as implemented by FAR-ICCROM, demonstrate that there is still a role for international institutions in heritage protection, as long as they are willing to take a learning stance and actively seek to use their position and resources in the service of those for whom heritage has cultural value. The development and operationalisation of a people-led approach can represent a way forward for international heritage actors to act that is more effective, inclusive and equitable.

Adopting a people-led approach is more than a choice; it is an ethical and practical necessity. Working in this way gives institutions legitimacy to engage, capitalises on their strengths and experience whilst taking full account of the critiques noted earlier in this chapter. Putting people at the heart of the way heritage institutions work is the only way to meet the complex and interlinking challenges facing the world today, particularly given the complexity of conflict and disaster-affected contexts. It means capitalising on the expertise of those closest to the heritage in question, and marrying this with the knowledge and resources of large-scale institutions in order to improve outcomes for all. Such an approach can engender a virtuous circle, which drives structural and policy changes in heritage protection that further cement a people-centred

and fundamentally equitable approach to managing heritage futures.

It is possible to identify a number of factors that have supported the application of this approach in the FAR-ICCROM programme so far. This includes the emergence of a more diversified heritage funding landscape in recent years with the arrival of donors such as the Aliph Foundation and programmes like the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund. By explicitly referencing conflict or disaster-affected heritage, these types of funding support approaches which may previously have been dismissed as too risky. What is more, a greater attention has been paid to enabling work with smaller, local-level organisations rather than focusing on large-scale institutions. It is also worth noting that the flexible mandate of ICCROM to work with a broad range of actors, instead of only governmental stakeholders, has been an enabling factor in integrating a people-led approach.

The prioritising of support for disaster- and conflict-affected heritage by international heritage institutions, states and funders is, in many ways, the logical next step for organisations seeking to support the protection of cultural heritage – a diversion of resources to where the need is most urgent. However, this should also be understood as part of the exercise of 'heritage diplomacy' on the international stage. Heritage diplomacy denotes engagement by states (and through international organisations) in heritage actions as a way of extending their soft power, demonstrating their global standing and furthering influence (see Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas 2022). The work of international heritage institutions to protect conflict - and disaster-affected heritage, and especially the development of new funding streams to support this, such as the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund (BCCPF) or the Aliph Foundation, represents what Winter has described (2015: 1014) as 'heritage *in* diplomacy'. In this way, heritage action focuses on supporting existing diplomatic aims, rather than on developing a narrative of common history and shared identity through heritage. Indeed, taking the example of the BCCPF, this approach is highlighted in its own evaluation, which confirmed that the scheme has offered value-for-money as 'a means to improve the reputation and recognition of the UK, particularly associated with cultural heritage.' (ERS 2021: 29) With this in mind, it is important to consider how such actions reflect or further the diplomatic aims of their funders, particularly when these come into contact with the complicated and often controversial contexts of crisis-affected countries where they seek to operate.

Taking into account the diplomatic aims of these initiatives, it is pertinent to ask how this affects the likelihood of persuading international heritage bodies and the funding mechanisms they rely on to more widely adopt a people-led approach in their work. In some respects, this could complement thinking that is emerging within states and funders about how soft power can best be deployed through cultural and heritage-based activities. Again, turning to the case of the BCCPF, the lead evaluator of this scheme has noted that 'the key to understanding the cultural relations and soft power processes lies in connecting the approaches to cultural preservation with issues such as community, values, and development and how this creates an enabling environment for exploring people-to-people connectivity, reciprocal cooperation, mutual trust and shared values' (Thomas 2022). This focus on people-to-people connectivity and reciprocal cooperation chimes well with the values of a people-led approach, and hints at a door that is already partly opened to these ideas. At the same time, though, there remains a dissonance between the idea of people-led heritage protection and the fundamental principle of sovereignty that underpins the work of international heritage institutions and the diplomatic outreach of states and funders alike. Where there is the risk that heritage communities identify divergent priorities, or value different forms of heritage to state-level elites, this could trigger anxieties on the behalf of international actors loath to violate the principle of state sovereignty. It is all too easy to see how this may be an issue, particularly in contexts that have been affected by painful and divisive identity conflicts, or where the heritage claims of minority groups clash with those of the governing elite. The challenge of advocating for people-led approaches more widely is, in part, a challenge of balancing the needs and preoccupations of these local, national and international level stakeholders.

As discussed previously, there exists a strong argument for the ethical imperative to engage in people-led approaches. When done well, such approaches can lead to partnerships that are more inclusive, more reflective of the needs and beliefs of heritage communities, and ultimately more effective. However, other ethical implications associated with these ways of working should be taken into account. Reflections on the broader participatory turn in numerous fields, including heritage, international development and research, have noted that the 'shift from subject to participant' in engagement with local communities has often raised wider ethical dilemmas (Bromley et al 2015). When thinking specifically about people-led approaches to disaster and conflict-affected heritage, two ethical considerations in particular appear significant.

Firstly, asking heritage communities to lead in defining and undertaking heritage protection activities should not mean offloading costs to these same communities. This is particularly salient in terms of risk or danger to the individual, but also in terms of time and resources. Whilst one of the benefits to people-led heritage work

could be to enable work in locations or moments that would otherwise be too hazardous for external interveners to access, there is a corollary risk that this means encouraging local communities to take on additional risk. Working in disaster- and conflict-affected contexts can often be physically dangerous in addition to its emotional and psychological toll. Introducing a people-led approach should include a consideration of these risks, and the provision of support and resources to heritage communities to ensure that this shift in practice does not, in fact, bring about a de facto offloading of risks to people who are often already experiencing multiple forms of vulnerability.

Secondly, it is important to avoid the temptation to 'romanticise' the local (Intepe et al 2023; Richmond 2009). Simply put, this means acknowledging that local communities are not homogenous but multifaceted and characterised by a variety of identities, interests and motivations. A people-led approach must not be an uncritical approach lest it serves to reinforce problematic power asymmetries and further marginalise the very people it seeks to support. In practice, this means thinking carefully about what inclusion really looks like, taking time to make sure all voices are being represented at the table, as well as paying close attention to how the heritage in question fits into wider socio-economic, political and cultural ecologies.

It is also important to note a number of persistent barriers to developing such a people-led approach more widely. These include a normative framework that lags behind this view (as evidenced in the stubborn distinction between tangible and intangible heritage, and the nature-culture divide); legal frameworks which do not account for diversity of experiences on the ground; persistent uses of expert-centric language and approaches by international actors; and insufficient consideration of the ambivalence of heritage – its capacity to harm as well as heal – particularly in cases where heritage protection and interpretation is intrinsically bound up with narratives of exclusionary nationalism. Until these structural issues can be addressed (an undertaking which will require concerted action from the global community of heritage professionals at all levels), it will be difficult to reach the full potential of people-led approaches to heritage, or for international heritage institutions to fully move beyond the criticisms to which they have hitherto been subjected.

Conclusion

The experience of FAR-ICCROM in attempting to integrate people-led approaches to its work protecting conflict- and disaster-affected heritage underscores the importance and potential of reorienting heritage protection efforts. The criticisms levied against international heritage institutions—Eurocentrism, neo-colonialism, marginalisation, and exacerbation of conflict dynamics—highlight the pressing need for a sea-change in their approach. While international heritage institutions have taken steps to address some of these criticisms, the challenges persist and require comprehensive and transformative action.

The emergence of people-led approaches to heritage offers a promising pathway forward. By centering the voices, needs, and expertise of local communities, these approaches affirm the value of heritage as perceived by those who give heritage value. They prioritise inclusivity and challenge the hegemony of Western-centric perspectives and colonial legacies in heritage discourse and practice. Moreover, people-led heritage approaches recognise the interconnectedness between cultural heritage and broader socio-economic, political, and environmental contexts, underscoring the potential of heritage as a catalyst for peacebuilding, resilience, and sustainable development.

The experiences and principles outlined within the FAR-ICCROM programme serve to demonstrate how an international institution might begin to adopt people-led approaches to heritage in practice. Through the co-creation of context-specific strategies, local-level skills development, advocacy for community voice, and bottom-up networking initiatives, communities are recognised as leaders in the protection and management of their own heritage. By integrating training with in-field action and fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders, these initiatives foster adaptive approaches to heritage protection that put people at their heart whilst leveraging the reach and influence of an international institution.

However, the implementation of people-led heritage approaches is not without its challenges. Community priorities may conflict with elite concerns and the principle of sovereignty, undermining the take-up of such approaches by international actors. Moreover, ethical considerations such as risk offloading onto vulnerable communities and avoiding 'romanticisation' of the local must be kept in mind. Structural barriers, including normative and legal frameworks and expert-centric approaches, will have to be addressed if the full potential of people-led heritage initiatives is to be realised.

Turning finally to the broader focus of this volume, what lessons can be drawn from the experience of FAR-ICCROM for media reporting on conflict and disaster-affected heritage, and particularly for the prospects of integrating people-led approaches to this? We must

acknowledge that an institution like ICCROM occupies a position of power, power which is rooted in the historical dynamics of heritage protection described at the beginning of this chapter. We argue that this power can be used to shift the narrative around heritage interventions in times of conflict and disaster, from speaking *for* to speaking *with* communities who are most affected by damage to their heritage and - perhaps more importantly – to listening to what these communities have to say. This approach, whilst by no means perfect, is already bearing fruit within the FAR-ICCROM programme, and has significantly shifted its approach to heritage work. A number of important lessons can be drawn from this for the wider question of how the media and other organisations might approach the challenge of reporting on the fate of cultural heritage in times of crisis.

Firstly, that even in moments of extreme urgency, it is both possible and preferable to make the space to listen to heritage communities, and to take an inclusive approach to understanding how these communities relate to the heritage in question. Urgency is no excuse for narrowing the scope of our inquiries. Much of the work of FAR-ICCROM has been carried out in contexts of extreme crisis, but this sense of urgency has only strengthened the programme's commitment to people-led principles. The same must, therefore, be possible for media reporting.

Secondly, that a people-led approach opens the door to accessing more nuanced and in-depth information about heritage, its role in the community and in perpetuating or resisting the dynamics of conflict and disaster. It is clear that this can only be a net positive for anyone seeking to disseminate information about heritage in crisis. Thirdly, these changes will not come about overnight. In the experience of FAR-ICCROM, the people-led approach has benefited from significant investment in activities such as network building, skills development and capacity building, as well as the development of a positive feedback loop to build institutional support for people-led approaches from multiple levels. This is vitally important. There is a risk inherent in supporting people-led approaches that this translates in practice into ever greater demands being placed on already marginalised or vulnerable groups. As Cooke and Kothari (2001) warned in their critique of the unstoppable rise of participatory approaches, at worst this risks a type of tyranny. A people-led mindset, whether championed by a heritage institution or the media, must therefore be predicated on the use of institutional power to support community voices rather than the offloading of labour and, given the crisis contexts we have focussed on, serious risk to these groups.

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Chapter 3. The Perils of Endangerment: Reflections on Mapping Africa's Endangered Archaeological Sites and Monuments

Paul J. Lane, Stefania Merlo, and the MAEASaM Project Team Members

Introduction

When terrorists blow up ancient monuments and bulldoze archaeological sites, maximising the impact of their actions through videoing the events and posting them on social media, the international community typically takes note (e.g., Burke 2001; Curry 2015; Hardy 2001; McCarthy 2001; Ray 2015). After the shock and media coverage (Harmanşah 2015) have subsided, coalitions are formed and philanthropic bodies, research councils and nation-states begin to lay plans and earmark funds. Typically, these are funds either for interventions aimed at salvage and at protecting other sites and monuments from a comparable fate in places that previously lacked significant funding for heritage work, or for post-conflict reconstruction and rebuilding activities. After the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas (Afghanistan) in March 2001 by members of the Taliban (Falser 2011) and subsequent temporary fall of the Taliban later that year, for example, multiple national and international agencies and nation-states pledged funding in excess of US$7 million (Michaut 2006: 50) to support projects aimed at restoration and repair of Afghanistan's cultural heritage. These included restoring works of art and monuments damaged prior to the rise of the Taliban following Russia's invasion of the country in 1979 and the looting and destruction of the National Museum in the early 1990s (Mulholland 2023). Similarly in Syria, following the intense conflict between government forces and anti-Assad groups from 2011 to 2015 during which significant destruction of cultural heritage occurred across the country (Guidetti and Silvia 2015), various national governments (including Russia and Chechnya) and the European Union, alongside diverse philanthropic bodies, committed millions of US dollars toward restoration projects, including at Palmyra (Denker 2017) and in Aleppo (Munawar and Symmonds 2022).

As recent events in Gaza and Ukraine serve to highlight (Ahemed 2024; Blackburn 2023; Veltman 2023; Whitaker 2023), national governments can be equally complicit in the destruction of individual monuments and even entire urban heritage landscapes, again to much international consternation. Should peace and stability return to these two regions in the near future, it is likely that at least some of the damaged monuments will be rebuilt, or reproduced using digital technologies, as happened after the end of the civil war in Lebanon in 1991 (Newson and Young 2015; Perring 2009; Seeden 2000), and is ongoing or planned for Iraq and Syria (see discussions in e.g., Denker 2017; Fangi *et al.* 2013; Isakhan and Meskell 2019; Munawar and Symmonds 2022; Paynatar 2022), among other examples across the globe since the end of the Second World War.

In contrast, when other less publicised ancient monuments and archaeological sites are damaged and destroyed in the name of 'development' or as a consequence of everyday agricultural and commercial operations, there is often far less of an international outcry. Perhaps this is how things should be – archaeological heritage is always decaying and disappearing. The profession also accepts, through its endorsement of the need for impact assessments and the concept of 'preservation by record', that not all sites can be protected (for articulation of this principle concerning England, see e.g., Wainwright 1993). Yet even this principle, intended to ease the burden of trying to preserve and protect all archaeological sites by being guided by assessments of each site's 'significance' or 'value' (Darvill *et al.* 1987; Deeben *et al.* 1999; Hardesty and Little 2009; Lipe 1984; Reed 1987), has raised additional concerns and challenges around such issues as publication (e.g. McCarthy *et al.* 1992; Opitz 2018; Thomas 1991) and the sustainability of digital archives (Clarke 2015; Kintigh and Altschul 2010; Richards 2017). It has also prompted critical commentary on how the term significance should be defined and applied in different contexts of archaeological practice (e.g., Henderson 2001; Mitchell and Guilfoyle 2020; Raab and Klinger 1977; Samuels 2008). The suggestion that archaeological practice is primarily about recording

rather than interpretation also needs to be challenged (Andrews *et al.* 2000), while the rise of 'Big Data' and Open Data policies in the wake of the digital revolution over the last few decades has led to new concerns around issues of access, ethics and long-term data storage (Kansa 2012; Kansa *et al.* 2020; Nicholson *et al.* 2023; Rouhani 2023; Walters and Edwards 2015).

In tandem with the rise in attention being given to data management in the heritage sector, has been the growth in importance given to the concept of 'endangerment' in helping guide decision-making regarding both efforts aimed at *in situ* preservation and preservation by record. While archaeologists and other heritage managers have long been conscious of the diversity, scale and likelihood of different threats to tangible heritage, and identification of those most at risk and in need of 'salvaging' or 'rescuing' has a long pedigree in the profession (Rico 2015), the idea of heritage *endangerment* has gained particular traction over the last few decades at a time when both scholarly and public concern about the long-term future of wild species and the Earth's environments has also heightened (Holtorf and Ortman 2007). While it is certainly the case that heritage is often valued 'most when it seems at risk' and 'threats of loss [can] spur owners to stewardship' (Lowenthal 1996: 24), classing certain kinds of heritage as endangered does more than heighten awareness of the multiple threats all forms of heritage may face. Once designated endangered an 'entity's status...crystallizes by way of its incorporation into various documentary devices – archives, catalogues, databases, inventories, and atlases' and becomes 'animated by a sense of urgency and citizenship' in the face of impending threats (Didal and Dias 2015: 1). As these authors go on to note, an 'indispensable step for coping with endangerment consists of inventorying and ranking' (op. cit.). The idea of 'endangerment' as both condition and process, in other words, 'stands at the heart of a network of concepts, values and practices dealing with entities considered threatened by extinction and destruction, and with the techniques aimed at preserving them' (Vidal and Dias 2016: 1).

Mobilising an endangerment trope, especially to leverage funding for certain kinds of heritage work has several pitfalls, however (DeSilvey and Harrison 2020). These include the imposition of external systems of valuing heritage but can also result in exacerbating the levels of other risks to sites, especially those of a less 'unique', 'special', 'universal' nature – whereas it is the latter that are most commonly targeted for deliberate, attention-seeking destruction. Drawing on the experiences of the Arcadia-funded *Mapping Africa's Endangered Archaeological Sites and Monuments* project during the project's initial phase between September 2020 and June 2024, we reflect on the perils of endangerment as encountered in different parts of Africa, and suggest how these may be averted and how 'heritage endangerment' might be reimagined in ways that better align with local sensitivities and values.

We begin, however, with further reflections on how narrow understandings of endangerment can lead to heritage protection measures being overly invested in conserving and restoring monumental built heritage to the neglect of other, less eye-catching forms of endangerment and heritage loss.

As we discuss below, outside of academic circles, in recent decades reporting on heritage endangerment and loss has tended to focus almost exclusively on either examples of deliberate destruction of heritage during times of conflict (and even then, in quite a selective manner, as the virtual absence of international media reporting on the accelerating harm to Sudan's tangible and intangible heritage during the ongoing conflict, bears testimony), or on the damage and loss of tangible heritage due to ongoing climate change (Sesana *et al.* 2021). Such selectivity, we argue, obscures the existence of multiple other threats and sources of endangerment and carries the risk of over emphasising the importance and value of sites with prominent, surviving architectural remains over other less eye-catching material traces.

This is a common feature of much popularisation of archaeology (and some might argue, even of archaeological practice itself), and can be glossed here as 'the conceptual tyranny of monumentality'. This can have wide-ranging implications leading to highly selective choices around the preservation and protection of archaeological entities and their presentation to members of the public (Sinamai 2019), and also the interpretation of material signs of social complexity (for a recent exposition on the latter, see Ben-Yosef and Thomas 2024). Reporting deliberate destruction of such monuments, however unwittingly, often reinforces these perceptions, especially among wider publics. As Susan Pollock (2005) has argued specifically with reference to the reporting on monument destruction in Iraq and Afghanistan, emphasising this kind of endangerment can actually serve inadvertently to promote partial and politically favourable views on a region, its history and the root causes of the conflicts in which the practice of deliberately damaging monuments arose. With this said, journalists obviously have their own priorities and constraints, and will likely have better knowledge of what kind of story attracts public attention than most heritage professionals. Hence, our aim here is primarily to caution against treating heritage endangerment too narrowly, without discounting the value of and need for reporting on various kinds of heritage destruction for mobilising widespread support for heritage protection policies and interventions.

The Tyranny of Monumentality

Like stranded monsters, to borrow one of Mervyn Peake's (1950) characterisations of Gormenghast's skyline,[1] monuments impose themselves on our consciousness. The most tangible of tangible heritage, monuments and other kinds of architectural constructions even when in partial ruin, are probably the most readily relatable material elements of past times that surround us and hence are often most amenable (if not necessarily any easier) to interpretation for non-professionals. Specific monuments take on iconic status in part because of this, acting metonymically for entire societies, cultural traditions or value systems, and so when these structures are deliberately or even inadvertently damaged or destroyed it is not just the loss of important material evidence concerning the past that becomes the focus of concern, but also other more existential matters. This was certainly the reaction in the West following the deliberate destruction of archaeological monuments, such as those at Palmyra in Syria, and museum collections, such as those in Mosul in Iraq, by self-identifying members of the Islamic State (IS, also rendered ISIL, ISIS and DA'ESH in reporting at the time), ostensibly on the grounds of these material things were examples of idolatry. Both in the mainstream media and in academic output these acts of deliberate destruction were cast as modern expressions of religious iconoclasm (e.g., Al-Azm 2015), barbarism (e.g., Jones 2016) and a veritable threat to past, present and future civilisation (United Nations General Assembly 2015), and cultural heritage more generally (Smith *et al.* 2016).

Alternative readings of the motivations of Islamic State's sanctioning of these acts of destruction (and those of other jihadist groups over the last few decades, including Islamic Group's attack on tourists visiting the Temple of Hatshepsut at Luxor [Egypt, 1997], Al Qaeda's bombing of al-Askari Mosque in Samarra [Iraq, 2006], and Ansar Dine's destruction of mausolea and manuscripts in Timbuktu [Mali, 2012]) are possible, however. Not least of which is that, far from being a denial or abrogation of heritage *per se*, these actions are perhaps better understood as deliberate attempts at appropriative and transformative *heritage-making* intended to challenge a Western, preservationist, canon and fixation on the monumental (Elices Ocón 2021). As Benjamin Isakhan (2018) and Kirsty Campion (2017) both note in rather different ways, these were deeply symbolic, as much as ideologically motivated, acts aligned toward a particular reimagining and realignment of collective memory. In this regard, it is perhaps equally telling that so many resources have been devoted by both Western and non-Western agencies (including various Islamic foundations) toward the repair, rebuilding and recreation of sites and museums targeted by Islamic jihadists (see e.g., Hammer 2009 on restoration of al-Askari mosque; Kishkovsky 2021 on proposed Russian-Syrian rebuilding of Palmyra; and, Gronlund 2023, on Mosul Museum's restoration), which at the same time have triggered wider discussions around notions of authenticity reminiscent of Plutarch's philosophical ponderings on 'the Ship of Theseus' and the conditions of identity (i.e., continuity of form and identity of parts)[2] (see Smart 1972 for an elaboration of Plutarch's apparent paradox).

At a more prosaic level, across much of sub-Saharan Africa, while traditions of building with stone certainly exist and the archaeological traces of these survive on the landscape, earthen and wooden architectural styles have tended to predominate among both sedentary and more mobile populations (Denyer 1978; Prussin 1995), including demographically dense, urban communities (Oliver 1971; Hull 1976). As inherently more perishable materials, prone to rapid weathering and decay in the tropics albeit rather longer lasting in more arid lands in the northern part of the continent, physical traces of the direct ancestors of a great many African societies can be far more ephemeral than in some other localities. Perhaps because of this, memory practices are commonly directed toward things other than monuments, such as shrines, sacred and heritage groves, and natural phenomena, including mountains, open spaces, springs, wells, and other watery places (Dawson 2009; Prussin 1999; Sheridan and Nyamweru 2007), accompanied by various intangible cultural practices and expressions of tradition and ancestry (Abungu 2012; Mire 2020). Endangerment in these contexts is thus much more about threats to continuities in identity and utilitarian values, than necessarily continuity in material form (Joy 2007; Rowlands and De Jong 2007; Ugwuanyi *et al.* 2021).

Africa's Archaeological Heritage – Alternative Sources of Endangerment

As is well documented, the archaeological and built heritage on the African continent is facing escalating threats from multiple factors, including rapid unmonitored urban expansion (de León *et al.* 2020; El Safadi *et al.* 2022); large-scale agricultural intensification and irrigation projects (Wallace 2006);

[1] 'High, sinister walls, like the walls of wharves, or dungeons for the damned, lifted into the watery air or swept in prodigious arcs of ruthless stone. Lost in the flying clouds the craggy summits of Gormenghast were wild with straining hair – the hanks of the drenched rock-weed. Buttresses and outcrops of unrecognizable masonry loomed. . . head like the hulks of mouldering ships, or stranded monsters whose streaming mouths and brows were the sardonic work of a thousand tempests.'

[2] For those unfamiliar with this apparent paradox, in essence Plutarch asks whether, after being brought into port for repairs and every old plank in Theseus's ship replaced by a new one, it was still the original ship?

oil, gas and mineral extraction (Chirikure 2014; Esterhuysen 2009); dam construction and other large-scale infrastructure projects including port facilities and railways (Arthur *et al.* 2021; Ndoro, 2021a; Nikolaus *et al.*, 2023; Taha 2021); climate change (Brooks *et al.* 2020; Vousdoukas *et al.* 2022; Westley *et al.* 2023); inter-community violence and international terrorism (see below); looting (Barford 2020); and steady demographic growth (Lane 2011). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a great many African economies were experiencing significant growth fuelled in part by foreign investment, especially from China, Malaysia and Arab nations, generally without accompanying pre-development archaeological impact assessments and mitigation work. These problems are compounded by the fact that relative to many Western countries the number of heritage professionals employed in the publicly funded academic and parastatal sectors, private commercial sector, and non-governmental organisations in both individual nation-states and across the entire African continent is low. For those who are employed in these sectors, their budgets are typically quite limited, and other resources are stretched. Also, large areas of the continent are relatively poorly surveyed and so their heritage assets remain unknown and undocumented. Moreover, while legislative frameworks have been strengthened in many countries over the past two decades, the effectiveness of such legislation as a preventative measure remains uncertain, penalties in many countries are quite modest, and enforcement of heritage protection laws can be highly variable (Arazi 2011; Ashley and Boukaze-Khan 2011; Katsamudanga 2021; Ichumbaki and Mjema 2018; Mudzamatira 2019; Ndlovu 2011).

There is also an increasing urgency to enhance sharing of information about the diversity and status of Africa's rich archaeological heritage, as threats to its preservation intensify as both a direct and indirect consequence of economic and demographic growth. In the months following the onset of the COVID-19-pandemic, economic growth across sub-Saharan Africa slowed partly due to impacts on investment (Agwanda *et al.* 2021; Cilliers 2024; Verhagen *et al.* 2020), but also because of the war in Ukraine and its impact on grain supplies and food costs (Fabiani 2023; The Borgen Project 2023), other related inflationary pressures and the continuing climate emergency (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2023; World Bank 2023). The United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs, for example, estimated that GDP across Africa in early 2023 was around 2.4 percentage points below its pre-pandemic levels (UN-DESA 2023). Nonetheless, there are signs that economies in West Africa are picking up again, and those in East and Central Africa have stabilised (International Monetary Fund 2023). As nation-states also move to implement their green energy agendas (Müller *et al.* 2020) and, in the case of coastal states, take advantage of the blue economy (Akpomera 2020), pressures on both documented and undocumented heritage sites are likely to intensify. Continuing incremental growth of urban centres, often through the lateral expansion of informal residential areas, is also set to continue as sub-Saharan Africa's urban populations grow because of natural population increase and out-migration from rural areas (Lane 2011), as elaborated below.

In our view, it is these more mundane, less visually dramatic and 'newsworthy' forms of endangerment that are most deserving of international concern and appropriate responses. Moreover, as documented by the MAEASaM project's initial findings on the state of digitisation in Africa and as discussed further below, it is evident that the lack of digitised sites and monuments records, the dispersed nature of the existing paper records concerning previously documented sites (i.e., legacy data), the general absence of digital backup copies of these paper records (some of which date to the 1930s and 1940s and are increasingly fragile), the absence of digital data management plans, the limited expertise in using open source remote sensing imagery to locate possible new sites and monitor known sites, and the poor integration of heritage records in development control and the planning process, all contribute to the endangerment of sub-Saharan Africa's archaeological heritage. Addressing these skills-, services-, and systems- gaps in a manner that enables and enhances existing capacities across the region must be a priority. Moreover, the development of rapid and reliable means of mapping, documenting, and monitoring archaeological sites and monuments using freely available satellite imagery (Khalaf and Insoll 2019; Ochungo *et al.* 2022; Rayne *et al.* 2020) and making this information available in open access formats (with necessary protections for sensitive datasets) can provide very cost-effective means of providing comprehensive and up-to-date records of site types and distributions for use in development control, local planning, and monitoring activities.

MAEASaM Project

To take advantage of these opportunities and help address some of the challenges outlined above, the *Mapping Africa's Endangered Archaeological Sites and Monuments* (*MAEASaM*) project, with funding from Arcadia, aims to identify and document endangered archaeological heritage sites across Africa using a combination of remote sensing, records-based research and selective archaeological surveys. Records of these sites are uploaded to an online Arches geospatial database tailored for different interest groups and stakeholders, with different levels of access determined

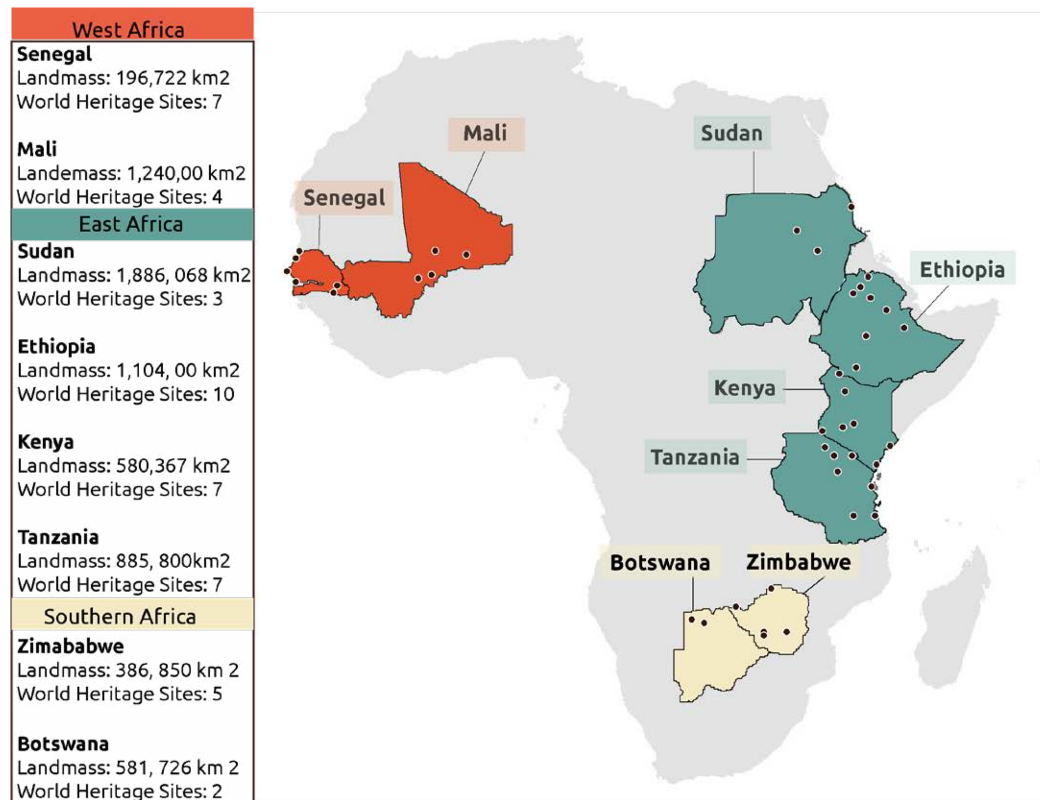

Figure 1: Map of Africa illustrating the countries of activity of the MAEASaM project (Map: Faye Lander).

in consultation with the relevant national authorities. So as to promote wider public awareness of the nature, range and number of archaeological sites and monuments in each country, very general information about each site or monument, excluding sensitive information such as their precise coordinates, is intended to be entirely Open Access, in line with the funder's requirements. So as to respect the concerns expressed by national authorities about retaining ownership over such data, access to higher levels of detail and information will be restricted, accessible only to authorised users confirmed by the relevant national authorities. Decisions on the rules governing data access are also informed by the CARE and FAIR principles regarding making digital data accessible (Carroll *et al.* 2021; Nicholson *et al.* 2023). Past, present and potential future threats to these sites are identified and assessed as data are entered, and approaches to enhancing long-term site protection measures and new management policies are being developed with the project's Africa-based partners and collaborators. The project aspires to ensure long-term sustainability of the mapping and monitoring components through targeted training of in-country collaborators and other heritage stakeholders.

The project was launched in September 2020, and its first phase of activities ended in June 2024; Phase 2 will run from June 2024 to May 2029. During Phase 1, the project focused its activities on eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa, selected to provide a cross-section of different site types and conditions, the diversity of threats to archaeological sites, in-country needs and capacity, and data availability. These were Mali, Senegal, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Botswana (Figure 1). The project is hosted by the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, and collaborates with partners at the University of York, Institute of Archaeology, UCL, and (from 2020 to 2022) the University of Exeter in the UK, Uppsala University (Sweden), Cheikh Anta Diop Université, Dakar (Senegal), the British Institute in Eastern Africa (Nairobi, Kenya) and the University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa). Collaboration agreements with the national authorities in the relevant countries are the framework under which in-country digitisation of legacy records and field data verification are conducted, with the aim of co-creating the online database that will allow national authorities to document and monitor the archaeological sites and monuments that are their legal responsibility. Documentation, monitoring and sustainability (including ethical and inclusive use of digital data) strategies were discussed with national authorities at regional workshops, and have guided the construction of the project's workflows and database. Online and

in-person training in the project's methodology to employees responsible for maintaining archaeological sites and monuments registers has been offered, alongside that on using remote sensing to detect and monitor archaeological sites, managing digital data and developing data management plans, and on the concept of Open Access and Open Data. The primary languages used are English and French, although the database will also eventually be accessible in Arabic and various African languages including Swahili.

To date, the MAEASaM project has co-developed a geospatial database (based on Arches 7), modelled to host known and newly recorded archaeological sites and monuments in these eight countries. The database will serve primarily as a research and monitoring tool for national authorities, who will have full data input and access rights. It will also be made publicly available (with access restrictions to aspects of the database considered sensitive) on the MAEASaM platform once it goes live. Working across countries in Anglophone and Francophone Africa, with different histories of research and heritage management systems has presented several challenges, not least of which has been the impact of civil wars (Ethiopia, Sudan) and ongoing terrorist threats (Mali, NE Kenya). Despite this, the project has digitised over 22,000 archaeological sites and monument records and identified almost 40,000 potential archaeological features through the analysis of 880,000 km^2 of satellite imagery using a mix of visual inspection and machine learning techniques. Ground verification work, aimed at the verification of the nature and conditions of a selection of sites, was not possible in the first 18-24 months of the project owing to the COVID-19 pandemic but is now yielding important results. The project, in collaboration with national stakeholders, has developed a monitoring strategy document that includes a background study of the state of heritage monitoring in Africa, a comprehensive list of threats, an assessment of needs and a proposal for practical, easy-to-use solutions for the continuous safeguarding of sites while allowing for sustainable development.

Challenges in this phase have included a lack of familiarity among many heritage professionals on the continent with open access protocols and the potential of open access data in heritage management; and limited skills in digital heritage, GIS and data management among these same professionals. Both seemingly give rise to a hesitancy on the part of several national authorities to commit to full open access (even with access protocols) to heritage records. This, and the overall low-resourced digital infrastructure may become impediments for the sustainability of the project in the future and have informed some of our thinking around the concepts of 'heritage endangerment' and 'heritage destruction'. We discuss below three areas where the MAEASaM project has considerable potential to contribute to reducing heritage endangerment.

Incremental Loss of Africa's Archaeological Heritage

Africa is projected to have the fastest urban growth rate in the world in coming decades, with the expectation that Africa's cities will host an additional 950 million people by 2050. Much of this growth is expected to happen in small and medium-sized towns (OECD/SWAC 2020). Of note here is that these are often the locales with a longer history of human occupation and higher presence of pre-colonial heritage compared to contemporary mega-cities that often developed on the basis of colonial decisions. Although systematic studies of the loss of heritage sites to urban development for the entire continent are rare, where present, they have evidenced that the extent of damage to heritage resources has been severe. Using a combination of historical aerial photographs and data on infrastructural and urban development, it has been estimated that in an area of 270 km^2 between Alberton and Soweto in Southern Gauteng (South Africa) for every 55 hectares of development (inclusive of building and housing, power line and road network, mining and water bodies) five stone walled sites (dating 1500 to 1900) were destroyed between 1937 and 2015 (Naidu 2019: 84). In total, in the larger (but inclusive of less urbanised regions) area of Southern Gauteng, 226 stone walled sites were completely destroyed and 22 damaged between 1961 and 2015 (Mudzamatira 2019: 6). Whilst linking heritage management to urban planning via the application of the exhaustive South African heritage protection legislation was seen by both authors as a mitigatory factor in preventing a number of otherwise possible destructions, the application of such legislation was deemed patchy and the lack of an effective information infrastructure, in particular the lack of maps of sites and/or the existence of their geospatial record, has been identified as one of the most important factors in the endangerment of sites preservation (whether physically or by record) (Mudzamatira 2019; Ndlovu 2014).

Similar issues were identified as the reasons for the loss of heritage sites in and around the capital city of Gaborone (Botswana), which has exponentially expanded from a small village to a commercial city in the span of nearly 60 years, since Independence (Figure 2). Here, although cultural resource management legislation aimed at the protection of archaeological sites and monuments is thorough and routinely applied, land allocation for urban development has operated (and continues to do so) in a legislative vacuum with regard to the safeguarding of archaeological sites in their landscape

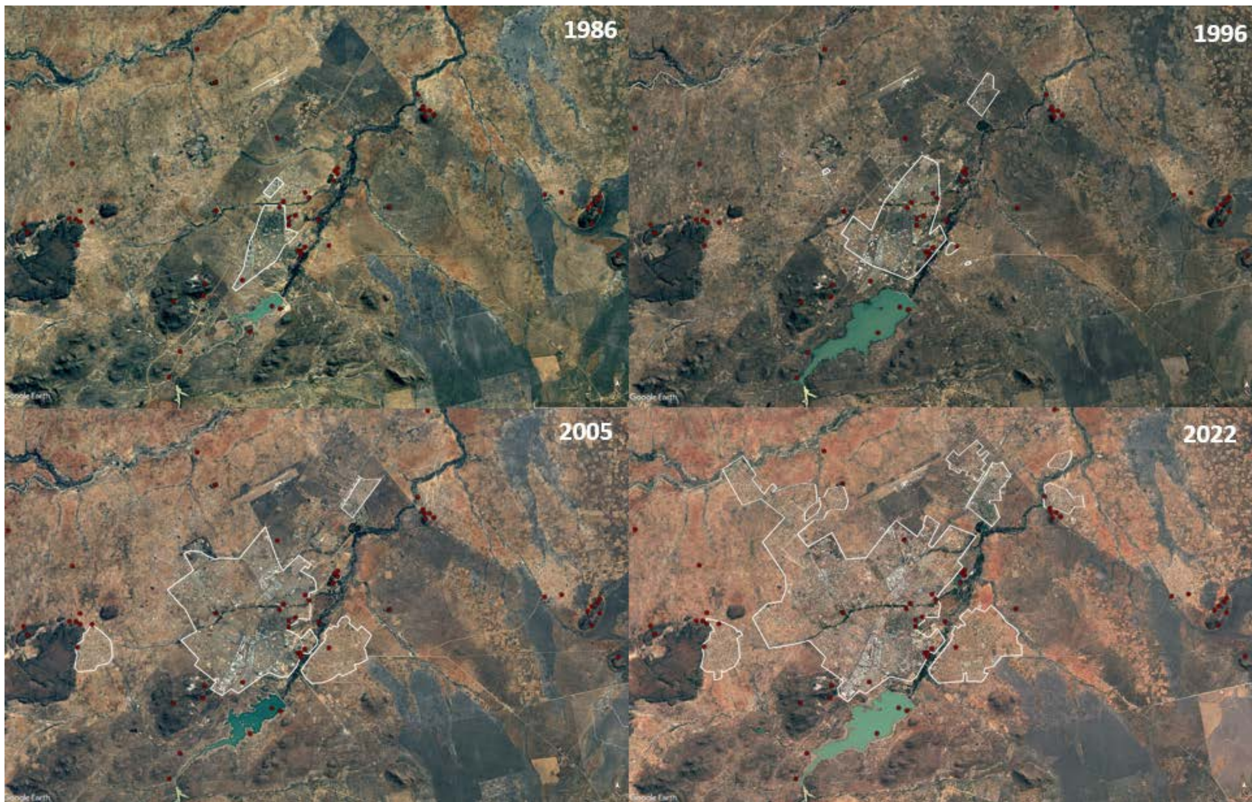

Figure 2: The evolution of the city of Gaborone from 1986 to present, showing urban expansion and the location of known archaeological sites (red dots). (Map: Stefania Merlo).

context. Fieldwork conducted in the peri-urban areas of Gaborone and its hinterland (Mothulatshipi and Merlo 2013) identified systematic destruction of archaeological sites (including fairly large stone-walled settlements dated to the 1700s) as a consequence of residential development in areas the Land Board authorities had allocated to individuals (Figure 3). Whilst the *Monuments and Relics Act 2001* makes it compulsory for any person intending to construct and excavate an area to commission an Archaeological Impact Assessment, any land declared wholly communal by the Government Tribal Grazing Policy can be allocated to anyone who is allowed to develop on this land, with no restrictions. In between the legislative gaps and the lack of clarity on whose responsibility it is to verify the existence of archaeological sites in areas allocated for development, sites are routinely destroyed. This is problematic not only because it endangers the preservation of the cultural heritage in the country but also because it drastically alters a natural and cultural landscape of tangible and intangible value (Mothulatshipi and Merlo 2013).

Eroding Evidence

Climate change and its effects on heritage sites globally has been the subject of numerous studies and several reviews, some of which were dedicated specifically to coastal environments (Fatorić and Seekamp 2017; Orr *et al.* 2021; Sesana *et al.* 2021). Climate change hazards, both direct (coastal flooding and erosion) and indirect (population migration, changing agricultural practices), are known to impact coastal archaeological sites globally. Few studies have assessed climate change risks to the African coastline, however, despite its 300,000 km length, spanning 39 countries (see Brooks *et al.* 2020: 301–3). An important exception is the work by Vousdoukas *et al.* (2022), who assessed exposure of African heritage sites to coastal flooding and erosion along the entire African coastline, using a newly created digital dataset of 284 coastal heritage sites (combining 71 cultural and 213 natural World Heritage Sites that are either already recognised, or currently under consideration by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Centre and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance). The analysis focused on the coastal area exposed to a 1-in-100-year

Figure 3: Plot fencing cutting through a stone enclosure at site 46-A3-11 in Morwa (Botswana). This kind of fencing is conducted after an individual is allocated land for residential construction by the Land Board authorities (Photo: Stefania Merlo).

(that is, once in a century) coastal flooding and coastal erosion event and calculated the combined projected effects of flooding and erosion due to climate change under two different greenhouse gas emission scenarios (moderate Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 4.5) and high (RCP 8.5) greenhouse gas emission) in 2050 and 2100. The results highlighted that fifty-six (20%) of the 284 identified sites are currently exposed to a 1-in-100-year coastal extreme event - specifically thirty-five of the 213 natural heritage sites (16%) and 21 of the 71 cultural heritage sites (30%). The number of sites threatened by a 100-year coastal extreme event is projected to more than triple under moderate emissions, reaching 191 by 2050. High emissions would increase this number to 198. At country level and in terms of median estimates, there are several countries that are projected to have all their coastal heritage sites exposed to the 100-year coastal extreme event by the end of the century, regardless of the scenario: Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Western Sahara, Libya, Mozambique, Mauritania and Namibia, with the addition of Côte d'Ivoire, Cabo Verde, Sudan and Tanzania under the high-emission worst case scenario.

Archaeological sites other than world heritage sites in coastal Africa are recorded in the thousands. They have been documented over the course of more than 100 years (with most of this knowledge still locked in paper records) and all archaeological periods are attested from the Early Stone Age to the Historical Period although, in part due to the tyranny of monumentality (for discussion, see Joyce 2006; Sinamai 2019; Stoler 2008), more attention has been dedicated to the ones built in stone or coral (from North to Southern Africa). Their nature and size are varied, and so is their resilience to disturbances. Amongst the least studied and mapped, yet most endangered sites are the shell middens of coastal Senegambia. These deposits, composed of shells from different bivalve species, have been created both naturally but also by the various populations exploiting sea and coastal resources from the Late Stone Age to the modern era. Many were reused over time as funerary monuments (Figure 4). It is becoming increasingly evident that these are the locus of a long-lived and complex cultural maritime landscape characterised not only by marine resources exploitation but also iron production, trade and networks to the interior that incarnate water-related mystical knowledge still

Figure 4: Islamic-Christian cemetery of Joal-Fadiouth, constructed entirely on a shell mound (Senegal, Saloum Delta). Cereal granaries suspended over water visible in the distance. (Photo: Nicolas Sagna).

associated with many groups (Alioune and Sall 2021). More than 1,500 shell midden sites have been recorded in this region through ground verification (Alioune and Sall 2021), while the MAEASaM project has identified, to date, 1,810 between the Saloum Delta and Casamance alone using remote sensing techniques, with the expectation that their total number could be at least double this figure. Climate change (rise of sea level in particular), rapid urbanisation and the exploitation of sites as quarries for lime production and road constructions are destroying these sites. The lack of readily available site data and a monitoring system for the measurement and prediction of direct and indirect climate-related risks to these types of sites continue to endanger them (and the local communities that still derive knowledge and strength from them).

Digital Disappearances

Digital heritage programmes are continuing to gain momentum across Africa with calls to join the global network of knowledge exchange and data transparency. However, digitisation of complex and scattered archival information deriving from colonial and post-colonial archives runs the risk of being carried out mechanically and uncritically with consequences for both the spatial, temporal and thematic quality of the information created and the discourse on the ethical considerations that should be central in the creation of de-colonial digital archives (Gupta and Nicholas 2022; Gupta *et al.* 2023; Watrall and Goldstein 2022).

The example below is used to reflect on some of the practicalities facing the transformation of cultural heritage records into the digital, and in particular the risk of making all sites recorded in traditional paper forms 'invisible' due to incorrect assumptions regarding the nature and characteristics of the archival records themselves (Figure 5). The work of the team has brought to light issues linked to incorrect re-projection of datasets from paper records in Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe with the consequence that most of the databases and spreadsheets that are currently being used for creating site distribution maps contain incorrect coordinates. Our suspicion is that in all cases, non-locally based researchers who did the digitisation work, based their transformations on lists of sites coordinates, without realising that the annotated maps held by National Authorities indicating where sites had been reported were generated using older geographic projections and coordinate systems (such as ARC 1960) which have since been supplanted by newer global and local projections. The project's team members have noted that where incorrect transformations have been applied, this can result in a discrepancy between the digitally recorded location of a site and its real-world location, ranging from a minimum of 100m to a maximum of 700m. This obviously results in the sites

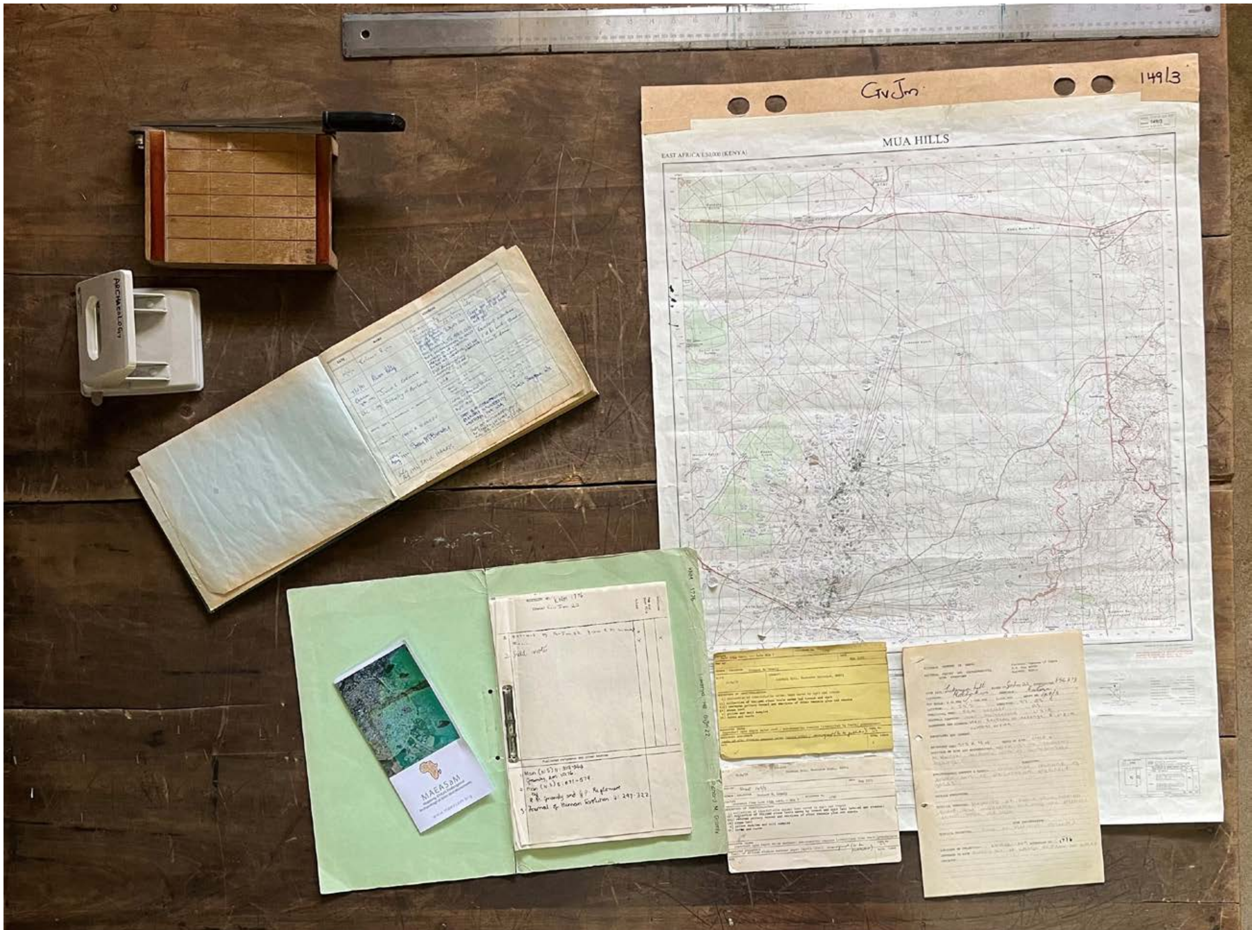

Figure 5: Example of the typical array of archival documents on file at the National Museums of Kenya that describe an archaeological site (Photo: Stefania Merlo).

literally disappearing when someone uses the wrongly projected coordinates to revisit them with the help of modern GPS or using satellite imagery.

This issue was suspected in all the above-mentioned countries after preliminary work by one of us (Merlo) prior to 2012 in Botswana. It was confirmed by re-projecting the data and ascertaining via fieldwork that the old coordinates transformed by the MAEASaM project using an appropriate map datum and projection were closer to real-world location as opposed to other digital datasets. We offer here the example of recent verification work done in Zimbabwe by our team, where the map speaks clearly about the issue (Figure 6). We now know that to make all of these sites visible again we have to replicate this projection work for all the involved datasets, to some thousands of sites, and with extensive ground verification to confirm our protocols. Sites will slowly become visible and findable again. To put these findings into the wider context of our discussion, in essence, an issue that at first sight may seem to be inconsequential has the potential of endangering hundreds if not thousands of archaeological sites by repositioning them where they are not and making any form of monitoring almost impossible.

Summary and Conclusion

As noted in our introduction, well-publicised acts of deliberate destruction of historical sites and archaeological monuments by religious extremists during the first two decades of the twenty-first century have helped frame the approaches toward heritage protection and conservation adopted by many philanthropic bodies and common coverage of heritage 'endangerment' in Western media. While undoubtedly worthy interventions and concerns, some of the narratives surrounding such work, especially those in the public sphere, risk creating very singular conceptualisations of the notions of endangerment and risk as they relate to global tangible heritage, and we

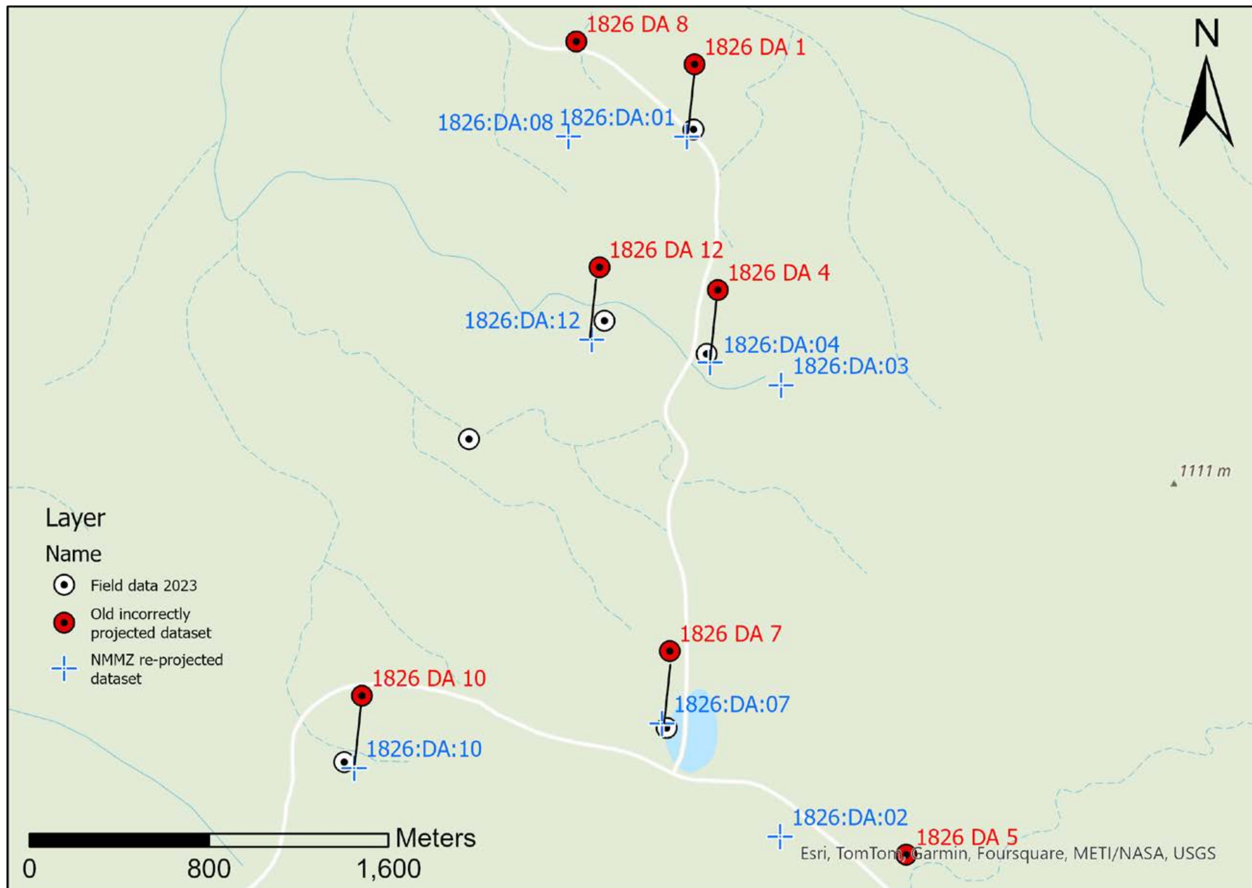

Figure 6: Map showing the discrepancies in position of archaeological sites in the Hwange National Park (Zimbabwe) as recorded by an incorrectly projected dataset created in the 1990s (Old incorrectly projected dataset), data re-projected by the MAEASaM project (NMMZ re-projected dataset) and ground data collected in 2023 by the MAEASaM team, lead by Ezekia Mtetwa, showing the close correspondence of the two latter datasets (Map: Stefania Merlo).

have argued for their replacement by a more nuanced and diverse understanding of how and why heritage sites are currently endangered.

With this said, it is certainly the case that heritage sites across our study areas continue to be endangered by both civil war and violent extremism. For example, during the recent conflict in Ethiopia, several historic churches were damaged by shelling and artefact stores holding archaeological materials and samples collected over decades of systematic fieldwork were ransacked and looted (Ahmed and Oumar 2023; Beldados *et al.* 2023). The ongoing conflict in Sudan has also witnessed damage to some sites and looting/ransacking of artefact stores (Ahmed 2023). The outbreak of an Islamic insurgency in Mali in 2012 and a parallel Tuareg uprising rendered large tracts of the country inaccessible for any meaningful documentation of monitoring of heritage sites that continues to this day. At the outbreak of the insurgency and in a well-publicised case, Ansar Dine and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) destroyed at least 14 mausolea in Timbuktu, including some that formed part of the Timbuktu UNESCO World Heritage Site,[3] as well as the El Farouk monument at the entrance to Timbuktu and elements of the Djingareyber Mosque (O'Dell 2013; Manhart 2015). They also burned over 4,200 manuscripts housed in the Ahmed Baba Research Centre (Motsi 2017). As is well known, Mr Al Mahdi (the leader of the majority of attacks, if not the main instigator), was subsequently arrested and found guilty of a war crime by Trial Chamber VIII at the International Criminal Court in the Hague. He was duly sentenced to nine years' imprisonment in September 2016 (Casaly 2016; Herman 2018; Joy 2016), although some have questioned the logic underpinning his conviction (see e.g., Ba 2019, 2020; Harber 2015), not least because other individuals were more explicit in their calls for the destruction of some of the Islamic mausolea, among them Mr Omar Hamaha (Cavendish 2012). In NE Kenya, from Lamu on the coast north through Garissa, Wajir

[3] For details, see https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/119/, accessed 18 February 2024.

and Mandera counties to the Somali border, activities by al-Shabaab, a Somali-based Islamic insurgent group (Anderson and McKnight 2015a; 2015b), have continued for over a decade curtailing access to these areas for site documentation and monitoring. While there have been no reported incidents here of religiously motivated destruction of monuments, the looting of archaeological sites to recover artefacts for sale on the international art market (including in Eastleigh, Nairobi) is known to be a favoured strategy by al-Shabaab in Somalia for financing their activities, and also by other Islamic State affiliates in Mali, Libya and other countries across North Africa (Brown 2020; Kantchev 2018; Ndoro 2021b; Ngari 2021; Puskás 2022). It is possible that sites in NE Kenya have been similarly impacted although this has not been verified.

Such deliberate destruction as has been recorded, while highly lamentable, has been on a much smaller scale relative to the levels of endangerment and documented destruction of archaeological heritage arising from other factors, including urban and agricultural expansion, industrial mining operations, infrastructure expansion, artisanal gold and other mineral mining, and coastal erosion. As various analyses have highlighted, the civil wars, armed conflicts and Islamic jihads have created contexts wherein archaeological sites, historical monuments, museums, libraries, and university collections have been damaged or destroyed. Whether this has been due to their being deliberately targeted or more incidentally, this is symptomatic of deeper structural economic and political challenges. The recently ended civil war in northern Ethiopia and ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) under General Abdel Fattah al Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by General al Burhan's former deputy commander and previous leader of the paramilitary Janjaweed group, Mohamed Hamsan Dagalo, are cases in point.

For much of its post-colonial history Sudan's economy, for example, has been characterised by extractivism, heavily reliant on livestock and agricultural commodities at first and subsequently, from 1999, on revenues from oil fields in the south of the country until secession of South Sudan in 2011 (at which point oil revenues accounted for over 75 percent of Sudan's foreign exchange earnings and around 45 percent of government finances (Sharfi 2014: 316)). In the years following the separation of South Sudan, expansion of gold mining has been encouraged by successive governments in an effort to recover some of that lost income, and until the outbreak of the ongoing civil war, Sudan was the third largest gold-producing country in Africa, with 'most gold coming from small-scale mining' (Greco 2023: 4). Militarisation of different elements of Sudan's extractive economy also became widespread which, coupled with inequities in land registration dating back to the era of British colonial rule and state-fuelled tensions between so called 'Arab' and 'African' tribal groups, heighten tensions over access to these gold deposits especially in Darfur (Bartlett 2016). The current conflict between SAF and RSF is to a significant degree a continuation of this situation, as their respective leaders struggle to gain control over gold revenues (Abbas 2023; Liptrot 2023). Aside from the humanitarian crisis the conflict has created, long before its outbreak many of these artisanal gold mining activities were targeting parts of the country known to have been gold producing areas in antiquity, causing significant damage to archaeological sites and monuments (Maliński 2017; Masojć *et al.* 2021; Nassr and Masojć 2018).

Moreover, this is not a problem unique to Sudan - with the exception of Botswana, in all of the countries MAEASaM has been focusing on, largely unregulated and unmonitored artisanal gold mining, often in areas known to have been centres of gold production in the past, has been on the increase as individuals struggle to sustain viable livelihoods in the face of land reforms, rising inflation, climate change and other economic hardships (e.g., Hilson and Garforth 2012; Mkodzongi and Spiegel 2019) and in response to rises in the price of gold on international markets. Destruction of heritage as a consequence of small-scale gold mining has also been reported in other parts of the continent, including Egypt (Fradley and Sheldrick 2017) and Ghana (Biveridge 2021). In some locations, these activities have also enhanced the threat of violent extremism (Bartlett 2016; Toupane *et al.* 2021), and hence also potentially renewed endangerment to certain categories of built heritage of the kind that does seem to attract international attention and reporting in the media. Without diminishing the importance and value of media coverage of high-profile destruction of cultural heritage, whether through deliberate human actions or the dramatic consequences of ongoing climate change, it is important that greater recognition is accorded within the media to the linkages that underpin the various kinds of structural endangerment facing cultural heritage especially in the Global South. As argued here, media coverage of cultural heritage issues on and about the African continent must seek to broaden public understanding of the roots of heritage endangerment in a manner that encompasses recognition of the scale and pervasive nature of the less spectacular forms and their root causes.

Such losses, while typically gradual, are also incremental and can result in the complete disappearance of entire heritage landscapes (and not just a few, more visually prominent sites) and the corpus of intangible heritage values that communities attach to these places.

Projects, such as MAEASaM, that approach heritage documentation holistically and focus as much on the mundane and the ordinary as on spectacular and special elements, offer one way forward for reconceptualising ideas about heritage endangerment and approaching the topic from a landscape perspective rather than a narrower, site-based focus. In so doing, they provide greater scope for exploring what the loss of heritage actually means for those communities that currently inhabit these landscapes and how this loss impacts their abilities to connect with their individual and collective pasts through the material remains of past lives and lived experiences (Bridges and Osterhoudt 2021; Dueppen and Gallagher 2023; Howell *et al.* 2023). It is these narratives of loss and disconnection from the tangible traces of past generations of inhabitants, whether conceived as direct ancestors and forebearers of 'tradition' or as earlier occupants who also gave shape to the land of the living that are typically missing from reports on heritage destruction, and which all of us must surely try harder capture, whether as heritage professionals, journalists, or other interested party.

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Chapter 4.
Intentional Heritage Destruction: Feminist Perspectives on Gender, Voice, and Norms

Eleanor Childs

Introduction

Cultural heritage has become increasingly susceptible to the operations of non-state actors (Lostal *et al.* 2018: 8; Stone 2015; Van der Auwera 2013: 2–5), especially the systematic looting of artefacts for financial gain (Brodie 2015; Brodie and Sabrine 2018) and the widespread practice of deliberately targeting minority ethnic or religious communities, known as 'cultural cleansing' (Bevan 2006; Brosché *et al.* 2017; Van der Auwera 2012). When appraising the progression of international norms in this context, led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), it is evident that the international community has become highly reactive to acts of destruction, especially when at the hands of violent extremists. This has had a definitive influence on the level of urgency attributed to protecting heritage and expectations surrounding international funding and resources (see Vrdoljak 2018). In no instance has this urgency been more apparent than in the case of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (*Da'esh*).

In the years following the March 2013 emergence of *Da'esh*, the world witnessed as a campaign of ideologically motivated and strategically driven violence was unleashed on the populations of Syria and Iraq. Not only did this involve almost incomparably frequent mass atrocities but also a scope and scale of deliberate heritage destruction, theft, and pillage that remains unparalleled in the modern era. However, the monumental collective response triggered as a result – including novel heritage documentation, reporting, preservation, and safeguarding instruments – also provoked alarm amongst experts for being incapable of addressing the scale of challenges presented (Cunliffe *et al.* 2016) (see UNESCO 2015). As put by Weiss and Connelly, the 'call for protecting cultural heritage in zones of armed conflict has become increasingly visible on the international public policy agenda, yet governments and citizens have typically limited their responses to deploring such destruction while doing little to prevent it from happening' (2017: 6).

This chapter highlights the need to critically analyse the multilayered legislative architecture and discursive framework surrounding the status of heritage in conflict in order to illuminate structural flaws and potential avenues for normative change. While the exclusion of local perspectives has specifically been evidenced as negatively influencing the agendas of organisations like UNESCO, less attention has been directed to how the international normative environment on heritage destruction is constrained by implicit biases and path-dependent institutional frameworks. One critically relegated aspect to the shortcomings of recourse to attacks against heritage sites that continues to impact the protection of heritage *and* associated cultural communities is the omission of gender in the discourse surrounding conflict-related heritage destruction.

In the limited academic critique available on the omission of gender under international heritage protection mechanisms, the use of gender-blind language is highlighted and condemned. Moghadam and Bagheritari critique UNESCO's intangible heritage and cultural diversity conventions for making 'no mention of women's rights, participation, or equality, or to gendered understandings of lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs' (2007: 15). They claim that by presenting cultural rights in a gender-blind manner, UNESCO is failing to detect and respond to 'the challenges faced by diverse groups of women within their own cultural group' (2007: 16). Similarly, Blake refers to UNESCO's 'silence' on the issue of gender and how, despite references to individuals and community groups, it stops short of identifying gender groups such as women (2015a: 5–6). Conversely, De Vido criticises UNESCO for painting a one-dimensional picture of women as vulnerable and without adequate recognition of their agency (2017: 454).

Although gender occurs frequently during discussions on the protection and preservation of heritage, especially intangible practices, this is hardly the case when it comes to the deliberate destruction of tangible heritage sites. Not only is there a noticeable absence of

any deep academic, institutional, or public engagement on the nexus between the destruction of heritage and gender but also a critical deficiency in authoritative literature questioning the validity of international heritage norms from a gendered perspective. Indeed, there is considerable lamentation from scholars over the persistent liminality of gender in heritage normative discourse (Colella 2018; Reading 2015; Smith 2008). As it stands, both the literature and the broader field remain embryonic in their meaningful engagement with gender and even more so with feminist theories (Fryer and Raczek 2020: 7). More specifically, feminist International Relations (IR) theories have rarely, if ever, been thoroughly applied by either scholars or policymakers to the problem posed by the intentional destruction of heritage. Therefore, by leveraging feminist IR perspectives on international norms this chapter highlights new dimensions to the ways in which attacks on heritage sites can be conceived.

For instance, while the disproportionate effects of conflicts on women are broadly well-known and progressively better understood (see Nasar 2013; UN Women 2013), when it comes to women's insecurities from exposure to deliberate heritage destruction in conflict and (post-)conflict environments, little has been said. As it stands, issues related to the violent repression of tangible and intangible heritage are noticeably absent from the otherwise expansive discourse on women's vulnerabilities in conflict and the risks women face in (post-)conflict environments that arise from gendered inequalities, group membership, and socio-cultural norms. The feminist view of gender as relational, political, and imbued with power dynamics makes it impossible to suggest that witnessing attacks on heritage could amount to a standardised or homogenised gendered or female experience (Kunz 2014: 606–7). Instead, the understanding of gender projected throughout feminist IR illustrates its importance in informing, justifying, and legitimising 'discourses, structures, and positions' (Sjoberg *et al.* 2018: 851). These reflect a dominant binary to exacerbate certain impacts of war and violence on women.

The idea that the international community's inadequate inclusion of the category of gender within multilateral legislative and normative heritage instruments is indicative of an inability to incorporate feminist-informed knowledge within rigid, top-down frameworks (Bode 2020: 351–2) is, therefore, fundamental to this chapter. Similarly, the problematic 'co-optation' of gender by neoliberal institutions and elite-run organisations (Prügl and Tickner 2018: 84) and the re-appropriation of women's rights and gender equality to suit the overriding political objectives held by international actors is a primary concern. This directly relates to the influence of power and privilege on the inception, diffusion, and trajectory of international norms.

Da'esh in Brief: Mass Atrocities and Heritage Destruction

In the months preceding and immediately after the capture of Mosul and proclamation of the Caliphate, *Da'esh* 'unleashed a cataclysmic wave of both genocidal pogroms and iconoclastic campaigns' (Isakhan and Akbar 2022: 516). In doing so, they can be viewed as attempting to disconnect civilian populations from their histories in order to supplant their defined sovereign entity. Over the course of several intensely violent years, ethnoreligious groups with centuries-old linkages to the land were broken up and internally displaced, and thousands of non-combatants were murdered, tortured, kidnapped, enslaved, or converted to Islam.

The group's Jihadi-Salafist ideology also translated into an overtly patriarchal view of society with strict gender roles and the authorisation of practices such as male guardianship, child marriage, and slavery – all of which aligned with the subordination of women (Al-Dayel *et al.* 2022; Revkin and Wood 2021). Women and girls were routinely trafficked into sexual slavery or forced into marriages, and repeatedly raped and tortured. Numerous organisations paint a bleak picture of the 'systemic gender-based persecution constituting crimes against humanity and... the war crime of torture based on gender discrimination' (Davis 2018: 518–9) committed by *Da'esh* (see OHCHR 2015; UNHRC 2016b).

Amidst the staggering atrocities committed by *Da'esh* at the height of its power was 'a systematic iconoclastic programme which saw the razing of countless cultural and religious sites' (Isakhan and Meskell 2019: 1189). While certain events gained global notoriety through an intense media spotlight (including the attacks on Nineveh, Nimrud, the Mosul Museum, or the UNESCO-listed World Heritage Sites of Hatra and Palmyra), *Da'esh* 'also actively targeted the sites most sacred to various minority communities: Yezidi temples, Christian churches and Shia shrines were systematically desecrated and destroyed' (Isakhan and Shahab 2020: 4). These methodical campaigns of heritage destruction – undertaken to 'erase the manifestation[s] of the victims' identities' (Vlasic and Turku 2016: 1373) – have thus come to be recognised as a weapon of war to spur displacement, exert control over occupied peoples, and establish dominance and authority (see Jones 2018; Turku 2018).

The cultural cleansing that occurred in the context of genocidal campaigns, enslavement, and forced

displacement was significant due to the centrality of heritage in the formation and continuation of distinct communities. As argued by Harmanşah, it should be viewed as a type of 'place-based violence that aims to annihilate the local sense of belonging, and the collective sense of memory among local communities to whom the heritage belongs' (2015: 170). Similarly, Vlasic and Turku contend that *Da'esh* likely intended its attacks on cultural heritage to result in a distinct psychological toll on the people and communities who defined themselves as being linked to particular sites, including their meaning, value, and physical presence (2016: 1373). However, commentary comparing wanton heritage destruction to a 'virus' spread by *Da'esh* 'beyond Iraq and Syria to *infect* Libya, Yemen, Mali, and Egypt and [threatening] nearby Lebanon and Jordan' (Lehr and Chamberlin 2015: emphasis added), dominated press coverage from flagship international, European, and American media outlets. This was underscored by the centring of threats posed to Western tourists (see Meskell 2005) and World Heritage Sites like the Pyramids of Giza or the Sphinx.

Unfortunately, there are few sources that deal directly with the impacts of heritage destruction perpetrated by *Da'esh* on those 'myriad communities most closely associated with these sites and thus most affected by the destruction' (Isakhan and Shahab 2022: 821). This is true for religious and ethnic minorities, as well as the general populations of Syria and Iraq, and particularly for women from both majority and minority communities. Across the small number of media sources that deal specifically with the ramifications of heritage destruction for local Syrian and Iraqi populations, the authors make a strong case for further engagement that centres on the experiences of targeted individuals and communities. Moreover, the academic literature encourages audiences to view attacks on heritage sites and cultural cleansing not as a 'footnote' in the suffering of Syrian and Iraqi communities but as a central factor in the ethnic- and religious-based violence leveraged against them (RASHID 2019: 114).

International Response

Da'esh's habitual practice of deliberately inflicting immense damage to historical, religious, national, and archaeological sites captured the attention of political actors and media outlets around the world. Given that destructive acts were often removed from active conflict locations, rarely treated as a military object in the vicinity of fighting, and essentially enacted without any pretence of military necessity, there is little question that they constituted a violation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (see ICTY 2006: 57–8). For a multitude of state and international actors, *Da'esh*'s defiance of the rules of war quickly reached the level of an existential threat (see Foradori and Rosa 2017: 151–3). It is within this context that attacks on heritage sites came to symbolise the group's 'refusal to implement norms – many of which [held] the status of customary rules – aimed at protecting both cultural heritage and people exposed to conflict' (Johannot-Gradis 2015: 1255).

The weaponisation of heritage by *Da'esh* can thus be isolated as a critical juncture in the trajectory of heritage governance, catalysing a renewed sense of resolve from disparate state and multilateral actors on heritage destruction as a preeminent concern in global politics (see Ki-moon 2016; UNESCO 2014: 5; UNSC 2016b; UNSC 2017). Resolutions acknowledging *Da'esh*'s repeated attacks on heritage sites, its looting of artefacts, and its 'cultural cleansing' of ethnoreligious communities both hastened and expanded the nascent securitisation of heritage protection and strengthened the previously tenuous links between heritage destruction and human rights (chiefly cultural rights) (Leloup 2019; Vlasic and Turku 2016: 1391).

The convergence of widespread attention on *Da'esh* and the 'emotive power of the' Global War On Terror (GWOT) (Weiss and Connelly 2019: 8) saw the direct association between heritage destruction and 'terrorist barbarity', spurred on by world media (see Cuno 2015; Puskás 2019: 97; Romey 2015; Turku 2018: 27–67). Correspondingly, a key element of the current landscape on heritage destruction is the progressively securitised status of heritage in armed conflict (Lostal 2017) that has been spearheaded by the UN Security Council (UNSC). Christensen elucidates that heritage 'securitisation' has been accompanied by increasingly politicised rhetoric surrounding heritage diplomacy (2022: 660). The resulting international discourse established a 'heritage-security nexus' (Rosén 2022), which has seen heritage destruction sitting firmly within the security concerns associated with armed non-state actors, especially violent extremists (Baj 2022: 8).

Notably, the UNSC's heritage mandate has been met with mounting academic criticism for remaining overtly fixed on looting, trafficking, and terrorist financing (UNSC 2015: 5) at the expense of considerations for how heritage destruction may factor into exploitation, ongoing violence, or conflict escalation. This has seen some scholars calling for an expansion of the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine to cover heritage sites (Lenzerini 2016; Weiss and Connelly 2019) or else for international deployments to integrate 'Cultural Peacekeeping' in their missions (Foradori and Rosa 2017). Regardless, it is apparent that the securitisation of heritage protection has already expanded the mandates of security actors whose priorities and preferred

courses of action (i.e. militarised intervention) are intrinsically removed from the human security needs of local populations.

Moreover, irrespective of a small body of academic sources expressing 'grave reservations' on the ethical and practical dilemmas that pertain to the use of military force in the protection of heritage sites (Frowe and Matravers 2019; Matthes 2018), the institutionalisation of a 'heritage-security-nexus' has faced limited scrutiny. This has enabled the 'intentions and causes of the securitising actors and how those actors usually benefit from security policies' to go largely unnoticed (Christensen 2022: 660). As Hausler points out, the UNSC's failures to treat heritage protection as related to human security or leverage resources from special procedures or fact-finding missions (see UNSC 2016a: 4–6) are indicative of the UN's fragmented approach to heritage, creating protection gaps for populations and their human rights (Hausler 2020: 219–20).

In contrast to the UNSC's *object-centric* stance (Clark 2018: 41), the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has adopted a *people-centred* approach that supports the idea of both individual and collective cultural rights being innately connected to tangible and intangible heritage. The human rights-based approach has been lauded for stimulating crucial progression in the normative framework around deliberate heritage destruction, with prominent scholars contending that it may add further protections to sites belonging to minority communities or not listed as World Heritage, as well as intangible heritage practices that occur in the presence of physical sites. Significantly, the approach explicitly recognises that human rights (specifically cultural rights) are 'greatly jeopardised when cultural heritage is at risk or destroyed' (UNGA 2016: 6). This is especially true in those instances where cultural violence is deployed to cause pain in communities who are directly targeted and to 'spread terror, fear, and despair' across populations at large (UNGA 2016: 4).

However, it is not insignificant that despite the UNHRC helping to elevate the narrative on heritage destruction as 'an aggravating factor in conflict and a major obstacle to dialogue, peace, and reconciliation' (UNHRC 2018: 2), given it does not possess the UNSC's or UNESCO's same power to institute binding resolutions, the cultural rights-based approach to heritage destruction is 'limited to recommendations with no legal effect' (Hausler 2020: 222). Additionally, it is worth pointing out that the remit of the human rights-based approach to heritage destruction is limited to the singular category of cultural rights. Scholars describe how, when compared to the treatment of other indivisible and universal human rights, cultural rights are disregarded (Campagna 2017: 171), 'treated rather as a residual category' (Stavenhagen 1998: 1) or a 'leftover category' (Logan 2014: 160) and 'neglected' as their 'poor relatives' (Symonides 1998: 559). Although some have suggested that the introduction of rights frameworks to issues surrounding heritage may help in addressing injustices and alleviating inequalities (Blake 2011; Luke and Kersel 2013), others have paid attention to the imposition of rights discourse creates new challenges in negotiating, mediating, and responding to cultural claims (Long and Smith 2010: 189).

Ultimately, despite the significance of recognising individual and collective aspects of cultural rights, the human rights-based approach falls short in extending this recognition to other group-based collective identities, including those based on gender (Tripp 2013: 19–20). As such, there remains no acknowledgement of how the relationship between heritage destruction and gendered social, political, or economic inequalities may manifest in rights violations. This is noteworthy given the likelihood that cultural violence results in increased vulnerability for women specifically, both in regard to their individual and collective security and in terms of women's human rights (including cultural rights) during and after armed conflict. This silence is also conspicuous given the frequent recognition of women's human rights in the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts, and the determination that women were intentionally targeted by numerous, if not all, state and non-state parties to these conflicts.

As it stands, this agenda has facilitated the prioritisation of an overtly internationalised security mandate on heritage protection coupled with a relatively weak cultural rights-based model, which ultimately lacks critical cross-over and thus fails to address key human security concerns. Contrary to the UN's generally 'respected role as a standard setter and norm entrepreneur' (Weiss and Connelly 2017: 36), there is now a growing consensus that heritage legislation, norms, and practices are problematic. Western-led efforts to institutionalise heritage protection in the context of *Da'esh* 'seem largely to have been repeating the tired rhetoric of salvaging antiquities in the event of armed conflict from the hands of "violent extremists"' (Harmanşah 2015: 170), whilst essentially failing to mitigate or respond effectively to destructive acts themselves (Al Quntar and Daniels 2016; Brodie 2015).

Heritage Destruction and Women's Security

There is an evident lack of consistency in the protection of cultural heritage despite the overwhelming consensus in favour of core normative instruments. Additionally, throughout the volumes of resolutions, official documents, and press releases produced by state and international actors, there are scant references to

the ways in which heritage destruction may affect local populations, infringe their cultural rights or heighten their insecurity. Broadly speaking, the UN's practices of 'gender mainstreaming' (purported to rectify the gender-blind or gender-neutral realities conceived under international frameworks) have a history of contributing to the misappropriation of *gender* as a synonym and catch-all term for *women*.

For instance, the UNSC's unanimously-adopted Resolution 1325 (2000) and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda represented a remarkable turning point in global perceptions on the roles of women in situations of armed conflict and prospects for peace. However, its transformative potential has been decidedly tempered in the decades since. Alongside the intense difficulties in implementing WPS policies, feminist IR scholars have problematised its role in perpetuating tropes of women as inherently peaceful or lacking political agency and disproportionate focus on women as victims (see Cook 2016; Coomaraswamy 2015; Kirby 2015; Olsson and Gizelis 2015; Schneiker 2021; Shepherd 2008; McLeod 2011). The inability of conventional international discourse on gender to move beyond one-dimensional views of women as victims, usually packaged as concern for 'women and children' (UNSC 2012: 2) has also contributed to the further marginalisation of women by failing to 'challenge prevailing practices in response to armed conflict' (Schneiker 2021: 1167), chiefly militarised interventions (Basu 2016: 364, 370; Pratt 2013: 777).

Moreover, by applying 'gender legitimacy' to security policies, security actors like the UNSC have expanded their own mandates and the grounds for international interference in a manner that is deeply problematic to numerous prominent feminist scholars. This is related to the tendency of equating women's victimhood to gendered or patriarchal violence with a lack of agency and power (see Åhäll 2012; Steans 2021), particularly for women in the Global South whose experiences of victimisation are consistently conflated with cultural backwardness, passivity, and dependence (Kreft and Schulz 2022). For instance, in the media, female victims of *Da'esh* were consistently portrayed as helpless and gendered stereotypes were employed to describe women who joined the organisation (or 'jihadi brides') as being easily manipulated, lacking free will, young, vulnerable, lured, and 'begging for rescue' (Sjoberg 2018: 301) (see Ali 2015; Coghlan 2015; Hamilton 2015; Jaber 2015; Shane 2015; Simpson 2015).

The introduction of securitised responses to heritage by UNESCO and the UNSC is not designed to respond to localised insecurity in the wake of heritage attacks, let alone gendered insecurity in politically volatile or systemically gender-imbalanced contexts. Arguably, the securitisation of heritage thus reflects 'the gendered nature of the values prized in the realm of international security' (Sjoberg and Tickner 2012: 179) that render multilateral agendas fundamentally ill-equipped to recognise or respond to the needs of women facing multilevel and gendered insecurity. In this way, the securitisation of heritage has subsumed the everyday insecurities experienced by women (and men) into a politicised discursive terrain wherein 'decisions on whom to protect, care for and save rest with international actors and their priorities' (Seckinelgin *et al.* 2010: 518). Therefore, rather than seeking to secure women and other vulnerable or marginalised populations from egregious forms of cultural violence, securitised heritage norms arguably widen the gap between threats to women's security and internationally sanctioned actions addressing the destruction of heritage in conflict situations.

Notably, given the recent context of heritage securitisation, it can be compared to the treatment of other non-traditional security threats that rapidly expanded the scope of security discourse in the twenty-first century. Whereas this enlargement of security concerns arose from mounting recognitions of the seriousness of threats beyond traditional military conflicts, the articulation of insecurity in reference to heritage destruction legitimises the need for emergency and extraordinary militarised response mechanisms (Balzacq 2005) that ultimately obscure or ignore the primary sites of insecurity. Security crises expose structural inequalities that are deeply embedded in society on the basis of gender norms and gendered socio-political power imbalances (Cockburn 2013; Huber 2023; Rigual *et al.* 2022), which often increase the vulnerability of women, particularly minority women (Cohn 2011; Dingli and Purewal 2018; Gomes and Marques 2021). However, these vulnerabilities and especially women's feelings of insecurity are often overlooked in traditional accounts of threats to security, particularly when surrounding the 'feminized civilian/homefront' (Sjoberg 2016: 53) (see Copelon 2000; Karam 2000).

Despite intense interest from UNESCO and other multilateral agencies to frame the destruction of tangible heritage as tantamount to cultural cleansing, these bodies have consistently overlooked how the violence of heritage destruction is attached to gendered harms with a differential impact on women. Women's security relates to a broad spectrum of interrelated threats. However, given the influence of 'socially constructed gender normative rules' (UNGA 2012: 14) on how women experience conflict, their insecurity is often behind closed doors, ill-fitting to Western ideas of female agency, and thus easily ignored by international actors (Youngs 2004: 83–5). This is exemplified in the

parallel spheres of the heritage-security-nexus, the bulk of which is focused on the deployment of armed forces and curtailing the threat of terrorism, and WPS, whereby women's experiences of insecurity and the presence of gender-specific threats has become grounds for necessitating militarised intervention.

By denying those directly affected by attacks on their heritage the means and avenues through which to influence and give meaning to security norms (Aradau 2010; Hansen 2000), international recourse to heritage destruction has insulated itself from the need to reckon with the (post-)conflict fall-out to stability and social cohesion (UNHRC 2018: 2) that compounds insecurity at the local level. As extremist or fundamentalist attacks on heritage sites are seen to symbolise 'attempts at cultural engineering,' other manifestations of which have been recognised as having 'a particularly dire impact' on women (UNGA 2017: 4), the omission of women's experiences of heritage destruction as a form of gender-based cultural cleansing within archetypal heritage discourse, international norms, and global mastheads is implicitly gendered as opposed to gender-neutral.

While heritage destruction and sexual- and gender-based violence are now discursively understood as threats to international peace and security and weapons of war, there is little to suggest that progressively securitised norms in either instance have assisted in effective intervention, prevention, or response (Nordås 2012). Moreover, within the context of armed conflict, both the protection of women and the protection of heritage sites have become embroiled in international security discourse and utilised as a means of justifying expanded grounds for militarised and interventionist security policies. In the same way that feminists have cautioned against the WPS agenda and its functional ties to traditional security, calls for greater provisions for heritage protection in 'international humanitarian, security and peacebuilding policies and operations, as a means to encourage dialogue and peace among nations' (UNESCO 2017: para. 6) (see OHCHR 2017) should provoke a degree of apprehension – at least until there is some evidence from those actors capable of shaping binding international law that addressing the protection gaps in international heritage law (based on 'which heritage' or 'whose heritage') is of material concern.

Engaging with experiences of heritage destruction from individuals who are less visible yet arguably more vulnerable to cultural violence, destabilisation, breakdowns in social cohesion, and protracted inter-communal tensions, highlights the 'possibilities of conceiving of (in)security differently' (Stern 2006: 196). It also has the potential to build on the work of feminist scholars who problematise masculinist security discourses (see Cockburn 2013; Shepherd 2008; Wibben 2011) for failing to address the differential nature of women's insecurity (Hoogensen and Rottem 2004; Shepherd 2021; Youngs 2006). Remaining attuned to women's varying articulations of insecurity and the ruptures to their lives set in motion by attacks on heritage sites requires cognisance of the context-specific ways in which patriarchal societal structures constrain elements of women's agency. In Syria and Iraq, women broadly face restrictions on their roles, relationships, livelihoods, and behaviours and are met, in large part, with different expectations to those placed upon men. However, this does not negate the existence of power or empowerment in women's lives, especially when it comes to their engagement with tangible and intangible heritage and internalisations of their cultural, ethnic, religious, and gender identities.

Heritage Destruction and Women's Rights

Of specific concern in this chapter is the influence of hegemonic masculinity on the norms of acceptable personhood and thus of legitimate cultural heritage, which have remained shielded behind gender-blind and gender-neutral heritage discourse. By 'default[ing] to white (or otherwise racio-ethnically dominant), masculinist norms in the narratives presented at heritage sites and in the dynamics encountered on heritage projects' (Fryer and Raczek 2020: 9), have continually obscured the uniqueness of gendered relationships to heritage destruction, allowing pervasive assumptions that view culture as a barrier to women's rights and gender equality to flourish. The 'blatantly absent' status of gender 'as a core concern' (Fryer and Raczek 2020: 9) for heritage actors in the context of *Da'esh* espousing a societal and political vision rooted in systemic gender-based persecution and subordination is particularly symptomatic of the broader tendency to essentialise culture as an obstacle to gender equality emanating from the West (Cole 2013: 247).

Essentialist tendencies are markedly apparent when dealing with the Global South, whereby women are often exclusively and permanently viewed as victims of cultural oppression without consideration of their agency or the 'intricate and complex ways' in which gender intersects with heritage, let alone its deliberate destruction (UNGA 2012: 2). This binary understanding of culture in opposition to women's rights effectively limits the possibility of heritage destruction being motivated by gender or being capable of inflicting gendered harm. Additionally, it perpetuates and reinforces a divided view of culture that is reminiscent of the ways in which colonial discourse actively conceals 'similarities between violence against women in the [Global] North and such violence in the [Global]

South' by portraying violence as 'qualitatively different' and leveraging difference 'as evidence of a backward culture or civilisation in arguments regarding the civilising mission of northern powers' (Weldon 2006: 85) (see Narayan 1997).

Despite the feminist-informed turn towards institutions affording more weight to women's agency in conflict situations (see Kreft 2019), women's cultural agency remains poorly understood. As with other categories of women's rights or insecurities, this has seen the gendered consequences of heritage destruction in conflict zones remain opaque, with most state and multilateral actors preferring to discuss the effects of heritage attacks through specific cultural rights frames. Not only does this de-prioritise other human rights but it also fails to grasp the implications of cultural violence and fundamentalist attacks on heritage for the human security of local populations, including women.

Should heritage sites be viewed as being conducive to women's enjoyment of their cultural rights, the immense potential for harm inflicted on women when malicious actors like *Da'esh* attempt to 'establish a single, homogeneous way of life' (Matthews *et al.* 2020: 125) by erasing their heritage is foregrounded. Consequently, questions are raised as to whether international actors possess a willingness to reconceive the destruction of heritage as a violation of women's cultural rights in addition to cultural rights broadly defined. While recommendations have been made for states to 'ratify the core cultural heritage conventions' (UNGA 2016: 21) to prevent destruction as well as 'adopt a fully gender-sensitive approach to the protection of cultural heritage' (UNGA 2016: 23) to avert cultural rights violations, it remains unclear how a gender-sensitive approach would manifest in reality.

Additionally, the leadership of successive Special Rapporteurs at the forefront of international efforts to reframe the relationship between heritage and human rights has yet to result in advances to protections for women's rights when their heritage is attacked, destroyed, stolen, or suppressed. The literature singles out reports made by Farida Shaheed and Karima Bennoune as instrumental in establishing that access to heritage is a fundamental cultural right (UNHRC 2010: 5) and that the intentional destruction of heritage is thus a rights violation (UNGA 2016: 6). However, their equally substantial endeavours to reconceive the relationship between gender and culture have arguably stalled without solid linkages between heritage destruction and women's culture rights. In her 2016 report to the UNGA, Bennoune (2016: 5) argued that:

> "It is difficult to obtain information on women's experience of cultural heritage and its destruction because many organisations engaged in work on heritage do not approach it from a gendered perspective, and many women defenders of human rights do not engage in such work. Here lies a gap that must be bridged."

Despite presenting an obvious 'gap' to be filled, in order for more meaningful understandings of the gendered ramifications set in motion by attacks on heritage to take hold, a more robust approach to gender is urgently required. Indeed, it seems of little use to 'obtain information' about the specific experiences of women engaging with cultural heritage or dealing with its destruction without first sustaining deeper engagement on the gendered nature of heritage destruction and the violence it embodies, particularly in situations of conflict. If, as Bennoune proposes, women's connections with heritage sites 'may be a factor in their targeting' (2016: 5), questions are raised as to why her successor, Alexandra Xanthaki, chose not to include gender when reporting on the threats to populations facing heritage destruction in 2022.

In her inaugural report, Xanthaki declared her intention as Special Rapporteur to address 'the loss or damage of cultural heritage of communities and groups, particularly – but not only – threatened minorities, indigenous peoples and victims of assimilationist policies' (UNHRC 2022: 5). Given her otherwise powerful advocacy on furthering international understanding of the interplay between women's rights and cultural rights (2019), the omission of gender within this report calls into question the broader lack of clarity and deep engagement on the nuances of women as a political category with associated rights and protection needs. Therefore, an interrogation of the category of 'gender' as it appears in both international heritage law and discourse as well as across the UN at large is crucial should progression in the normative framework on the threats posed by cultural violence – locally and internationally – advance positively to include gender dimensions and involve women's rights and security.

Threats to women's cultural rights have been met with increasing scrutiny in recent decades. However, this has mostly revolved around the need to prevent negative cultural practices that violate women's fundamental rights, of which heritage destruction is not recognised. Returning to Bennoune, despite providing potted recognitions that extremist ideologies targeting minorities and women increase the likelihood of cultural cleansing and heritage destruction (UNGA 2016: 23), when reporting exclusively on the grave impacts of such ideologies on women's cultural rights she focuses instead on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and patriarchal restrictions on bodily or legal autonomy (UNGA 2017). The harms inflicted

by practices that prevent women from participating in religion and education, restrict reproductive rights, impose modest dress codes, and lead to hate speech and violence (UNGA 2017) are undeniable. Yet, the overt, skewed fixation on such practices mirrors 'the ways in which human rights discourse legitimates a very narrow category of gendered subjectivity' (Collins *et al.* 2010: 312).

Broadly speaking, the ability for women to exercise cultural agency in their engagement with heritage is limited to intangible practices, the implication being that accessing and enjoying tangible sites (often gender segregated, status adjacent, and dictated by gender norms) falls outside the scope of what is considered women's 'control, influence and freedom' (Youngs 2004: 76). In reality, women frequently carve out spaces for themselves and negotiate their individual and collective identities through the use of both tangible and intangible heritage, whereby ideas about culture and gender are created and re-created over time. Given that fundamentalist beliefs are said to pose a specific 'threat to women's human rights' (UNGA 2017: 21), the conspicuous absence of heritage destruction emphasises the normative deficiencies in understanding the value of culture for women and the threats posed by cultural violence to a range of women's fundamental rights.

The Normative Environment

Current normative discourse on the status of heritage sites in armed conflict can be considered as aligning with UNESCO's longstanding rhetoric on the value of heritage to 'all of humanity' (Clark 2018: 59–60), thereby reinforcing the idea that heritage agendas must uphold the prerequisite of universalism (Xanthaki 2019: 702). Also known as 'Authorized Heritage Discourse' (AHD) (Smith 2006), the leveraging of self-evidence and incontrovertibility across heritage governance has perpetuated a particular construction of heritage based on the covert '(un)privileging of particular identities, memories and experiences' (Åse and Wendt 2021: 287). Under the auspices of universalism, international actors have entrenched a normative hierarchy within heritage practices that actively contributes to the reinforcement of 'unequal power dynamics inherited from colonial and patriarchal social projects' (Fryer and Raczek 2020: 9).

Relatively little attention has been directed toward the multifaceted power relations covertly dictating the direction of normative progression on the destruction of heritage sites in armed conflict. Power determines the ways in which social and political spheres are constructed, meaning it both clears and obstructs the path for dealing with issues whilst including or excluding actors and promoting or silencing their voices from being heard and taken seriously. Because much of the normative framing surrounding cultural heritage is taken for granted, there is a dearth of observers pulling at the threads justifying its logic or perpetuating its relevance. Of chief importance is how the exclusion of local voices (especially from the Global South) within an immensely top-heavy area of international governance has enabled the progression of exclusionary norms under the guise of universalism that lack functionality and applicability in the contexts where they are needed most.

Amongst the broad array of actors now intimately involved in the protection of heritage at the behest of universal value, international peace and security, human rights, and development, there are few who display cognisance 'of the complex symbolic, discursive, ideological and physical environment in which heritage protection, destruction and reconstruction takes place' (Isakhan and Akbar 2022: 529). The ongoing prioritisation of protections for tangible sites despite increasing critiques of Eurocentrism (Blake 2015b: 20) and the one-sided interest in safeguarding gendered intangible heritage speak to the normalisation of international heritage law and its legislative and political agendas, which are critically curtailed in their sensitivities to the consequences of cultural violence. Despite the growth in advocates for a human-centred lens to heritage and heritage destruction, the scope of protections has remained relatively narrow. The failure to acknowledge the numerous, interlocked human rights and security issues faced by populations being targeted by actors perpetrating heritage destruction in the midst of active conflict presents a clear barrier to achieving its intended aims and appears incongruous to the ongoing relevance of its normative framework.

From a feminist perspective, the continual weight in contemporary politics placed upon international norms that perpetuate ideas of universality has little to do with the abstract existence of inherent truths based on inalienable values or a shared global culture (see Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). That the 'intellectual orthodoxy' afforded to the inherent necessity in protecting 'our common heritage' for the 'common good,' has faced limited 'empirical scrutiny' (Isakhan and Akbar 2022: 517; see Weiss and Connelly 2019) despite profoundly 'Western ideas about cultural heritage [functioning] as a global backdrop for the destruction in Palmyra, Bamiyan, and Timbuktu' (Rosén 2020: 505), is illustrative of the power in normative 'truths' and the actors who espouse them. This is indicative of 'the silent unspoken, not necessarily easily observable, but fundamentally material reality' of multilateralism (Hearn and Parkin 2001: xii), which continuously naturalises the status of elite, white, heterosexual, cisgender men as the standard 'person'

and normalises the division of culture between 'us' and 'them'. While subtle, the feminisation of gender (Butler 1990: 19) and colonial 'othering' of culture under AHD is demonstrated in the narratives and political rhetoric dominating public discourse on heritage destruction that arose in the context of international response to *Da'esh*.

This again points to the significance of understanding the role of 'voice' in the development of narratives and political rhetoric through which 'certain meanings of norms get constructed, reproduced and/or altered' and calls into question 'the ability of different kinds of [privileged] agents to define and implement norms' based on the marginalisation or omission of particular (underprivileged) voices (Krook and True 2012: 112–3). The privileging of hegemonic masculinity in heritage discourse has enabled the sidelining of 'people of color, ethnic and religious minorities, white women, as well as LGBT, and queer+' individuals worldwide (Fryer and Raczek 2020: 9). As stated, it has also perpetuated the liminality of both gender and women in the normative and legislative frameworks covering the destruction of heritage, actively removing women's agency from contributing to any existing processes that might possess the capacity to invert gender-blind norms. Underscoring the critical evasion of gender within heritage discourse is a more nuanced obscuration of the 'public value' attributed to various rights and freedoms, ascribed on diverse populations and identities, and awarded to particular conflict and (post-)conflict concerns. Despite reflecting the historic preferencing of particular identities on the basis of gender in addition to 'race, class, nation and empire' (Fryer and Raczek 2020: 9), these value systems have become normalised and thus act as a key source of legitimacy in heritage discourse and of authority for heritage actors.

By applying a feminist approach to international heritage law that draws upon critical theory, it becomes evident that, like much discursive framing at the international level in the realm of heritage, 'masculinity is not a gender; it is the norm' (Kronsell 2006: 109). This can be evidenced in the ways in which intergenerational intangible heritage practices have progressively become couched in the terminology of 'gender equality', 'gender-based discrimination', 'gender issues', and 'gender identities' by multilateral bodies. Indeed, when it comes to the issue of gender, international dealing with intangible heritage have received considerably more attention than those governing tangible heritage (Reading 2015: 406; Shortliffe 2015: 108). This is significant given the patriarchal and masculine overtones present in much of the world's 'recognised' tangible heritage, particularly given the historically Westernised and religious connotations surrounding a majority of protected World Heritage Sites. It is also important in light of the widely held view on intergenerational heritage practices (including oral traditions, knowledge and skills, social or cultural values, etc.) as feminised or 'women's activities', whereby women are entrusted as the cultural custodians upon whom the fate of intangible heritage transmission rests.

Similarly, the idea that 'there is no gender but the feminine' (Butler 1990: 19) has been reinforced by the treatment of gender as an 'add-on' under international heritage law, whereby a 'gender consciousness' is only invoked or taken seriously in situations 'where *women* can be conceptualised in [institutionalised] language of social groups with "special needs"' (Sevenhuijsen 2001: 12, emphasis added). The arguably tokenistic manner in which gender has been incorporated by the UNHRC in its approach to heritage destruction is a prime example. In its two resolutions on the destruction of heritage and human rights, the UNHRC '*encourages* States to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to the protection of cultural heritage and the safeguarding of cultural rights' (2016a: para. 9), later adding, 'that is respectful of cultural diversity' (2018: para. 9).

When placed against the backdrop of gender mainstreaming across the UN, it is obvious that the inclusion of gender in multilateral rhetoric and discursive norms does not necessarily '[improve] the condition of women' (Ackerly and True 2018: 265) or '[constitute] progress towards gender equality' (Sjoberg *et al.* 2018: 860), particularly when gender advances take precedence over more complex understandings of women's intersectionality. Failing to grasp how 'gender is always constituted through and constitutive of... other relations of power' (Kunz 2014: 605) runs the risk of reinforcing structural violence by sensationalising the role of gender as deterministic and diminishing the socially-ascribed character of identity politics to reflect a dominant hierarchy. Indeed, it is clear that international heritage law is hindered by an inability to account for intersectionality or the cross-cutting discrimination and violence which occurs at the nexus of multiple identity categories. As a result, the progressively prevalent 'observation that cultural destruction is closely connected to destruction of groups' (Davidavičiūtė 2021: 599) has yet to encompass the understanding that deliberate attempts to wipe out the heritage of minority groups 'have a particular impact on women, who are often seen to symbolise minority groups' (UNGA 2017: 18).

In one of the only studies to deal specifically with international cultural heritage law and women, Powderly and da Silva (2020: 458) conclude:

> "Failing to understand how the denial of women's cultural rights and the destruction of cultural heritage intersect with the violation of other fundamental rights results in a myopic and simplistic analysis. For example, little attention has been given to the reciprocal relationship between the destruction of cultural heritage (tangible or intangible) and the crime against humanity of gender-based persecution. Only an intersectional view of the phenomenon can lead to a comprehensive recognition and safeguarding of women's cultural rights and cultural heritage."

Conclusion

Despite growing recognitions that heritage destruction is capable of amounting to war crimes, a violation of international criminal law, an infringement on human rights, and even a crime against humanity (ICC 2016a: 32; ICC 2016b: 3), proponents of international heritage law have demonstrated a general inability to reflect the realities of communities whose heritage (whether tangible or intangible) lacks international standing. This has been accompanied by a broad tendency to frame heritage destruction as either isolated or easily demarcated incidents that (whether singularly or collectively) can be seen to pose a specific threat and responded to accordingly. Although true in some instances, the countless attacks on heritage committed by *Da'esh* are indicative of a co-constitutive 'system of brutality' (Robinson 2006: 236), wherein organised violence and conditional citizenship engendered a constant renegotiation of daily lives under occupation and in the ongoing effects of its aftermath.

Notwithstanding the intensity in condemning and reporting on mass atrocities at the height of the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts, by separating the issue of heritage destruction from localised contexts, the much-lauded integration of a 'human element' to understandings of heritage is, in actuality, critically watered down. As such, while the lexicon surrounding intentional destruction with 'discriminatory intent' makes a strong case for viewing the deliberate targeting of heritage sites as representative of direct attacks on particular communal identities, the substantive body of international law remains ill-equipped in endowing either heritage or associated communities with the consequential protections each desperately needs. In this rapidly changing discursive transnational landscape, there has been a consistent vying for recognition, status, and control over the processes and definitions for heritage as a shared concern in the interests of humanity (Francioni 2004: 1210).

However, this chapter problematises the singular dependency on top-down frameworks in each of these domains and their collective incapacity to address the scope and scale of harms to heritage or to people endemic to heritage destruction. The ongoing prioritisation of protections for tangible sites despite increasing critiques of Eurocentrism (Blake 2015b: 20) and the one-sided interest in safeguarding gendered intangible heritage speak to the normalisation of international heritage law and its political agendas, which are critically curtailed in their sensitivities to the consequences of cultural violence. By applying this uniquely feminist methodology to international heritage norms, the approach taken by this chapter deals with the inherent challenges imbued in dynamic and reactive normative trajectories whilst advocating for the expansion or reorientation of their neoliberal and Western-centric discursive frames. The broad inability to recognise the consequences of naturalising and depoliticising 'tacit knowledge of what can and cannot be voiced' (Altan-Olcay 2022: 300) across institutionalised recourse to the destruction of heritage is therefore not only inhibitive but potentially harmful.

In order to bridge the divide between the international and the local, a multidimensional approach to heritage destruction, the heritage-security-nexus, and the human rights-based approach for heritage must be developed that is able to classify, assess, and report on the characteristics and intensities of threats experienced when heritage destruction occurs. Only then, can such a framework serve to strategise, conceptualise, and operationalise appropriate avenues and models for redress. Therefore, as this analysis demonstrates, feminist theoretical tools can help to provide explanations of the shortcomings in international heritage norms and the conceptual and practical challenges that need to be addressed to effectively address the issue of heritage destruction in its full extent. In starting from a vantage point that recognises the contested nature of heritage and which problematises the reification of 'the international' as the mouthpiece and source of knowledge for heritage value, new spaces are opened up that test the limits of tightly guarded global norms to include the knowledge, aspirations, intuition, grievances, and needs of local communities, especially those whose voices have been subjected to systemic subordination.

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Chapter 5.
Underwater Cultural Heritage: A Weapon for Political Deception and Psychological Operations

Elena Perez-Alvaro

Introduction

The utilisation of cultural heritage in the context of warfare has long and historical precedents. Throughout centuries, various civilisations and military powers have recognised the symbolic, emotional, and strategic value of cultural heritage, employing it as a tool to achieve diverse objectives in times of conflict. For this reason, cultural heritage has been intertwined with the strategies of warfare, serving as a tool for propaganda, intimidation, and the assertion of power. The legendary Trojan War, as depicted in Homer's Iliad, involved the strategic use of an object that was crucial to their identity and cultural heritage. The Greeks employed the famous wooden horse as a deceptive tactic to infiltrate the city of Troy, highlighting the intersection of military strategy and cultural symbols.

The weaponisation of underwater cultural heritage aligns with this historical continuum, emphasising the enduring significance of heritage in the dynamics of conflict and geopolitics. According to Rosén cultural heritage

> "has become a societal vulnerability that lends itself to irregular attacks and disinformation campaigns, and its destruction or misappropriation may trigger destabilization and eruptions of violence: it has become a frontier (Rosén 2023: 46)."

McLuhan *et al.* (1968) contended that future international conflicts would manifest as information wars targeting both soldiers and civilians. The deliberate targeting of cultural heritage, including underwater cultural heritage, has significant repercussions beyond the immediate archaeological and historical impact. One notable consequence is the potential alienation of the local community. When cultural heritage is intentionally damaged, manipulated or exploited, this can evoke strong negative reactions from the affected population, leading to a breakdown in trust and cooperation (Hamilakis 2009). In military contexts, such actions can pose serious challenges to the success of a mission. Negative sentiments within the local community may translate into resistance, hindering the military's ability to establish positive relationships and gather essential intelligence. This, in turn, can compromise the overall effectiveness of the mission even if the mission is legitimate and just. In extreme cases, the weaponisation of cultural heritage may contribute to an escalation of hostilities, exacerbating tensions and increasing the risk of casualties. Therefore, recognising the cultural significance of heritage sites, including those underwater, is not only ethically important but also strategically prudent in military operations.

Psychological operations (PSYOP) have been defined as a

> "multifaceted instrument of national power and influence that can deter or dissuade potential adversaries [...]. PSYOP can erode an enemy's will before the commitment of combat forces as well as facilitate humanitarian relief missions and the reconstitution of societies following conflicts (Jones and Mathews 1995: 1)."

In April 2022, Ukraine sank the Russian flagship RTS Moskva, the largest Russian warship sunk in combat since World War II. After the sinking, Ukraine's Ministry of Defence reported on its Facebook page that Ukraine had registered the Moskva shipwreck as underwater cultural heritage under Ukraine number 2064[1].

This statement by Ukraine's Ministry of Defence is actually being wielded as a political tool to undermine the Russian community's morale, as its implementation would actually create numerous complex legal implications. Despite having little legal basis, this Facebook post is proof of the use of underwater cultural heritage for psychological operations in hybrid warfare. In fact, the use of social networks for political propaganda has become increasingly prevalent in the modern era, leveraging online platforms to disseminate

[1] Ministry of Defence of Ukraine Facebook page, viewed 18 June 2024 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=336164768613886&extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN_GK0T-GK1C&ref=sharing>.

Reporting Heritage Destruction (Archaeopress 2025): 51–60

information, shape public opinion, and influence political discourse. These platforms, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and others, provide a vast and accessible space for political actors to engage with the public and advance their agendas. Political propaganda on social networks often involves the strategic dissemination of information with a particular bias, designed to sway public opinion in favour of a specific political ideology, candidate, or cause (O'Shaughnessy 2004). Various techniques, including the creation and promotion of misleading content, targeted advertisements, and the use of bots and trolls, are employed to amplify messages and manipulate online discussions, also as part of PSYOP (King 2004).

Russian military deception, known as 'maskirovka,' is a strategy that involves misleading the enemy about the true intentions and capabilities of one's own forces. This includes creating false strategic information and affecting the enemy's morale by spreading misinformation, rumours, and propaganda (Hui Han 2016). In fact, Russia has leveraged its underwater heritage to disseminate propaganda, particularly to legitimise the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. In 2002, Vladimir Putin 'randomly recovered' two ancient ceramic jugs while diving in the Taman Gulf off Crimea. It is challenging for archaeologists to make such significant discoveries, yet Putin managed to locate them within just a few hours of diving. In 2014, historical and archaeological evidence was again used to demonstrate a past Russian presence around Crimea: Vladimir Putin boarded a three-seater submersible ship to inspect an ancient sunken ship recently found in the Black Sea, off the coast of Crimea. He descended 83 meters to see the remains of the Byzantine ship. Speaking on the radio with Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev while still underwater, Putin said he hoped the commercial ship would shed light on Russia's development and show 'how deep our historical roots are' (Zikakou 2015: paragraph 3).

Cultural heritage has, consequently, great potential as a geopolitical asset, influencing international relations, territorial disputes, and the construction of national identity. The nuanced interplay between fabricated and scientific proof underscores the complex dynamics surrounding heritage in the context of geopolitical narratives. As Viejo-Rose and Sorensen (2015) remind us, the relationship between cultural heritage and armed conflict is an old one, but it raises new questions and dynamics. For instance, as this chapter will demonstrate, the manipulation of cultural heritage, whether intentional or collateral, often attracts unfavourable or favourable publicity. As Boler and Davis (2020) highlight, media coverage and public opinion can turn against the perpetrators, bringing attention to the disregard for cultural preservation and potentially tarnishing the reputation of the involved military forces or actors. On the other hand, perpetrators may also exploit media channels to disseminate their narratives and shape public opinion. By controlling the narrative and framing the actions in a way that aligns with their objectives, they seek to influence not only the local population but also the broader international community (Badsey 2014). This manipulation can involve crafting a distorted historical account, justifying the actions taken, or even denying any wrongdoing. Recognising the role of media in these dynamics is important for crafting responses that not only condemn the manipulation of underwater cultural heritage but also address the broader information warfare strategies employed in conflicts.

The Hidden Power of Underwater Cultural Heritage

Underwater cultural heritage is the witness of the history of diplomatic, military, commercial, and scientific developments. In fact, the history of war and peace of all the nations has tangible remains underwater. Underwater cultural heritage, encompassing sunken ships, submerged cities, and archaeological artefacts beneath the sea, plays a crucial role in preserving the historical narrative of human civilisation (Perez-Alvaro 2019). These submerged sites often hold evidence of past diplomatic endeavours, naval engagements, trade routes, and scientific exploration, providing invaluable insights into the evolution of societies across different epochs. The preservation of underwater cultural heritage is not only a matter of archaeological significance but also contributes to a broader understanding of geopolitical interactions, technological advancements, and cultural exchanges. Sunken ships, for example, may reveal the routes of ancient trade networks, the types of cargo transported, and the challenges faced by seafarers. Additionally, the remains of submerged cities shed light on the urban planning, architecture, and daily life of past civilisations. Scientific developments and discoveries made during underwater archaeological excavations enhance our knowledge of ancient technologies and maritime practices.

Even landlocked countries have a history under water. There are 44 landlocked states in the world (Casal and Selamé 2015). Prior to 1914, there were only four independent land-locked states outside Europe: Bolivia (landlocked only since 1879), Paraguay (which had access to the sea via an internationalised navigable river), Ethiopia (which has become a coastal state with the acquisition of Eritrea by federation in 1952 and by absorption later), and Afghanistan (which did not become fully sovereign until 1919) (Glassner 1970). Some of the landlocked countries today have connecting infrastructures, capitals near the sea and navigable rivers. In fact, some of the landlocked countries have even joined the Third United Nations Conference on

the Law of the Sea (Alexander 1981). In this context, it is essential to distinguish between states and nations. A state refers to a political entity with defined territorial boundaries and a centralised government. In contrast, a nation is a group of people who share a common identity, such as language, culture, ethnicity, or history. Not all nations have their own state, and not all states encompass a single nation. Consequently, even in countries with access to the sea, there may be nations that are landlocked.

The formation of new nations and the dissolution of old ones, all have left remains under water. In times of peace, bodies of water have been, and still are, routes for commerce, witnesses to communities' encounters, and proof of technological, nautical, and resource development. Oceans have been natural highways connecting different lands. In times of war, these same bodies of water have been, and still are, battlefields, civil and war graves, and witnesses to political strategies. Millenia of war at sea have left thousands of shipwrecks which is a powerful subject rich in history, imagination, and emotion (Delgado 2022).

That is precisely why governments use underwater cultural heritage for political ends: the emotional and symbolic dimensions of underwater cultural heritage make it a powerful tool for governments seeking to influence public sentiment, assert national identity, and enhance diplomatic and economic standing on both domestic and international levels. Nostalgia is an important issue because heritage is valued for the notions it evokes in people. The real sense of heritage lies in the act of passing on and receiving memories, emotions and knowledge. The heritage user experiences sensations, feelings and emotions (Smith 2006). These emotions, memories and knowledge are engaged when the various stakeholders change, influence and manipulate the applicable values, for example, by adding new context.

The second reason why underwater cultural heritage is used for political ends is that oceans, rivers and lakes have always been a symbol of power. For instance, the British Empire relied heavily on its naval supremacy. Control over the oceans allowed Britain to expand its territory, influence trade routes, and project military power globally. During the American Civil War, control of the Mississippi River was crucial, and the Great Lakes in North America have been pivotal in the economic development of the region. In water, the link between identity and territory is more important than in land, but also more complicated with no limits. Consequently, the sea is a geopolitical entity, and it will continue to influence how global events unfold (Stravridis 2017). Therefore, underwater cultural heritage is not only proof of past encounters but it is also a tool for future actions. It not only serves as a historical record but also holds contemporary and future relevance, influencing various aspects of society, economy, diplomacy, and environmental conservation.

The current global geopolitical landscape features several maritime conflicts and tensions, reflecting a complex interplay of regional disputes, power struggles, and historical grievances in different regions including: the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia that has heightened tensions in the Black Sea with more military manoeuvres such as maritime landings and naval patrols for grain trade; the Mediterranean Sea, that has witnessed maritime tensions due to conflicts in Libya and Syria; the Türkiye-Greece Disputes in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean over territorial waters, maritime boundaries, and energy resources that have led to naval standoffs and increased military presence; the piracy in the Red Sea, particularly near the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden where navies from multiple countries, including international coalitions, have conducted anti-piracy operations to secure maritime routes; the disputes in the South China Sea that have led to heightened tensions in the South China Sea with military activities and island-building; or the tensions that persist between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea with naval and air force activities in the region increasing, contributing to an uneasy security environment (Pichel 2022).

These maritime conflicts underscore the strategic importance of key waterways and the complex interactions between political, economic, and security interests. Efforts to manage and resolve these conflicts often involve diplomatic initiatives, international cooperation, and adherence to maritime laws and norms. The presence of naval forces and the potential for military escalation emphasise the need for diplomatic solutions to prevent further instability.

Hybrid Warfare

For individuals unfamiliar with the language of warfare, the perception may be that wars primarily involve the launching of bombs and gunfire. This is the image that governments tend to portray to the public. However, wars encompass various strategies and tactics beyond conventional military actions. While the common perception often revolves around traditional warfare involving the use of force, modern conflicts extend into different realms, such as political deception and psychological operations (Mattis 2018).

As Renz (2016) defines it, hybrid warfare economises the use of force, is persistent and is population centric. The objective is to foment internal divisions within the enemy, leading to the psychological disintegration of the opponent. Numerous mechanisms are employed for

this purpose, with strategies ranging from leveraging historical discourses to undermining the spirits of the enemy's population by targeting and destroying their heritage. These tactics contribute to shaping political narratives in the conflict. The rationale behind this lies in the inherent population-centric nature of heritage. According to Rosén:

> "[c]ultural property here emerges as an element of a certain symbolic power that adversaries may "play" to provoke new, or escalate existing conflicts, or utilize for strategic communication purposes, including social media campaigns. This can include making claims to cultural property in territories belonging to other nations (Rosén 2017: 16)."

Before the Cold War, warfare relied on the technical-military development of armies, such as the aircraft carrier. Additionally, the early 20th century witnessed an intense arms race leading up to World War I, characterised by the construction of 'dreadnoughts', which were revolutionary battleships that set new standards for naval dominance. Looking further back, the success of Atlantic sailing vessels in the Battle of Lepanto (1571) against Ottoman galleys showcased the strategic importance of naval innovation. This battle demonstrated the shifting balance of power through advancements in ship design. Similarly, the development of Viking longboats enabled Norse explorers and warriors to navigate and conquer vast territories. Even earlier, the Assyrians demonstrated innovative military techniques during sieges by crossing rivers using buoyancy aids, illustrating the longstanding importance of controlling waterways for strategic advantages (Potter 2014).

Following the Cold War, the significance of military innovation became even more apparent. The advent of high-precision guided military systems, including drones and missiles, fundamentally altered the nature of conflict. Methods of warfare evolved, giving rise to the concept of the 'grey zone'. This term is used to describe a space between peace and war, where indirect threats, such as information warfare, hold as much importance as open hostilities (Pulido 2021). Grey zone strategies are designed to prevent the conflict from escalating into a large-scale, direct military confrontation leading to a conventional war. These strategies stem from the sobering realisation that the invention of nuclear weapons has the potential to easily annihilate the world (Pulido 2021). Nations then began to engage with each other more delicately, leading to the establishment of a non-proliferation regime that was collectively agreed upon. This phenomenon has been termed the 'stability/instability paradox', a concept that encapsulates the notion that while nuclear weapons may contribute to stability by preventing large-scale wars between major powers, they simultaneously introduce instability by allowing for the possibility of smaller conflicts and the use of unconventional tactics (Snyder 1965). The nuclear stability resulted in the emergence of multiple 'minors', non-nuclear conflicts, since superpowers were assured that the other would not resort to retaliation that could lead to the outbreak of an all-out nuclear war (Frias-Sanchez 2020). These minor conflicts are often referred to as 'Schelling points'. These points represent instances where the value of the objective under dispute in a conflict is deemed to be less than the potential costs associated with crossing a specific threshold to achieve that objective (Pulido 2021). Hence, the grey zone constitutes a strategy of deterrence and coercion that refrains from direct violence but rather relies on the credible threat of its use. Consequently, it represents a delicate balance involving political, psychological, and propaganda aspects, all of which are intricately linked to the concept of hybrid warfare.

Hybrid warfare is based on socio-political structural vulnerabilities (Korybko 2016). Economic manipulation, economic blockade, sanctions, use of proxies and insurgencies, diplomatic pressure, propaganda, hoaxes, misinformation and online statements are some of the tools for hybrid warfare (Pulido 2021).

There are numerous other instances where underwater cultural heritage has been utilised as a weapon for political deception in hybrid warfare, extending beyond the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In fact, underwater cultural heritage is one of China's justifications in the conflict over the disputed South China Sea (Perez-Alvaro and Forrest 2018). The archaeological findings from shipwrecks and their cargoes provide valuable insights into the early maritime cultures of the region. The South China Sea is rich in underwater cultural heritage, having been a hub for some of the busiest ancient maritime routes, numerous battlefields, and some of the oldest heritage on Earth. This heritage reflects the close interactions, activities, and the accumulation of maritime history by various civilisations over generations. In 2013 an article in the Wall Street Journal (Page 2013) explored how the Chinese territorial conflict had affected underwater archaeology since China had asserted ownership of thousands of shipwrecks in the South China Sea. An underwater archaeologist working off the coast of the Philippines was expelled by a Chinese marine-surveillance vessel since China claims that the South China Sea has been part of its territorial waters for centuries. As the vice-minister of culture of China recognised, 'marine archaeology is an exercise that demonstrates national sovereignty' (Page 2013). China is, as a consequence, using underwater cultural heritage to justify territorial claims. The theory of the three warfares was developed by China, and then adopted in Western countries (Mattis 2018). The first of the three types of warfare is media and public opinion warfare.

It is the attempt to shape community sentiment. The second is to influence foreign decision-makers through psychological warfare. The third is legal warfare to support claims. In the South China Sea conflict, China is employing underwater cultural heritage to shape sentiments about 'their sea,' engaging in psychological warfare to undermine the enemy's sense of belonging to the ocean, and pursuing legal warfare by seeking historical evidence to establish legal ownership of that part of the sea.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982) states in Article 15:

> "Delimitation of the territorial sea between States with opposite or adjacent coasts
>
> Where the coasts of two States are opposite or adjacent to each other, neither of the two States is entitled, failing agreement between them to the contrary, to extend its territorial sea beyond the median line every point of which is equidistant from the nearest points on the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial seas of each of the two States is measured. The above provision does not apply, however, where it is necessary by reason of historic title or other special circumstances to delimit the territorial seas of the two States in a way which is at variance therewith."

The central term in Article 15 is 'historical title'. It suggests that the more extended the period of possession or occupation, the stronger the rationale for a consistent display of authority (Perez-Alvaro and Forrest 2018). This could be linked to the utilisation of underwater cultural heritage to substantiate territorial claims. The fundamental argument revolves around China being the initial discoverer, name, explorer, and exploiter of the islands in the South China Sea, establishing sovereignty over them and, consequently, maritime territories. China tries to validate this affirmation through the utilisation of underwater cultural heritage. As Nankiwell (2017: paragraph 2) suggests, 'any claim to maritime jurisdiction that is based in history will be newly evaluated against the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as treaty law'.

Underwater cultural heritage has also been used for political claims concerning historical sites and Indigenous rights in Canada and the Arctic Northwest Passage (Aznar 2021). In 2017, it was agreed that the UK would transfer ownership of the *Erebus* and the *Terror* shipwrecks — the lost vessels from Sir John Franklin's Arctic expedition — to the government of Canada to be co-owned by the Inuit, although the UK would retain the 65 items already recovered in one of the shipwrecks. This means that Canada could use the historical presence of Indigenous people and both British shipwrecks to claim ownership of the Northwest Passage. The shipwrecks have also been used for further claims. Canada's (then) Prime Minister Stephen Harper explained, 'Franklin's ships are an important part of Canadian history given that his expeditions, which took place nearly 200 years ago, laid the foundations of Canada's Arctic sovereignty[2]'. Canada's (then) President of the Treasury Board, Tony Clement, added, 'This is part of our history, part of our heritage as a nation and, quite frankly, part of our Arctic sovereignty as well. I don't think we're going to find a Russian flag on the Erebus, so I think it underscores our point[3]'. These statements were directed to an ongoing battle between Canada and Russia over sovereignty in the Arctic. In fact, in 2007, Russian submarines planted a Russian flag at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean, and since then, Russia has invested in underwater archaeological research in the Arctic (Sarid 2022). Statements such as 'a historical monument to the Soviet Union's conquest of the Arctic' (Bykova 2019) in relation to the preservation of an abandoned Russian city in the Arctic demonstrate the importance of heritage for these important and very conflicting maritime claims.

These are examples of states using underwater cultural heritage for geopolitical interests. They are utilising underwater cultural heritage as tools for hybrid warfare, leveraging political statements about it as a message of historical precedence against the enemy. These states comprehend not only the potential for 'identity erosion' that underwater cultural heritage holds but also that this heritage can be used as 'proof'—whether fabricated or scientifically grounded—of historical dominance, territorial claims, or the sanctity of submerged grounds. The intricate interplay of emotions, symbolism, and historical narratives surrounding underwater cultural heritage makes it a powerful instrument for shaping geopolitical narratives and advancing strategic objectives.

In most of the cases discussed, leaders have used social networks to disseminate their propaganda related to underwater cultural heritage. Media propaganda is, in fact, one of the main concerns in hybrid warfare; it refers to the dissemination of information, often biased or misleading, with the aim of influencing public opinion and shaping perceptions (Miller 2004). It is used by individuals, organisations and governments to advance their agendas, ideologies, or interests. It includes purposeful messaging to influence public opinion or

[2] CBC News, 9 September 2014, Franklin ship discovery: Stephen Harper's full statement, viewed 12 June 2024 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/franklin-ship-discovery-stephen-harper-s-full-statement-1.2760566>.

[3] The Globe and Mail, 16 April 2015, New footage offers look into HMS Erebus wreck, viewed 12 June 2024 <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/new-footage-offers-look-into-hms-erebus-wreck/article23993670/>.

manipulate perceptions, persuasion to manipulate individuals' beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours, repetition to reinforce specific messages and ideas, emotional appeals to evoke specific feelings or reactions, and the use of symbols and imagery. Shipwrecks, in this sense, are a powerful symbol to convey an emotional messaging that can sway public opinion. The 'tweets' by Ukraine's Ministry of Defence in relation to the Russian shipwreck serve as an example. When the war was running in favour of Russia across various domains, Ukraine utilised cyberspace to undermine the spirits of their enemy's government and population. Ukraine's Minister of Defence not only declared the Russian shipwreck as underwater cultural heritage, as already explained before, but later, he published a mocking tweet describing the site of the Moskva's shipwreck as a 'worthy diving site'. 'We have one more diving spot in the Black Sea now. Will definitely visit the wreck after our victory in the war', he added[4]. As already pointed out in this chapter, the speed and reach of social media make it a powerful tool for political actors to connect with a broad audience, mobilise supporters, and counter opposing narratives. However, the ease with which information spreads on these platforms also raises concerns about the potential for future warfare based on misinformation, the manipulation of public sentiment, and the erosion of trust in historical and scientific processes.

Underwater cultural heritage holds special significance for individuals and communities today, particularly when it involves sites where lives were lost, as is often the case with underwater heritage locations. The wreck of the RMS Titanic is a poignant example. Discovered in 1985, the Titanic's remains provide insights into early 20th-century maritime technology, the lives of its passengers, and the tragic events of its sinking. This shipwreck has become a symbol of human vulnerability. Human remains in underwater cultural heritage hold scientific, cultural, and political value (Gibbs 2005). This issue is particularly significant in the context of war graves. According to Williams (2005), the debate surrounding war graves is often driven more by emotion than reason. Technological advancements in underwater exploration during the 1980s spurred not only underwater archaeology but also concerns about disturbing war graves, which typically garner more interest than other types of graves, possibly due to their association with specific groups or organisations and the sentiment of honouring 'those who died for us, for their country' (Slackman 2012: 11). Declaring shipwrecks as war graves involves a combination of salvage principles and legislation related to military remains (Williams 2005). Under international law, the captain of any ship, regardless of its size or nationality, has the authority to conduct an official burial service at sea. According to Aznar (2010), sunken state vessels on non-commercial missions are considered grave sites and are protected by general rules that safeguard human remains, including *jus in bello* rules, or international humanitarian law, within the law of war. Belting (2012) studies the 'anthropology of the image' and explores the themes of images, heritage and the dead. The fact that the dead sailors and individuals in general are still on board many of the shipwrecks, is a powerful mental image. The graves symbolise remembrance. Consequently, the sunken ship becomes a grave, provoking emotions in those who contemplate or imagine it. A shipwreck, in the end, represents a loss, either personal or a loss of cargo. However, the symbolic value of the shipwreck is only gained if there is an effort to prolong its memory (Gibbs 2005). Turning these burials into heritage is therefore a process, and commemoration is part of this process. Media publication is also part of this process of commemoration —fabricated or not —as seen in the case of the Russian shipwreck sunk by Ukraine.

The strategic utilisation of an underwater cultural heritage site can effectively undermine the stability and security of the enemy. In the case of a historical shipwreck, it invokes a myriad of emotions tied to historical identity, thereby fostering a sense of connection and pride. If the site represents a recent shipwreck, it exploits the poignant symbolism of the location as a war grave, a final resting place for the dearest ones of the enemy. This calculated approach leverages both historical and emotional ties to exert psychological pressure and influence over the adversary. This symbolic power of underwater cultural heritage, consequently, is used to provoke ethnic, religious, regional or political identity conflicts (Korybko 2016). Furthermore, the enemy's underwater cultural heritage represents a strategic vulnerability, as the custodians of historical shipwrecks predominantly consist of researchers and archaeologists. This vulnerability arises from the essential role these individuals play in the preservation and scholarly examination of submerged cultural assets. Exploiting this vulnerability involves disrupting the custodial and investigative functions of these experts, thereby diminishing the enemy's capacity to safeguard and understand its maritime historical legacy.

Armed Conflict and Cultural Heritage

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) primarily focuses on matters related to collective defence, security, and military cooperation among its member states. While NATO's primary mandate is not directly related to cultural heritage, it recognises the importance of protecting cultural property during armed conflicts.

[4] Oleksii Reznikov, Minister of Defence of Ukraine, X Post, viewed 17 June 2024 <https://x.com/oleksiireznikov/status/1514877421647970309?s=20&t=lvm78zzFnVHV0j8kdE_P9Q>.

The protection of cultural heritage during conflicts is often addressed through the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (UNESCO 1954). The Convention defines cultural property as (Article 1)

> "movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above [...]"

The question is whether the Convention covers underwater cultural objects and thus also applies to naval operations. According to Forrest (2002), the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage is a complement to the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1971) and the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. According to Forrest (2002), all these conventions can be applied to the protection of underwater cultural heritage. In particular, the 1954 Hague Convention concerns the protection of cultural heritage 'irrespective of origin or ownership', so it includes underwater cultural heritage (Forrest 2002).

In this line, Article 4.1 of the Hague Convention (UNESCO 1954) expresses that

> "The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect cultural property situated within their own territory as well as within the territory of other High Contracting Parties by refraining from any use of the property and its immediate surroundings or of the appliances in use for its protection for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict; and by refraining from any act of hostility, directed against such property."

In the case of underwater cultural heritage, there is no explicit destruction of this heritage since it is usually underwater; instead, it often involves manipulation of its meaning. For this reason, it is important to understand the word 'hostility'. The 1954 Hague Convention does not provide a definition. In the context of war, 'hostility' refers to acts of aggression, violence, or opposition carried out by one party against another, and it encompasses various forms of armed conflict and aggressive behaviours with the intent to harm, hinder, or defeat the opposing side (Delahunty and Yoo 2007). Hostilities in war can manifest in actions such as military attacks, sieges, and other aggressive manoeuvres aimed at gaining an advantage over the enemy, including psychological strategies. In the context of underwater cultural heritage, hostile implies actions or behaviours that are detrimental or harmful to underwater cultural heritage, even if not explicitly physically destructive. This could refer to manipulation of meaning, research misconduct, falsification of underwater archaeological material or the provision of manufactured evidence. The essence of the Hague Convention and all existing legal interpretations of it have not categorised 'psychological damage' as a 'hostile act' against cultural property.

The 1954 Hague Convention was not drafted with the possibility of heritage being used as a weapon in hybrid warfare, and thus it does not address this aspect. Neither was it designed to be applied to underwater cultural heritage. The 1954 Hague Convention was drafted in response to the extensive cultural heritage destruction that occurred during World War II. The Convention aimed to mitigate the physical impact of armed conflicts on cultural heritage, with less concern for the possibility of using this heritage as a propaganda tool to initiate or escalate hostilities between countries. However, the weaponisation of underwater cultural heritage -and terrestrial heritage- poses a threat to established international law principles and undermines the already fragile protection granted to such heritage (Sarid 2022).

In the cases of Ukraine, Russia, Canada, and China, it has been demonstrated how underwater cultural heritage is being utilised for these purposes. There are many more examples. For instance, according to Kim (1967), because of the political confrontation between North Korea and South Korea, the reports of North Korean underwater archaeology discoveries are not available in South Korea. In all these case studies, underwater cultural heritage is being used to provoke hostilities between the parties, and the heritage is the one suffering the most. Another example is the recent statement by Colombian President Iván Duque, announcing the recovery of the San José galleon, which was shipwrecked in the Caribbean Sea and discovered in 2015. This legendary Spanish ship was sunk by British privateers off the coast of Cartagena de Indias in 1708 while transporting gold, silver, emeralds, and other riches from the Spanish colonies in South America to be delivered to King Philip V. Spain considers her a state vessel, where 550 sailors of the Crown perished, which makes her a war grave. Colombia still keeps the

shipwreck coordinates a secret. These two different political perspectives have already led to diplomatic confrontations between Colombia and Spain (Gallegos 2023).

Prospective and Limitations

Continuous advancements in war strategies are shaping the emergence of novel forms of warfare, with multi-domain and multi-mosaic approaches potentially representing the latest evolution in the nature of conflict. 'Multi-domain' operations refer to military strategies that involve the integration and synchronisation of actions across multiple domains of warfare. Traditionally, warfare has been divided into distinct domains, such as land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace. Multi-domain operations recognise the interconnected nature of these domains and aim to leverage capabilities across them to achieve a more comprehensive and effective approach to conflict (Pulido 2021). In multi-domain operations, military forces seek to exploit their advantages in one domain to create opportunities or advantages in others, and this includes, for instance, cyberspace and the use of social networks, as has been seen in the use of underwater cultural heritage for political propaganda. This possibility may develop even further with the development of artificial intelligence.

'Mosaic warfare' is a concept that has been discussed in the context of future military strategies and technological advancements. The idea is rooted in the increasing complexity of modern warfare and the need for flexible, adaptable approaches to address diverse and dynamic challenges. While the term may not have a universally agreed-upon definition, several key concepts are associated with mosaic warfare, such as adaptability to environments where the nature of conflicts can change rapidly, technological integration, including the use of artificial intelligence and autonomous systems and information dominance as leveraging information is a key element in gaining an advantage over adversaries, both in terms of decision-making and psychological effects (Pulido 2021). The concept is still developing, and its practical implementation will depend on technological developments, strategic considerations, and the evolving nature of global conflicts. Due to the symbolic potency of underwater cultural heritage, it is conceivable that future military strategies may incorporate this heritage, either through direct engagement or indirect utilisation. This recognition underscores the potential for the cultural and symbolic dimensions of submerged heritage to be strategically employed in military contexts, shaping the narrative and psychological aspects of conflicts. It is imperative that policymakers in underwater cultural heritage, archaeologists, and legal authorities remain cognisant of the military potential inherent in this heritage. This awareness is crucial for devising protective measures that safeguard underwater cultural heritage from disinformation and manipulation. By staying informed about the military implications, these stakeholders can formulate effective strategies to ensure the preservation and integrity of underwater cultural heritage in the face of evolving military considerations.

Further research is recommended regarding the intentional destruction of underwater cultural heritage, as such destruction and physical manipulation are often less visible and noticeable than those affecting terrestrial heritage. The potential use of submarines for the destruction of underwater cultural heritage raises concerns about the deliberate targeting and harm inflicted on these valuable sites. This poses a threat to the preservation of historical artefacts and highlights the need for increased efforts to safeguard underwater cultural heritage from intentional destruction caused by military strategies.

Conclusions

Underwater cultural heritage is intricately connected to the identity of nations and states. Governments have recognised its dual nature as both a powerful and vulnerable weapon that can be exploited to impact the stability of communities. This understanding underscores the complex interplay between cultural heritage, national identity, and the potential for strategic manipulation in warfare contexts. For this reason, they have been used several times as a weapon for political deception and psychological operations, serving as an additional strategy in hybrid warfare.

This chapter has presented examples illustrating the utilisation of underwater cultural heritage as a strategic element in warfare. By delving into instances where submerged cultural assets are strategically leveraged, the chapter sheds light on the multifaceted roles this heritage can play in the complex realms of geopolitics and military strategy. In fact, the weaponisation of underwater cultural heritage goes beyond demoralising and destroying a community's identity: targeting or manipulating cultural heritage can exacerbate social tensions, prolonging and intensifying conflicts.

The chapter has illustrated that underwater cultural heritage can be manipulated to shape historical narratives, provoke hostilities between countries, and even serve as a catalyst for military actions. This manipulation reveals the profound implications of cultural artefacts, extending beyond their intrinsic historical value to serve as PSYOP tools in shaping international relations and conflicts. By leveraging underwater cultural heritage, actors can not only

distort historical truths but also manipulate public perceptions and diplomatic stances, thereby influencing contemporary political dynamics and strategic decisions among nations involved.

This strategic manipulation underscores the critical importance of safeguarding underwater cultural heritage from exploitation in geopolitical conflicts. Heightened awareness and protective measures are essential to mitigate the misuse of these artefacts for political ends. Preservation efforts are crucial not only for conserving historical legacies but also for preventing their exploitation as tools of psychological warfare and political manoeuvring. By recognising and protecting underwater cultural heritage, the international community can uphold the integrity of historical narratives, foster mutual understanding among nations, and promote peace and stability in maritime regions.

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Chapter 6.
The Role of Iraq's Post-Conflict Legal Systems in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Protecting or Endangering?

Kristen Barrett-Casey

Introduction

Iraq's Constitution of 2005, implemented with the help of the US after the 2003 invasion and occupation, brought with it a sweep of reforms and restructuring to the political landscape and institutions of Iraq (Deeks and Burton 2007: 1). The systematic dismantling of the state and its institutions was replaced with a system which was driven by a power-sharing principle to balance the varying religious and ethnic groups in Iraq. This was reflected across each of the laws contained within the Constitution, as resources were divided amongst ministries and political positions according to each group's size proportionally, and was also the case with its cultural heritage property protection principles. Article 113 of Iraq's Constitution declares that everyone in Iraq has a collective responsibility to protect Iraq's heritage (Davis 2014: 445–463). Such provision within the Constitution should theoretically provide a basis upon which any reporting of destruction would trigger consequences for those who had this protection responsibility.

However, Iraq's legal system presents and creates several problems and limitations that hinder the heritage protection process, allow destruction to go unpunished and unreported, and, in some instances, contribute to active harm. For example, there is ambiguity in the phrasing regarding who is specifically responsible on a regional and national basis (Davis 2014: 445–463). Moreover, like gas, oil, and other natural resources, heritage is categorised legally as a commodity in its own article within the Constitution, leading to its treatment as property with a financial motive. This financial, profit-driven motive not only provides an impetus to remove that heritage which does not further this purpose, but also provides little incentive to report such actions when they occur. Finally, this legal characterisation occurs within a political system created by the same legal system that undermines the idea of national collective responsibility for heritage protection. The *muhasasa* system, a political power-sharing system created in the wake of the 2003 invasion and occupation, legitimised by the 2005 Constitution, has, as will be shown in this chapter, created an environment of intense rivalry, division and competition for resources, of which heritage is considered one (Al Jazeera 2019). The starvation of resources to central institutions in favour of political parties and associated religious Endowments has deprived the central state of the essential means to provide adequate services, such as heritage protection. In conjunction with site management being handed to each Endowment in turn, certain sites are becoming increasingly associated with specific Endowments. This is increasingly resulting in the fragmentation and dissociation from a national Iraqi identity in favour of an ethno-sectarian one, and, in some instances, is even fuelling the willful neglect and destruction of the heritage of other groups (Kathem *et al.* 2022: 5). Whilst tribalism and sectarianism have historically played a larger role in the identity of Iraqis than nationalism, the divisive nature of the political and legal systems is preventing Iraq from operating as a cohesive and functioning state. This, in return, hinders the effectiveness of the state model to engage in national conservation measures and international cooperation around conservation, such as through UNESCO.

Yet, despite having created a harmful and deteriorating political system, Iraq's legal system serves a vital function in legitimising it as a state. Legal systems are essential not only for internal civic governance — despite some clear limitations in the case of Iraq — but also for domestic and international state legitimacy (Franck 2017: 217–272). It is an essential component of a legitimate state in order to interact multilaterally and bilaterally with other states, which is crucial for receiving vital funds from the international community to sustain Iraq's heritage conservation efforts. In this sense, Iraq's legal system not only provides a basis for determining who is responsible for the protection of cultural heritage, but also serves as a legitimising factor to receive international assistance as a state, such as through UNESCO's Revive the Spirit of Mosul project (Isakhan and Meskell 2019: 1189–1204). As such, Iraq's Constitution and associated legal system have created a paradox, where the necessity of the existence of the

component arts of the *muhasasa* system simultaneously enables a fractious political system that both protects and harms Iraq's heritage. The same legal system upon which Iraq is dependent for internationally-recognised statehood, however, enshrines quotas that constitute the power-sharing, or *muhasasa*, system, which divides the notion of ownership and responsibility to protect additionally along political and ethno-sectarian lines. This division of ownership has several negative consequences for the ongoing conservation of Iraq's heritage sites and wider political processes.

The case studies selected each demonstrate the consequences of a stipulated legal system and its resulting political system, which remains unchecked and lacks the means to enforce itself, perpetuated by the very political system it legitimises. The Shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel in Babil, Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra and the expansion of Imam Musa Al-Kadhim Shrine, as well as the Shrines of Imam Ali and Imam Hussein in Najaf and Karbala, all illustrate the differing results from population displacement, distortions of the historic urban environment to the prioritisation of one group's heritage over another. At the core of these consequences is the commodification of heritage, a result of the legal system's division of power and resources, executed by its political system.

Removing the power and authority of central state institutions in favour of ethno-sectarian religious parties and their religious Endowments has created a system where financialisation and commodification for revenue have led to the consequences seen in the case studies, and this cycle is further perpetuated as each Endowment earns more revenue. This prioritisation has led to an unchecked system in which the private sector is able to flourish with little regulation, and the central state is incapable of enforcing its legal system owing to its starvation of resources and revenue. The separation of management of cultural and religious sites according to each Endowment has eroded the shared sense of national Iraqi heritage and identity, and has led to a prioritisation of religious identity reflected in the physical environment of cultural heritage and religious sites. The legal system has created a political system that undermines itself, turning what should be central assets into political and financial competition, with the potential to further entrench division and stoke identity-based tension.

The revenue motive, which brings with it socio-political status and leverage, is actively harming heritage sites in Iraq. Whilst this money could be used for better conservation and training of site staff, instead it is being reinvested most frequently into the expansion of commercial developments around mosques and shrines, to the neglect of other heritage sites which aren't related to religious tourism and from which large revenues cannot be generated, and is creating an imbalance in Iraq's heritage environment by placing an overemphasis on its religious heritage over its pre-Ottoman or pre-Islamic past.[1]

Iraq's Legal and Religio-Political Systems Before and After 2003

Iraq's legal system is difficult to discuss. Due to the rushed nature in which the US passed the new Constitution, many old laws remained whilst hundreds of new ones were produced, contributing to a state of flux which is still being worked through. Under Paul Bremer, both the Coalition Provisional Authority and its Transitional Administrative Law, the US annulled Iraq's existing constitution, regulations and state structures, creating a new system with very little consultation with Iraqis themselves. One of the reasons given for Iraq's invasion was its lack of democracy, so its new Constitution emphasised the hallmarks of democracy coupled with its attempts at representation among ethnic groups. This meant the inclusion of such structural elements as a Federal Council and Council of Representatives, an office of the President and a Council of Ministers, a legislative and judicial branch and several independent commissions and institutions (UN WIPO 2005). In the establishment of its Governing Council, appointments were made based on ethno-sectarian identity for the first time in Iraq's history, reflecting the divisions emphasised by the new constitution (Jawad 2013). Ethno-sectarian diversity, difference and division were embedded in the Constitution, which, whilst containing centralised structural elements suggesting a democracy, had the effect of creating a weak central state and strengthened provincial governments (Article 52 of Iraq's Constitution). This would prove to be an enduring challenge in the relationship with Kurdistan (Articles, 53, 54, and 58 of Iraq's Constitution). It resulted in a marked decline in the political and security situation and an escalation in inter-sect violence (Park 2005).

[1] An important counterpoint to the balancing act between conservation, historic emphasis in the built environment and commercial development is that Iraq has been deeply socially and economically affected by the sanctions of the 1990s, the 2003 invasion and occupation, and the occupation by Daesh. Therefore, an argument could be made that heritage conservation should not be prioritised over commercial development, especially if people are choosing to use the land in that way, rather than having it imposed externally. A survey of 1600 Mosul residents by Isakhan and Meskell attests to this; respondents wanted agency over their heritage and the ability to control conservation measures, as well as for heritage not to be privileged over aid, development and peacebuilding (Isakhan and Meskell 2023). In light of this reality, whilst the failures of the legal and political system to protect heritage remain, it must be considered alongside the responsibility of all parties —Endowments and communities — to decide how to use their land, heritage and resources. A separate debate would then need to be had about which people were actually making these decisions and what the implications were for social cohesion in Iraq.

Power within the Constitution lies with Provincial governments, political parties and religious Endowments to the detriment of a weakened central state which is unable to provide a moderating role between the varying interest groups. However, several exceptions are made to this, where certain resources retain a national character and lie with Baghdad. These were, unsurprisingly, oil and gas, but also heritage (Davis 2014: 445–463). Under Article 113: 'Antiquities, archeological sites, cultural buildings, manuscripts, and coins shall be considered national treasures under the jurisdiction of the federal authorities, and shall be managed in cooperation with the regions and governorates, and this shall be regulated by law'. Whilst Davis has rightly pointed out the ambiguities in holding federal authorities, regions and governorates jointly responsible for heritage management, and the numerous implications this could potentially bring, it still contains an important idea of collective responsibility for Iraq's shared national past.[2]

Before 2003, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) controlled Iraq's Islamic Endowments and promoted a unified message in mosques (Helfont 2019: 6). MERA appointed administrators—often chosen for their loyalty to the regime and as members of the Baath party—as state employees to run Iraq's shrines and mosques, and their sermons were monitored (Helfont 2019: 6). Through MERA, and through the Ministry of Culture and its sub-body the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), Saddam Hussein pursued major state-funded heritage projects. Although used to promote his own version of Iraq's history and his own political legitimacy, focused mostly on Iraq's pre-Ottoman past, under Saddam cultural heritage (both religious and ancient) was a national priority and centrally-funded. Such a focus was used by the Baathist state to project a history of triumphalism, especially through an archaeological restoration of Babylon (Kathem *et al.* 2022: 11; Schwartz 1990).

After 2003, the most significant change was the dismantling of MERA and the implementation of a new power-sharing political system, *muhasasa*, which brought new freedom to religious actors from the state through the establishment of religious Endowments. Whilst the creation of the *muhasasa* system was intended to distribute political power and representation among various groups and interests, the lack of effective state-building has resulted in a system that is fractious, contentious, and infamously corrupt, with central state resources being competed over for political and financial gain.

[2] Although, as mentioned earlier, the idea of a shared national past has been somewhat fictionalised, with tribalism and sectarianism always having played a great priority in people's identity.

Article 113 of the 2005 Constitution places responsibility for heritage protection collectively among central, semi-state, and non-state groups and institutions. The most significant element within this protection matrix is the religious Endowments, which were established after the disbanding of MERA in 2003 and replaced by the Shia, Sunni, Christian, Ezidian, and Sabean Mandean Religious Endowment Laws in the 2005 Constitution. Therefore, whilst heritage protection ultimately lies with the central state legislatively, there is a collective responsibility across Iraq's diverse society to actively contribute to the protection of the country's national heritage.

Iraq's legal system, however, contained the seeds of its own weakness. In various ways—some more significant than others—a set of circumstances has emerged that undermines the aims and claims of Article 113. These include the creation of the power-sharing system and the diversion of resources away from the central state, as well as how the laws have framed cultural heritage as a commodity, similar to other resources which have their own legislative articles.

The treatment of cultural heritage as a political and financial resource and commodity has enabled vital resources to be siphoned away from the central state and its institutions like SBAH, starving them of their ability to enforce their laws properly. Two consequences arise from this. Not only does it re-emphasise the profit motive in heritage conservation efforts, leaving sites vulnerable to political and commercial exploitation and abuse, but it also erodes a national sense of Iraqi identity and past. In both cases, Iraq's cultural heritage is politicised and exploited for either political or financial gain, becoming so closely associated with one community that others no longer regard it as their own, or becoming the focal point of commercial development that actively harms underlying archaeology, surrounding historic urban environment, and displaces the native population.

The greater consequence is the further weakening of the central state and the further entrenchment of division. Whilst the law says one thing, its phrasing, execution and contextualisation make cohesive recovery less likely and threaten heritage variously. This reflects how cultural heritage is not truly used for reconciliation, but rather for promoting particular political agendas, often to the detriment of sustained peace.

Case Studies: Al-Askari Mosque, The Shrine Of The Prophet Ezekiel, and The Shrine of Imam Musa Al-Kadhim

Three sites have been chosen, each demonstrating a different consequence arising from the tension within Iraq's legal system and the political reality it

has created. Although all political parties engage in the alteration, expansion and favouritism of heritage sites, or even the neglect or deliberate demolition of some sites, these case studies focus on the actions of the Shia Endowment. The Shia Endowment has been chosen for selective study because it allows for a closer examination of its actions and motivations, rather than using case studies from each political party. The *muhasasa* system has had varying effects on each sect, leading to rivalry amongst Sunnis, increased separatism by Kurds in the north, and a consolidation of power and strict hierarchy around Najaf within Shia Islam. As such, for the purposes of this short chapter, the political dynamics displayed within Shia Islam are conceptually the clearest to analyse.

The Shia Endowment has close links to Iran; most of its actions are around religious sites and religious tourism rather than ancient cultural heritage. Its actions revolve largely around shrine expansion, to the detriment of not only surrounding underlying archaeology, but also to the heritage of other communities, as the example of the shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel demonstrates (Kathem 2020: 163–177). A focus on the actions of the Shia Endowment highlights another important factor in Iraq's heritage conservation tensions: whilst all sites are monitored by Endowments with limited oversight from SBAH, those receiving the most funding and attention are those closely tied to the group's religion and identity, leading to the neglect of other ancient Mesopotamian, pre-Islamic sites where revenue generation is more difficult.

Each case study has been chosen because it affects both heritage and the surrounding community and political dynamics in varying ways. The first case, Al-Askari mosque in Samarra, shows how site favouritism and resource-funneling lead to an imbalance in the historic urban environment and landscape (with other historic buildings being neglected and demolished), as well as an imbalance in local demographics, with a large displacement of Sunni families. The second is the alleged removal of Jewish heritage, the synagogue and khans, surrounding the shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel in Babil. Whilst data about this case is shrouded and difficult to verify and establish, it is suggestive of the deliberate and gradual displacement of one group's heritage in favour of another (Yehuda 2017: 168–192). Whilst the consequences within the first case study could be chalked down to neglect, this second case study is indicative of some conservation measures being taken to actively remove the heritage of other communities because of the financial and political leverage it can bring. Finally, the expansion of the shrine of Imam Musa al-Kadhim in Baghdad, similar to the expansions in Najaf and Karbala with the Shrines of Imam Ali and Imam Hussein, is part of a broader religious tourism plan that has resulted in the demolition of Ottoman-era buildings in order to build hotels and commercial spaces to accommodate the increasing number of visitors to the shrine. This final example illustrates one of the biggest problems with cultural heritage conservation in Iraq: the encroachment of commercial development (Falah 2018). The prioritisation of religious heritage in Iraq, through management designation to religious authorities, has led to cultural heritage becoming a commodity which can be financially exploited to its own detriment. The collective responsibility prescribed in Iraqi law cannot be enforced in any meaningful way as resources and profits made from cultural heritage and religious tourism go straight to the religious Endowments themselves, financially weakening the central state.

Al-Askari Mosque, Samarra

The Al-Askari Mosque is one of the most important in Shia Islam, housing the tombs of two of the Twelve Imams, Imams Ali Al-Hadi and Hasan Al-Askari. It was attacked in 2006 and 2007 by Al-Qaeda, a significant event that nearly sparked civil conflict owing to the fact that the Shia mosque exists within a broader Sunni community in Samarra, with the attack being interpreted as being endorsed by the surrounding community (Crowley 2014: 219–247; Isakhan 2013a; Isakhan 2013b).

In 2008, the Iraqi government and the European Union sponsored a four-year UNESCO project to rehabilitate and reconstruct the site (UN News 2007; UNESCO 2011). As is common with its projects, UNESCO promoted the inclusion of hundreds of Iraqi workers from different sects in the reconstruction work, along with regular consultation with local society, religious leaders, and other key actors (Ghaidan 2008). By April 2009, the partially reconstructed mosque was opened again to visitors (Isakhan and Meskell 2023). The project has been praised for its reconciliation of different sects, particularly after the security situation nearly descended into civil war, yet, in reality, this project highlights how site favouritism and resource funnelling without considering the broader historic urban environment and the communities that live within it can be detrimental to both heritage preservation and the communities that live within it. One author of Chatham House's recent publication on this subject describes the change in Samarra: 'Today, the shrine and adjoining historical mosques and cultural sites are secured with an enclosure covering much of central Samarra... As part of the mosque's expansion, the historically significant built environment of central Samarra... was gradually transformed by the Shia Endowment' (Kathem *et al.* 2022: 7).

Hundreds of thousands of Sunni families were displaced during the bombing and its aftermath, bringing the

number of Internally Displaced People (IDP) in Iraq to 2.7 million (Bauer 2021: 1). This displacement was the result of sectarian conflict and the attempt to change the demographics of the area surrounding Al-Askari mosque. The rehabilitation of the mosque complex led to the destruction of surrounding Ottoman-era buildings and the claiming of the Sunni mosque opposite Al-Askari by the Shia Endowment (Al Ssaa 2021; Kathem *et al*. 2022: 10).

While Shia and Sunni communities had previously shared their high regard for the Al-Askari mosque, the securitisation of the area by the Shia Endowment and its subsequent enclosure of the rehabilitated, commercialised area led to a disintegration in inter-community relations which were actively damaged through the treatment of cultural heritage and religious sites in Samarra's historic urban environment (Panjwani 2012). Whilst Al-Askari is one of the most important Shia mosques in Iraq, its rehabilitation was conducted within a system that neglects holistic and collective protection and management of heritage in favour of what can generate the most revenue for each Endowment, leading to the willful neglect of other groups and their identities.

The Shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel, Babil

The Shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel in Babil has long been held as a symbol of multiculturalism in Iraq, holding a Jewish shrine from the 5th century BCE inside a fourteenth-century mosque and surrounding khans (Hann *et al*. 2015). Ezekiel's tomb lies within an ancient Jewish shrine, which became enclosed by an Islamic mosque and for centuries has been a shared site between Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities (Hann *et al*. 2015). Indeed, within the inner sanctum is a mix of Arabic and Hebrew inscriptions, with the latter painted on wooden plaques inside the tomb and the former across the coffin (Shams 2019). The tomb predates Islam, possibly dating back to the 5th century BCE, when Iraq was inhabited by Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and other polytheistic groups, enveloping Islam when it arrived. This diverse multiculturalism was maintained under SBAH until 2010, when it came under the aegis of the Shia Endowment. Notably, Ezekiel's tomb is situated on the main road between Najaf and Karbala, the holiest cities in Shia Islam, a road that continues on to Mecca. As such, the tomb is situated at the heart of an important pilgrimage and religious tourism route (Eliade 2002: 251).

Whilst it has been difficult to establish the veracity of claims, several photographic sources suggest that the shrine's Jewish heritage is gradually being subsumed and removed by the Endowment, as well as the surrounding khans being removed in favour of the mosque's expansion and construction of new minarets. Although additions and renovations have been more the norm than not over the history of religious sites, recent additions and renovations have changed the political dynamics of the site, its accessibility and its control. While the iconic leaning minaret is thought to date from the 14th century, when the Mongol Ilkhans continued their policy of shrine patronage through mosque construction around shrines across the empire, the left minaret is one of four constructed in recent building phases (Shams 2019). The results of these building phases have been that the Shia Endowment, and its related site management authorities, control access to the site for all religious groups who hold the site as important. The renovations of the site have been accused of a deemphasis of its Jewish identity, with some plaques in Hebrew being removed and an increased emphasis on its Islamic identity.

Left unchecked, and with private funds to sustain their work, religious Endowments are able to construct a physical projection of their power, ideology and identity. These in turn are divisive and cause inter-community tension when the removal of another community's heritage is involved, and can perpetuate the power-sharing rivalries between Endowments owing to the increased revenue it brings as well as the enhanced socio-political status of those who manage sites and those who preach at sites (Boujelbene 2023: 105–121).

This doorway, for example, is built in the Shia shrine style, incongruous with the surrounding historic walls. Whilst the Jewish community in Iraq no longer exists, the re-emphasis of Shia Islam to the point of alleged removal of other group's heritage and identity threatens the idea of multicultural and diverse tolerance that previously characterised Iraq's social dynamics. Being situated on a pilgrimage route which hosts 25 million visitors each year, sites of such strategic importance come under the religio-political influence of those who manage the route, of those who benefit from the donations of religious tourists and pilgrims, and who by their nature seek to assert a particular ideology and identity which will perpetuate the benefits of managing such a site (Hasan 2019; Kathem 2024). However, it comes at the expense of a collective sense and the legal collective imperative to manage and protect these sites together, further dividing what it means to be Iraqi.

The Shrine of Imam Musa al-Kadhim, Baghdad

The problems of an over-emphasis on religious heritage and religious tourism as a revenue-generator can be seen most of all with the main shrine expansions of Iraq, such as of Imam Musa al-Kadhim in Baghdad, but also with the Shrines of Imam Ali and Imam Hussein in Najaf and Karbala.

Over 100 Ottoman buildings and sites were forfeited to develop the surrounding area of the shrine for increasing numbers of religious tourists, including building hotels and commercial sites for shops (Kathem *et al.* 2022). This new dynamic of rapidly increasing religious tourism and its accompanying rampant development is frequently occurring on top of unexcavated archaeological layers within archaeological zones that are theoretically protected by law. It is this rampant, unchecked commercial development by the private sector, without any central vision or strategy that includes the wider environment and communities holistically, which demonstrates the real double-edged nature of a legal system which has planted seeds to its own detriment.

Results

These case studies each demonstrate the differing ways in which cultural heritage is affected by and is affecting social cohesion in Iraq. For example, the management and use of cultural heritage for the purpose of religious tourism, is having various effects of displacing populations, disturbing underlying archaeology, and changing the fundamental character of historic urban environments for the purpose of commercial development to assist tourists. Cultural heritage, especially that which holds a religious element, has come under heavy political identity-based commodification that is managed and developed for both political and financial gain. The fates of each case study are the direct result of a conflict between the legal system requiring collective responsibility yet within itself sowing the seeds of division, competition, and commodification, while existing within a political system which does not have the resources to enforce its laws.

The emergence of such a situation can be attributed to the new legal and political systems implemented after 2003. Whereas cultural heritage had once been heavily resourced by the central state–previously used to glorify and legitimise Saddam–any central means of protecting and managing heritage, such as the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, has been stripped of resources and assets needed for the effective management and protection of its sites. The dismantling of central state institutions capable of managing sites across the country has led to uneven and uncoordinated management efforts with no central oversight.

Endowments are the key to understanding Iraq's religio-political structure. They operate in both physical and spiritual spheres, as well as in commercial property, with increasing overlap between these areas. Sites under their management include, for example, mosques, shrines, and sites of religious significance, as well as any kind of land or real estate owned by the Endowments (Al-Qarawee 2014). This particular governance structure, and its relation to religious and commercial property, is the critical aspect that shapes the lives of Muslims as well as their inter-sect relations and political dynamics. This fragmentation has had varying consequences for each of the three major groups, with growing rivalries between the Sunni community, the Shia community consolidating power around Najaf, and increasing separatism of Kurds in the north.

The way that Endowments operate can be understood entirely through their relation to property. Religious sites not only serve as public gathering spaces but frequently, and increasingly so, as spaces for surrounding commercial development, most often to cater for increasing numbers of religious tourists. Under Iraqi law and its Constitution, Iraq's natural resources are split between the Endowments, and as such, serve as an important revenue maker for each. Similarly, the division of religious and cultural property between each also brings important sources of revenue, as well as donations made by pilgrims or philanthropists.

This has had several consequences. Within the context of the power-sharing *muhasasa* system, this lack of central oversight and coordination has enabled the proliferation of an unchecked private sector, which itself has exacerbated tendencies to corruption which frequently occur in post-conflict economies. The *muhasasa* system has replaced a centralised, national loyalty to Iraq with ethno-sectarian loyalty. The Shia Endowment's close ties to Iran demonstrate this most effectively, enabling large sums of money to flow into the country, most notably for the development of the Shrines of Imam Ali and Imam Hussein in Najaf and Karbala. The money which flows to religious Endowments, both from investors and from religious tourists spending money around these sites, which would otherwise go to the state, perpetuates the uncoordinated fragility between the central state and religious Endowments, and perpetuates the financialisation of resources and commodities which have been divided between Endowments in the law. The flow of wealth and resources leads to growing influence from those investing in Iraq, hence why Iran is seen to hold such sway over the country and its Shia majority.

An important context to this financialisation and commodification of sites and resources is oil. Iraq's main wealth generator is oil, followed by cultural heritage and religious sites, which heavily revolve around tourism and commercial development, and without which such a scale of development could not be achieved. As such, oil and cultural heritage in Iraq are intimately linked and require much closer research. The provision of heritage protection within

the Constitution has rendered its treatment similar to that of gas, water, oil and other natural resources, commodities which the Constitution also provides for the sharing of subsidies from. In this respect, the legal system, in an effort to protect, renders cultural heritage as both property and commodity, the designation for responsibility around which is blurred and exploited for political and financial gain.

One of the issues with the commoditisation of resources under Iraq's constitution and political power-sharing system is that it enables a general negligence of heritage sites. The prioritisation of historic sites and religious tourism as a revenue earner is not only resulting in a neglect (or leaving them for international NGOs to deal with) of pre-Ottoman heritage, but for other sites which cannot be commercialised to be neglected to a point of disrepair, at which point sites are more likely to be demolished and in their place shopping malls and hotels are built. Commercial development is high on the agenda in Iraq, especially in Baghdad, at the moment. Lucrative shopping malls, luxury hotels, and infrastructure supporting religious tourism, as well as private sector construction and investment are monumentally and rapidly changing the character of cities such as Baghdad, Karbala, and Basrah.

Whilst the law has given common responsibility to Iraqis to protect Iraq's common heritage, this is being met and interpreted in an economic environment and political climate that in itself is encouraging a disregard for Iraq's past or a capitalisation on it in exchange for financial and political gain. It is, as such, a double-edged sword that Iraq's constitution does at once make provisions for collective heritage responsibility whilst codifying a separation of powers and power-sharing along ethno-sectarian lines, which degrade the vision of heritage as collective and further render that heritage a commodity which is similarly to be shared as natural resources.

Conclusions and Solutions

If this situation continues, Iraq's national cultural heritage will continue to be threatened. What is missing from the current institutional and infrastructural context is an apolitical framing of cultural heritage conservation. To counter the politicisation of heritage that has been created through Iraq's legal system, one potential solution is to bring more apolitical institutions into the legal text, which could also bring more technical expertise to the conservation situation. This could, for example, involve creating stronger ties between SBAH, the religious Endowments and the Ministry for Higher Education and Higher Education institutions. Bringing a technical relationship and focus into heritage management could increase the surveillance and any reporting of destruction that might be necessary, as well as a broader societal awareness of its value beyond the land it occupies.

Currently, however, there is no incentive to change due to the significant profit and financial incentives generated from certain heritage sites, and very little way to enforce any laws to counter this. A more technical and enhanced civil society relationship through Higher Education institutes could help to change attitudes toward Iraqi identity and how committed different groups feel to it. This could take generations, and is unlikely to occur without reforming the *muhasasa* system. Ultimately, a fundamental issue remains where the legal system has created a political situation where the former cannot be enforced. Whilst both the legal and political systems are needed to create a legitimate state infrastructure, they have sown the seeds of their own issues. However, the potential harm of not having such systems could be even worse. Iraq's legal system, therefore, acts as a double-edged sword when it comes to heritage conservation, destruction, and the impetus to report.

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SECTION II.
CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Chapter 7.
A Human Rights Approach to the Protection of Cultural Heritage

Karima Bennoune

Introduction

The organisers are to be saluted for convening this important event on "Reporting Heritage Destruction: A Double-Edged Sword?" I am glad that in these difficult days for the world we are keeping alive this vital human rights discussion. It seems in these times that the very notion of humanity is being shattered in the Middle East conflict, and so I am especially grateful today to take part in a global discussion about how we protect the cultural heritage of embattled humanity and do so in the most effective and principled ways. Human beings are always the most important part of the heritage discussion.

This keynote begins by remembering the at least 260 mainly young people who lost their lives to the Hamas attack at the cultural festival in southern Israel on October 7 (Bain and Brooks 2023; Beardsley 2023). It is also dedicated to the memory of a young Palestinian cultural heritage defender, Moatasem Abdellatef Ahmed Habeb, described as a hard-working student and aspiring archaeologist, who worked with Gazamap for two seasons documenting deteriorating heritage sites. He was reported killed by Israeli bombardment in Gaza on Oct 9, one of the more than 30,000 Palestinians who have lost their lives as this chapter is submitted for publication (Andreou 2023). I am afraid I do not have the adequate words for such losses, but let us at least remember them as we focus on documenting cultural destruction.

I would like to focus on the human rights approach to cultural heritage based on my reports on the topic authored when I was UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights to both the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly in 2016 (Bennoune 2016a; Bennoune 2016b). This approach may be very familiar to *some* of you, and perhaps new to others. The relevant reports are to be found on the UN's cultural rights mandate home page (OHCHR).

Let me begin with an anecdote which I think helps us recall how important heritage is to people. I had the great honour in my academic work, before I became Special Rapporteur, to visit the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul. I learned of the work that the institution and its curators and director had undertaken to protect it and its collection from a range of armed actors over time, including the warring Mujahedin factions in the 90s and the Taliban in the 2000s. The Los Angeles Times reported at the time of the March 2001 Taliban attack on the Afghan museum that involved the deliberate destruction of 2750 important pieces that the Afghan curators went from room to room with the Taliban, begging for the lives of the statues as though they were their children, literally putting their lives on the line to save their country's history (Watson 2001). Though Omara Khan Massoudi, the Museum's director at that time, is a relatively reserved man, he was clearly anguished when he told me what this attack on Afghanistan's past meant. 'This is a part of our history,' he said, 'of our heart, from before Islam came to Afghanistan. No one worships these statues [now] but they are a part of our culture. We have to preserve that' (Bennoune 2013: 71).

I was also delighted to see the pieces that the museum workers had lovingly restored. Statues of Buddha, painstakingly reconstructed by Muslim Afghan experts who recognised them as an important part of the heritage of their country, are a powerful and needed symbol of hope and pluralism in today's world that should not be forgotten. Sadly, those Afghan cultural heritage experts have now almost all been forced into exile, leaving their collections behind in the hands of those who destroyed them, and whom the international community allowed to return to power. Indeed, I am sorry that those who destroy often get more attention than those who protect and reconstruct, at the very risk of their lives.

I was appointed UN Special Rapporteur on cultural rights immediately after the highly publicised destructions at Palmyra, and so out of those tragedies there was a moment of opportunity to address cultural heritage in the UN human rights system, and this became the focus of my first year in post. Most of all, I sought to encourage the development of a human rights approach to the question of cultural heritage protection, a human-centred framework which I believe can greatly enhance the long-term effectiveness of all initiatives

in this area, which should shape our methodology, and which will assist the public, that we need to support this endeavour, in understanding why it is crucial.

Viewed from a human rights perspective, cultural heritage is important not only in itself, but also in relation to its human dimension. While specific aspects of heritage may have particular resonance for, and connections to, particular human groups, all of humanity has a link to such objects, which represent the 'cultural heritage of all humankind.' Tangible heritage – sites, structures - and intangible heritage – practices, folklore, etc are interlinked, and attacks on one are usually accompanied by assaults on the other.

Cultural Heritage and Human Rights

The right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage forms part of international human rights law, finding its legal basis, inter alia in the right to take part in cultural life as has been made clear by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its General Comment No. 21 (UN Economic and Social Council 2009). It must be understood that cultural heritage is a fundamental resource for other human rights also, in particular, the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of religion, as well as the economic rights of the many people who earn a living through tourism related to such heritage, and the right to development.

So, cultural heritage protection is also about protecting human rights. Intentional destruction of cultural heritage is a violation of human rights. It bears important consequences for a wide range of human rights for current generations and those to come. The preservation and restoration of cultural heritage is also a critical tool for reconciliation and peace-building.

Given this importance of cultural heritage for human rights, I welcomed the fact that, in its September 2016 Resolution 33/20 on 'cultural rights and the protection of cultural heritage,' the Human Rights Council agreed that 'the destruction of or damage to cultural heritage may have a detrimental and irreversible impact on the enjoyment of cultural rights.' (Human Rights Council 2016a). The Council also encouraged States to consider implementing the recommendations that I made to the General Assembly on these issues. More recently, in its resolution 75/258 – adopted in January 2021 on the protection of religious sites, the General Assembly condemned attacks on cultural heritage in this particular category and specifically referenced that this violates international human rights law (UN General Assembly 2021: 10, 11).

However, there has so far been a failure to mainstream this approach throughout the UN system, for example in New York, and neither the words human rights nor the concepts appear in the groundbreaking Security Council Resolution 2347 which frames the issue entirely in terms of countering terrorism (which is also important, of course) (UN Security Council 2017). The human rights approach needs to be mainstreamed throughout the UN system, across regional bodies, and across different bodies at the national level, including military forces.

Cultural Heritage Defenders

A critical, related question concerns the protection of the defenders of cultural heritage who are at risk and who may even lose their lives in defence of cultural heritage, such as Khaled el Asaad, the 83-year-old Syrian archaeologist murdered by *Da'esh* whose remains were just found in February 2021 (BBC News 2021). There are also many others, including Samira Saleh al-Naimi, an Iraqi lawyer abducted and killed in September 2014 after denouncing destructions of religious and cultural sites by *Da'esh* in her home city of Mosul, and many others who today continue to labour in obscurity and danger (Bennoune 2016b: 69).

We must also commemorate those who fell earlier. Aida Buturovic, a librarian, was killed by a shell burst in August 1992 as she returned home after working with others to save the rare books and manuscripts in the National and University Library of Sarajevo on the day it was shelled. Expert bibliographer András Riedlmayer made the following comment about Aida's legacy: 'People sometimes ask me why I am worried about books when so many human beings have died and suffered. My answer is to point to Aida Buturovic, because the two are inseparable.' (remember a young Gazan tweeting, if I die, please take care of my books) (Bennoune 2016b: 70). But, we must not wait until we are mourning the deaths of at-risk cultural heritage defenders to rally to their cause.

Some of these people come within the terms of Article 15 of the 1954 Hague Convention, which provides that personnel engaged in the protection of cultural heritage within the terms of the Convention are to be respected and must be allowed to carry on their work if they and the cultural property for which they are responsible fall into the hands of an opposing State party. This provision must be fully implemented.

However, people like them and others to whom Article 15 may not apply but who are acting to protect cultural heritage in accordance with international human rights norms are also cultural rights defenders, ergo human rights defenders. In line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders 1998) and Human Rights Council resolution 31/32 on protecting defenders of economic, social and cultural rights (Human Rights Council

2016b), states should recognise the legitimacy of their work, address the threats and risks they face and guarantee them, in their defence of human rights, a safe, enabling environment (Human Rights Council 2016b: 9). States must also provide them, including through international cooperation, with the conditions necessary to complete their work, including all needed material and technical assistance, grant them asylum when necessary and ensure that when displaced, they are able to continue their work and to take part in the protection and reconstruction of their country's cultural heritage.

States and international organisations must also consult these frontline cultural heritage defenders – such as museum curators, archaeologists, archivists – who are rarely at the table. All too often, we talk about them, not with them. Sometimes they are not invited at all, other times, they are denied visas, such as Omara Khan Massoudi, the former director of the Afghan National Museum whose work I mentioned above, and who I have invited twice to speak at the UN – in Geneva and in New York – but he was not granted a visa to attend either time.

Human rights law is the underlying standard that applies at all times. However, a special protection regime enhances heritage protection in times of conflict. The core standards include the 1954 Hague Convention and the protocols thereto. The Hague Convention requires States parties to respect cultural property and to refrain from any act of hostility directed against it or any use of it likely to expose it to such acts, subject only to imperative military necessity (Hague Convention 1954: art. 4). The Second Protocol strengthens the rule by further limiting the military necessity exception (Hague Convention Second Protocol 1999).

There have been worrying reports of violations of these provisions on many sides in recent conflicts, and I endeavoured to raise these urgently with governments through the communications procedure when I was a Special Rapporteur. In that capacity, I called on states to recognise that any militarily necessary exception to the ban on targeting cultural property must be interpreted narrowly, taking into consideration the impact on cultural rights (Bennoune 2016b: 64). All military decisions resulting in the destruction of, or damage to, cultural heritage should be subject to close public scrutiny (Bennoune 2016b: 78(j)).

While greatly valuing the role of international humanitarian law and the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross, I consider that a human rights approach to armed conflict is an important complement to approaches based on international humanitarian law (I have thought about this a lot in recent days). There is no provision for derogation in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has confirmed that the Covenant applies in times of conflict or emergency (Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2015). International humanitarian law and human rights law provide complementary and mutually reinforcing protection of economic, social and cultural rights in situations of conflict. In addition, '[t]he application of human rights law, and in particular the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to conflict situations, helps in clarifying the content' (Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2015: 69) of the relevant humanitarian norms. It also supplements those norms, as in the case of intangible cultural heritage, which is not adequately covered by international humanitarian law.

Close scrutiny of all military decisions resulting in the destruction of cultural heritage, and public accountability for those decisions are essential (Bennoune 2016b: 65). Naming and shaming with regard to all instances in which cultural heritage is destroyed in armed conflict in deliberate, indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks, or in attacks that could have been avoided, are de rigueur. These are crimes against the heritage of humanity and gross violations of the cultural rights of current and future generations, which cannot be undone.

In addition to tackling the role of States, attention must also be paid to the robust use of international standards such as Article 19 of the 1954 Hague Convention–and developing other strategies–for holding non-State actors to account and preventing their engaging in destruction. Individual criminal responsibility arises from serious offences against cultural heritage (Bennoune 2016b: 26). A human rights approach emphasises accountability.

I welcomed the decision of the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to charge the destruction of cultural and religious sites as a stand-alone war crime for the first time in the case of Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, which resulted in a ground-breaking guilty verdict and 9-year sentence (Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi 2023). I was very pleased to serve as an expert for the International Criminal Court (ICC) at the reparations phase of that case. I hope we will see other such cases in future, with greater embrace of a human rights approach, though there has also been some, in my view, ill-founded criticism of this jurisprudence (including from human rights groups).

I endorse what were important conclusions in the Al Mahdi judgment that the crime in question aimed at 'breaking the soul of the people of Timbuktu' and was of 'significant gravity.' (Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al

Faqi Al Mahdi 2016: 41). These are not simply property crimes, but crimes with a grave impact on human rights and human beings. I very much hope to see similar prosecutions in future, and to that end, I reminded States of the vital need to collect and preserve evidence of any such crimes.

Some of the grave violations I have just described have received deserved international attention in recent years. However, I also noted many ongoing acts of destruction of cultural heritage in many regions which have gone unnoticed by the international community, targeting, in particular, indigenous peoples. So, we needed not only to respond to the Palmyra moment as I termed it in 2016, but to use that moment to shine the light on other patterns of past or current heritage destruction, which also constitute human rights violations. For example, in my report to the General Assembly, I recalled the grievous history of destruction of diverse forms of Indigenous cultural heritage in many parts of the world, including North America, as a systematic part of, inter alia, colonialism or nationalist policies in post-colonial States, and I note that the totality of these acts have had long-lasting effects on the human rights of many indigenous peoples in diverse geographical contexts (Bennoune 2016b: 43).

Acts of deliberate destruction are often accompanied by other grave assaults on human dignity and human rights, including acts of terrorism. They have to be addressed in the context of holistic strategies for the promotion of human rights, and peacebuilding. Protection of cultural heritage must be included in the mandates of peacekeeping missions. We must care about the destruction of heritage in conjunction with our grave concern for the destruction of the lives of populations. As I said, over and over again, while Special Rapporteur, it is impossible to separate a people's cultural heritage from the people themselves and their rights (Bennoune 2016a: 71).

In fact, I spent a great deal of time while I was the Special Rapporteur, listening to people talk about the pain and suffering, physical and mental, caused to them and their families, often after already suffering from other abuses, by the destruction of cultural heritage to which they have connections. It is critical to listen to their voices. I have met those who have lost family members who died trying to protect sacred sites or became gravely ill after learning of their destruction. I have had women cry in front of me about how hurt they were by limitations on access to sites. I have visited sites guarded by tanks and seen how deep the connections are that populations living in situations of post-conflict have with them – to space, to place, to site, to practice in that particular site.

All such encounters have made clear to me that it is no mere theoretical construct to say that intentional destruction of cultural heritage is a violation of human rights – it is a lived reality around the world for diverse people. My commitment to the paradigm of viewing cultural heritage as a human rights issue is both a principled one in the sense that it reflects actual human experience around the world and emphasises critical aspects of the issue within a framework of international human rights law commitments; but my commitment to this paradigm is also a practical one in the sense that given all the atrocities happening in the world, we will only be able to mobilise broadly on this issue if we emphasise the deep impact that it has on human beings, individually and in their collectives. Work on country situations and UN debates on the thematic issue of cultural heritage protection underscore the need to be universal in reporting and in concern about heritage destruction. Selective reporting and selective concerns became almost a weapon against adversaries in the UN General Assembly debate about my 2016 report, with some governments citing the destruction of heritage as of particular importance to them or their opponents, and overlooking the destruction of heritage important to adversaries or for which they and allies were alleged to be responsible.

I stress that it is now time to mainstream the human rights approach to cultural heritage. We must be inspired by the courage of the Afghan curators I began by speaking about to work together in defense of the cultural heritage of all humankind and of all the human rights in which it plays such an essential role. We cannot take the advances that have been made at the international level regarding the human rights approach to cultural heritage for granted, especially now that what I called the Palmyra moment is over and the international spotlight is not shining so brightly on this issue. We have to fight to defend them, and advance further. Unlike with regard to some other human rights issues, many actors working in the cultural field, including on cultural heritage, do not necessarily engage with the United Nations system. That must change.

Conclusion

At the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in memory of brave people like Aida Buturovic and Samira Saleh An Naimi, who have given their lives to this cause, we must re-commit to working together in a concerted way, nationally and internationally, to defend universally the human right to access and enjoy cultural heritage. This is a vital way to mark this anniversary in these difficult times, when humanity needs its heritage more than ever.

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Chapter 8.
Heritage and Genocide: The Role of Cultural Property Protection in the Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity

Jessica L. Wagner

Introduction

'Where they burn books, in the end they will also burn human beings' (Heine 2022: 11).

German poet, Christian Johann Heinrich Heine, presented in his 1821 play, *Almansor*, a compelling link between the destruction of cultural property and acts of biological genocide. Heine seemed to prophesise the impending World War II decimation of Jewish cultural property and subsequently, the Jewish people; a devastation exemplifying the interconnection between person and cultural object. This parallel destruction of physical heritage and groups of people holds true throughout history. Yet, it remains that damage to, and manipulation of, cultural artefacts is often considered separately from human rights violations in conflict.

Within the realm of war and heritage, it is common to view cultural property as material objects independent from the people and communities by which they are created. The preservation of heritage is regarded as separate at best, and negligible at worst, when seeking to prevent the loss of human life. This sentiment is made all the clearer by observing the lack of consideration for, and widespread damage to, cultural property in contemporary conflicts, such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War. However, the intrinsic relationship between cultural property protection (CPP) and the protection of groups of people has yet to be thoroughly explored through the lens of anthropological theory and Dr Gregory H. Stanton's ten stages of biological genocide.

This study has three aims: the first is to make theoretical connections between people and cultural objects. The second, to identify clear parallels between the destruction of cultural property and human rights violations, more specifically, biological genocide. The third, to prove cultural property protection (CPP) as a vital step in safeguarding against humanitarian crimes. This chapter argues that cultural objects are a key aspect of what constructs a person, and their protection is a means through which to prevent the loss of human life. In order to assert heritage preservation as a vehicle to safeguard against biological genocide, I first explore the anthropological theories of distributed personhood and social agency, and the role of cultural objects as extensions of person, memory, and collective identity. I then focus on Stanton's ten stages of biological genocide and make connections between cultural property destruction, or cultural genocide, and human rights violations. I conclude by arguing CPP as a medium for forewarning, resistance, empowerment, and reconciliation.

Historical Background of Heritage in Conflict

A short history of cultural property destruction and manipulation in conflict is useful to contextualise key arguments. Without a historical frame of reference, the case for utilising cultural property protection in preventing biological genocide is far less impactful.

The history of intentional damage and weaponisation of cultural objects stretches back to antiquity, from Assyria's destruction and plundering in Mesopotamia, the sacking of the ancient Persian capital of Persepolis in 330 BCE, and the 146 BCE Roman destruction of the city of Corinth, to the mass looting and erasure of European heritage by the Nazi regime during World War II, and the deliberate damage to cultural objects and sites by Russian forces during the ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict. (Clack 2022; Moustafa 2016: 320; Nicholas 1995; Parzinger 2022: 59–60; Zelman 2012: 5)

The motivations driving heritage destruction vary greatly from political power and religious ideology to economic superiority and the desire for high-impact propaganda (Clack 2022; Parzinger 2022: 59–60). Despite differing surface motives, the underlying objective remains the same; seeking the erasure or manipulation

of the physical representations of a certain religious, ethnic, or national, religious, or racial group. Cultural property serves as a tangible foundation, 'central to a person's sense of belonging and attachment (...) it anchors, orientates, and locates a person, a people, in time and space' (Clack 2022). Heritage destruction is then a vehicle through which to weaken a collective. The erasure of physical heritage disintegrates what binds a group together: the physical objects that act as personhood, collective identity, and memory.

Moreover, history has shown that cultural property destruction in conflict often occurs concurrently with attempts to exterminate a particular community (Nicholas 1995; Parzinger 2022). Dating back at least to Ancient Mesopotamia, 'wars were typically accompanied by the intentional destruction of cultural [objects] and by massacres and enslavement' (Parzinger 2022: 60). As mentioned above, the Second World War provides a particularly poignant example where the Third Reich systematically exterminated the Jewish people while also seeking to erase what was deemed degenerate cultural property, Jewish artworks, museums, places of worship, archives, libraries, and monuments, the physical traces of the Jewish community (Moustafa 2016: 320; Nicholas 1995; Sroka 2003; Zelman 2012: 5).

Focus and Definitions

The focus of this study is the manner in which CPP can be harnessed as a safeguard against biological genocide. I do not address all humanitarian crimes, nor do I explore the complex relationships between tangible and intangible heritage and its effect on cultural property protection in conflict. I instead focus on the relationship between cultural objects and people through personhood and social agency theories, examining biological and cultural genocide, and Stanton's (2023) ten stages of biological genocide. I also explore specific historical examples of parallel cultural property destruction and genocidal campaigns.

For clarity, it is useful to define key terms used in this chapter. The term 'genocide' is used throughout and broken into two differing forms. Biological genocide refers to the killing of individuals 'as members of a national, religious, or racial group', while cultural genocide references the destruction of cultural objects 'because they represent the specific creations of persecuted groups' (Luck 2020: 26). When the words genocide or genocidal are used alone it will be in reference to biological genocide.

In addition, the term 'object' within the study refers to 'movable' individual pieces of 'material culture.' Objects are defined as 'an individual piece, or in general terms, a number of pieces, (...) this group includes "object", "thing", "specimen", "artefact", "good" usually used in the plural as "goods' (Pearce 1994: 9).

The terms cultural heritage and cultural property, which are interrelated, are often used interchangeably. However, cultural heritage is far broader, including both tangible and intangible heritage (Stone 2011: 167). Thus, cultural heritage can be defined as 'the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of society' (UNESCO 2009; Willis 2014: 145). In contrast, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1954) defines cultural property as tangible heritage including 'movable or immovable property, (...) such as monuments of architecture, (...) archaeological sites; groups of buildings (...), works of art, manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well (...) collections of books or archives.' Bearing this in mind, terms referring to physical cultural heritage, i.e. cultural property, cultural objects, artefacts, heritage objects, and physical heritage will be utilised intentionally.

Research Relevance and Questions

In consideration of the conflicts ongoing during the writing of this chapter, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the Israel-Hamas conflict, the topic of cultural property preservation and genocide prevention in wartime has seen increased interest on the global stage. The 2019 reestablishment of the 'Monuments Men', the US Army Civil Affairs Psychological Operations Branch 38G/6V Program, has brought renewed attention to the protection of cultural property in the United States, and the role and responsibility of state and international actors in the preservation of heritage assets (Edsel and Witter 2010).

Bearing in mind the contemporary momentum for, and the increased international awareness of CPP in conflict, and building upon existing research surrounding the protection of cultural objects and prevention of humanitarian crimes during wartimes, I ask the following questions:

1. What theoretical connections exist between the heritage objects and people?
2. What is the relationship between biological and cultural genocide?
3. Where does cultural property destruction fall within the ten stages of biological genocide?
4. How can cultural property protection be harnessed in the prevention of humanitarian crimes, more specifically, biological genocide?

Study Structure

The first section of this study has provided an introduction to cultural property protection in conflict

and the potential it has to play in the prevention of humanitarian crimes. I have focused on the background context of cultural property destruction, the scope of research and definition of key terms used within the article, and have concluded with research aims, relevance, and article structure.

In the second section, I address the anthropological theories of distributed personhood, social agency, exploring cultural objects as extensions and embodiments of people. I then move to consider physical heritage as memory and collective identity in section three. Through these ideas I make theoretical connections between cultural objects and human beings, setting the stage to argue CPP as a means to protect human life.

An examination of biological genocide, cultural genocide, and the interconnection between the two, make up section four. The differing terms, coined by Raphaël Lemkin, are then analysed through examples of heritage destruction and human rights violations suffered by the Yazidi people in Iraq in 2014 and the decimation of the Bosnian–Herzegovinian Muslim community during the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. I conclude with an exploration of Stanton's ten stages of biological genocide, placing acts of cultural destruction, or cultural genocide within the stages, and close by examining the World War II Jewish Holocaust.

The final section identifies parallels between the damage and manipulation of cultural property and humanitarian crimes. Situated within Stanton's ten stages, I argue the protection of cultural objects as a medium for resistance, empowerment, and reconciliation in and after conflict. Thereby arguing CPP as a safeguard against biological genocide.

Distributed Personhood and Social Agency of Cultural Objects

In order to make the argument that cultural objects are an integral part of people, we must first establish direct connections between the two. What constitutes a person? How do relationships between people and objects contribute to personhood? By answering these questions, I identify the similarities between cultural objects and people through the anthropological theories of personhood and social agency. The theoretical connections identified ultimately support the use of cultural property protection in the prevention of crimes against humanity.

Distributed Personhood

Archeologist Chris Fowler (2010: 352) defines the term personhood as the 'state or condition of being a person.' Fowler's description begs the question, what then can be defined as a person? Contemporary Western cultures identify persons as individuals with clear physical and psychological boundaries, and as capitalist possessors of 'things, animals, and land' (Fowler 2004: 34). However, non-Western perceptions of a person blur such stark definitions, ergo, personhood is understood as a fluid composite of social relationships within the material world. These include relations with animals, with substances, with land, with objects, and with other people through material objects (Fowler, 2004). Thus, when examining the idea of a person through a wider cultural lens, and not assuming 'illusions of Western personhood', it becomes clear that the term is not an easily definable concept (Fowler, 2004: 20). That is, a person is a shifting, context and culture-based notion. Personhood is an equally complex term, and one that is created through a person's relationships to the surrounding psychological and physical world.

The idea of people defined not as individuals contained in a physical body, but through relations to materiality is a theory known as 'distributed personhood' (Crossland, 2010: 392). 'Distributed personhood' asserts that a person is expressed in relationships with material objects that are 'circulated and distributed away from the body' (Crossland, 2010: 392). Notions of distributed personhood have been drawn upon in anthropological studies to question assumed ideas of individuality, boundaries of self, and the physical body (Crossland 2010; Fowler 2010 2004; Gillespie 2001; Hallam and Hockey 2001). Distributed personhood disputes Western definitions of individuality, arguing that the idea of a separate, physically bounded individual is not the sole interpretation of a person, nor therefore, personhood. Fowler (2010: 353) summarises;

> Studying personhood requires an interrogation of the relationship between human beings, objects, animals, substances, and places at the most fundamental level: the boundaries between persons and things, persons and animals, and persons and divinities can be shown to vary culturally.

Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey (2001: 42) concur with Fowler's notions, arguing distributed personhood is not a 'static "essence"', but a product of social relationships through materiality. Fowler (2010) promotes these ideas of personhood as a culmination of successive relationships within the physical world. Fowler's notions of person to object relationships and person to person relationships through objects prove particularly relevant when comparatively analysing physical heritage in relation to distributed personhood. Fowler states, 'the body is not all there is to a person, and if we study only the human body we miss out on other features that commonly compose a person' (Fowler 2004: 11). If this is true, can cultural artefacts act as a material aspect of personhood?

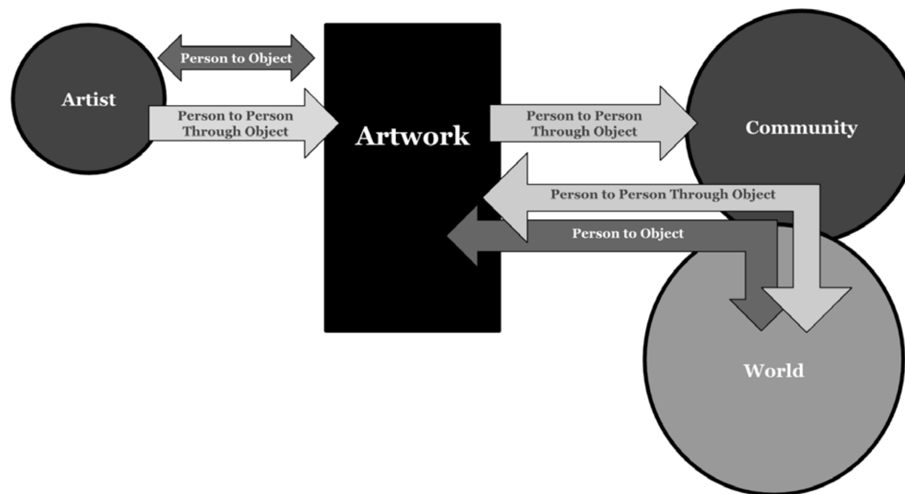

Figure 1: Distributed Personhood Flowchart, personhood relationships of an artwork.

First, heritage objects are materiality created, possessed, and distributed by persons, ergo they contribute to personhood. This is clear when drawing upon Crossland's (2010: 392) definition that 'personhood is created through social relations with material objects that are 'circulated (…) away from the body.' Marcel Mauss (1985), a foundational influence on academic ideas of self, confirms, emphasising personhood as a compilation of 'artefacts, other people, animals, places, and ideas, [that] may all participate in one "person"' (Tarlow 2002a: 26). Hallam and Hockey (2001: 36–37) elaborate, stating; 'personhood (…) [is] fashioned through the body and the material objects with which [the] body is associated.' Thus, cultural property is not just external materiality but extensions of people by person to object and person to person through object social relationships.

For further understanding of cultural objects' role in personhood, I examine a renowned painting created by an artist belonging to a particular national, religious, or ethnic group (See Figure 1 for Distributed Personhood Flowchart). The piece of artwork is first the physical creation of the artist, a material extension of the artist's abilities, and a person to object relationship within personhood. Secondly, the work is materiality connecting the artist's personhood to others within that community or society, or a person to person relation through a physical object. Lastly, the art piece is materiality through which the community anchors its 'sense of belonging and attachment', within the world, and a physical element of the group's memory and collective identity (Clack 2022). In other words, the painting is material through which that particular group places itself within, and relates to, the world and greater humankind; serving as both a person to person relation through a material object, and a person to object relationship. The painting exists as an aspect of the distributed personhood of the artist and the overall community to which the artist belongs.

Building upon this illustration, I now consider a specific well-known artist's work, paintings by Ukrainian artist Maria Prymachenko (See Figure 2). Prymachenko, a self-taught folk artist who lived from 1909-1997, is highly celebrated for her colourful paintings of mythical animals, anti-war imagery, and everyday Ukrainians (Greenberger 2022; Wolfe). Prymachenko is nationally renowned, and embraced as a Ukrainian icon, with postage stamps bearing her images and the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs proclaiming her work as 'world-famous masterpieces' (Greenberger 2022). When assessing distributed personhood, Prymachenko's pieces are first a part of the artist's personhood, through her relationship as the creator and possessor of the material object. Through Maria's status as a Ukrainian artist, the paintings are then cultural objects by which Prymachenko connects to Ukrainian society, existing as a person-to-person relation through materiality. Finally, her works are uniquely Ukrainian heritage artefacts, physical embodiments of Ukrainians' memory and collective identity, and objects through which the Ukrainian community places itself within the world and history, or as both an object-to-person relationship and a material link between Ukrainians and humankind.

In summary, through illustrations and debates surrounding cultural objects and people, I have drawn clear connections to argue physical heritage as an

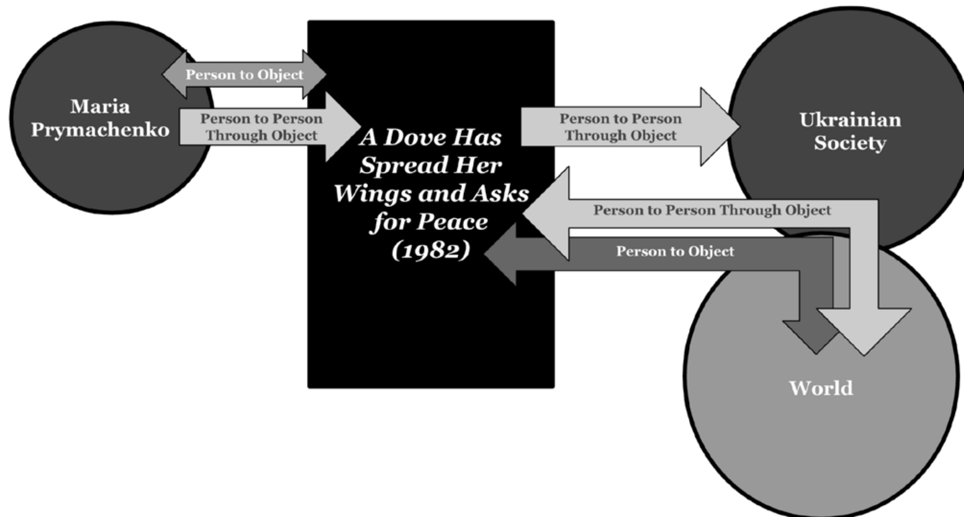

Figure 2: Distributed Personhood Flowchart, personhood relationships of Maria Prymachenko, *A Dove Has Spread Her Wings and Asks for Peace (1982)*.

aspect of distributed personhood. I have demonstrated that cultural objects employ multiple relationships as both materiality and embodied personhood; existing as both a person-to-object relationship, and a person-to-person relation through objects. However, the medium through which material objects are able to engage in social relationships within personhood has yet to be addressed. If 'our inner personhood' exists as a compilation of our external physical relationships, how are material objects employed (Gell 1998: 222)? The answer lies with the anthropological concept known as 'agency' (Bowden 2004; Dobres and Robb 2000: 8; Gell 1998).

Social Agency

The theory of 'social agency' addresses the manner in which material objects act as extensions of personhood (Dobres and Robb 2000; Gell 1998: 18; Johnson 2000). What is meant by agency within anthropology? A singular widely accepted academic definition of agency has been much debated (Dobres and Robb 2000; Sewell 1992). For the purpose of this section, I will focus on 'agency' as a social relation, or 'transaction, attribution, and motivation', of an 'agent' manifested through materiality (Appadurai 1986: 5; Gell 1998). Within agency theories, 'agents' are identified as the acting person (or thing) possessing agency or intention and 'causing the events to happen' (Gell 2010: 16). Therefore, social agency is defined as the carrying out of intentions by agents through social relationships within the physical world (Gell 1998: 7).

How does social agency contribute to distributed personhood, particularly in relation to people and cultural objects? Alfred Gell (1998: 17–18) answers in his 1998 anthropological theory of *Art and Agency* by asserting the relations between 'primary' and 'secondary' agents, or person-to-object relationships (Bowden 2004). He argues that agents are not solely human people, and that physical objects or 'the things themselves' also employ social actions and possess a social life (Appadurai 1986: 5; Bowden 2004; Gell 1998). However, material objects, such as cultural objects, are not 'self-sufficient agents' due to an object's inability to possess intention (Bowden 2004; Gell 1998). Gell (1998: 17–19) cites persons or 'intentional beings' as 'primary agents' and physical objects, such as 'artefacts, cars, dolls, and works of art', as 'secondary agents.' 'Secondary agents' are then, the objects through which human persons carry out intent within the material world, and the physical extensions of their personhood (Gell 1998: 17).

Cultural objects are social agents, or the object embodiments of the primary agent, or person's, 'power or capacity to will their use' (Gell 1998: 153). Gell illustrates this with the relationship of an artwork to an artist. The artist acts as the 'primary agent', 'creat[ing] and circulat[ing]' the physical object, the artwork, as a 'secondary or social agent' through which to 'manifest and realise their intentions' (Bowden 2004: 310; Gell 1998: 153). Artwork is a physical reflection of the agency of the artist— the viewer or possessor— and a material extension of their person.

In brief, through the medium of social agency, materiality articulates object-to-person and person-to-person relationships within distributed personhood. Cultural objects act as secondary agents to a primary human person's intent, and as material extensions of personhood. Though, while we have addressed the relationship between physical heritage and people in general terms, we have yet to examine the significance of cultural objects to personhood. What makes heritage objects more important than common objects? Is cultural property a more vital piece of a person than a hair brush, a bookshelf, or a mug of coffee?

Cultural Objects as Memory and Collective Identity[1]

It is through memory and collective identity that cultural objects exist as particularly powerful material aspects of personhood (Bayzler 2005; Besterman 2014; Hamilakis *et al.* 2002; Hallam and Hockey 2001; Jenkins 2010; Vrdoljak 2006). I have shown personhood to be created through social relationships within the material world, and cultural property as object extensions of people. However, we have yet to explore materiality as memory and collective identity, and the significant role that plays within personhood.

Memory

In their studies surrounding materiality and memory, Hallam and Hockey (2001: 36–37) argue that 'it is through (...) objects that the deceased are kept within memory.' They assert materiality as the link between the living and the dead, and 'as a means to recall people, relationships, and events that are no longer immediately present' (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 25). Tarlow (2002b: 92) concurs, citing 'meaningful objects', such as 'locks of hair, rings, jewellery, (...) [and] photographs', as reminders and embodiment of persons. Accordingly, cultural artefacts act as material reminders and a link between the deceased and the living. However, physical heritage is not significant solely as material remembrances of people, but also through the histories with which they are associated.

For example, when considering damaged or manipulated cultural property during World War II, a history of tragedy and death elevates the significance of materiality and embodiment. Specifically, Holocaust looted heritage acts as material reminders of the atrocities of the Nazi regime, and embodies those persecuted during World War II. This is exemplified by Baroness Ruth Deech, in her testimony concerning Nazi looted artworks before the UK parliament in the passing of the 2009 legislation, Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) Act. Deech contends;

> Looted art, once it is known to be such, (...) cease[s] to be an object of beauty (...). The spectator cannot look at it without seeing the pain and betrayal that led it to be situated there (...). It taints the spectator who knowingly takes advantage of the presence of the picture (...) and it speaks to them of loss and war, not creativity and insight (UK Parliament 2009b, column 908, para. 1).

For greater clarity, I examine the works of Ukrainian Artist Maria Prymachenko cited prior through the lens of memory. In February 2022, during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a large group of paintings by Prymachenko were destroyed when Russian forces targeted the Ivankiv Historical and Local History Museum in the village of Ivankiv, lying northwest of Kyiv (Greenberger 2022; Wolfe). Though approximately twelve of the works housed in the museum were able to be saved, several significant paintings were destroyed by a fire that consumed the museum after shelling (Greenberger 2022; Meduza 2022; Wolfe). The significance of Prymachenko's works, and their contribution to Ukrainian personhood was then intensified through their wartime destruction. The artist's paintings became a symbol of peace and Ukrainian resistance to the erasure of culture. 'Maria Prymachenko is not only a symbol of Ivankiv (...) [but a] symbol of Ukraine' (Meduza 2022).

In summary, memory magnifies the relationship of cultural objects to personhood. Physical heritage is not significant solely as material remembrances of people, but also through the history with which it is associated. Embodied objects act as material links between the living and the deceased, and as physical reminders of people and the past. If history and memory deepen the relationship of cultural objects to personhood, how then does cultural property construct collective identity?

Collective Identity

Cultural property holds historical and social significance, encapsulating the memory and knowledge of a community. Memory contributes to the construction of a shared identity and values, otherwise known as collective identity, or the 'definition of a group that derives from members common interests, experiences, and solidarity' (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 170). Cultural property shapes a group's collective identity, an idea expressed by Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka in their exploration of collective memory and cultural identity. The authors assert cultural memory composes collective identity, 'preserv[ing] the store of knowledge

[1] Parts of this section first appeared in Wagner, J. L. 2017. The Art of Repatriation: A Comparative Analysis of Human Remains and Nazi Spoliated Artworks in American Museums, Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Manchester.

from which a group derives an awareness of its unity' (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995: 130). Through memory and collective identity, cultural objects are particularly powerful physical contributors to personhood.

Referring back to Maria Prymachenko's artworks, I now assess the pieces through collective identity. Through their destruction, and the history with which they are associated, Prymachenko's pieces became an international symbol of Ukrainians and were magnified as significant cultural object extensions of Ukrainian personhood. The works are embedded into the cultural memory of Ukraine, acting as physical objects contributing to collective identity. Their destruction then aids in the eroding of Ukrainian identity, '[Russia] is trying to destroy culture' (Solnit qtd. in Meduza 2022). A sentiment echoed by Clack, Chingiz Gutseriev Fellow at University of Oxford: 'the targeting of Ukrainian cultural sites indicates an internal recognition of the robust and distinct character of Ukrainian identity (Clack 2022).'

Looking beyond destruction and damage, I now examine the manipulation and appropriation of cultural property and its effect on collective identity. Physical heritage is often harnessed in order to rewrite cultural narratives and hijack cultural memory and identity, destroying 'layers of culture (...) [to rewrite] the history of the ethnic groups' (Savisko qtd. in Berg 2023). This is clearly illustrated in the ongoing illegal appropriation and exploitation of Ukrainian cultural property in the Russian annexed regions of Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhia regions (Aljazeera 2022; Berg 2023). In a key example, the Tauric Chersonesos Museum in the Crimean city of Sevastopol presented a 2023 exhibition containing illegally transferred cultural artefacts traced to the Stone-Age Kamyana Mohyla heritage site in the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhya region (Berg 2023). The exhibition violated international law concerning the export of cultural property, while the museum itself frequently acts as a 'fake flagship of historical propaganda' with Russian 'historian-propagandists' proclaiming false narratives that the Ukrainian region is the 'alleged cradle of Russian Orthodoxy', thus a historically Russian area and rightfully annexed. (Aljazeera 2022; Berg 2023; Crimean Institute For Strategic Studies 2024; Kravchenko 2023; UNESCO 1971). Through cultural artefacts' power as pieces of collective memory, identity, and ultimately personhood, heritage objects became pawns in the manipulation of history and narratives.

I have determined that through distributed personhood, social agency, memory, and collective identity, cultural objects are not sole materiality, they are magnified physical elements of personhood. It is then through cultural memory and collective identity that heritage objects construct personhood beyond single individuals, they contribute to the collective personhood of hundreds, thousands, millions, and even billions of individuals simultaneously. Thus, when cultural artefacts are damaged or manipulated, pieces of innumerable people are destroyed or exploited, the fabric and history of a culture is unravelled, and the framework and foundation of a group is eroded. Subsequently, as the structure of a collective group weakens, it becomes far easier to commit the humanitarian crime known as genocide—an act that I will explore in two differing forms.

Biological and Cultural Genocide

In 1933, Polish lawyer Raphaël Lemkin, conceived the term 'genocide', submitting proposals to the Fifth International Conference for the Unification of Criminal Law at the League of Nations in Madrid. Lemkin's report presented two differing forms of genocide: 'barbarity', or the decimation of individuals 'as members of a national, religious, or racial group', and 'vandalism', the destruction of 'works of art and culture because they represent the specific creations of persecuted groups' (Luck 2020: 26). These two concepts, barbarity, or the destruction of human life, otherwise known as biological genocide, and the destruction of cultural property, or cultural genocide, exist in a closely intertwined relationship. This link is made clearer through examining historical examples of concurrent biological and cultural genocide, I first explore the erasure of the Yazidi people by the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq, and secondly, the Serbian persecution of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims during the disunion of Yugoslavia.

Yazidi and Bosnian-Herzegovinian Humanitarian Crimes

In 2014, the Islamic State (IS) sought to destroy the Yazidi people and their cultural property in Iraq. Upon taking control of northern portions of the country, IS carried out a genocidal crusade against the Yazidi people, 'targeting Iraq's Yazidi minority for mass execution, mass rape, systematic sexual slavery and forced labour, and forced religious conversion' (USCIRF 2023). Simultaneously, IS destroyed invaluable Yazidian physical cultural heritage (Isakhan and Shahab: 12; OHCHR 2015: 15). In a particular incident that paints a clear interconnection between the destruction of people and physical heritage, 'IS executed 14 elderly men inside the shrine of Sheikh Mand in the village of Jiddala at the foot of Mount Sinjar before blowing up the shrine with the bodies still inside' (Isakhan and Shahab: 12; OHCHR 2015: 15).

Similar acts of parallel biological and cultural genocide can be found in the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. In 1992, Serbia began an ethnic cleansing against Muslim groups and campaigns emerged amongst

Serbian and Croatian nationalists aimed to remove from the 'captured territories (...) ethno-religious minorities, (...) particularly [in regards to the] Bosnia[n]–Herzegovini[an] Muslim community.' Bosnian Muslims, or Bosniaks, were 'driven into concentration camps, where women and girls were systematically gang-raped and other[s] (...) were tortured, starved and murdered' (Holocaust Museum Houston). Concurrently, the destruction of Bosniak cultural property included 'libraries, national archives, religious buildings, public monuments, universities and (...) cemeteries' (Walasek 2015: 43). Through this, it is clear the aim was not only to create 'an ethnically homogeneous (...) state but also to eradicate any indications of a multicultural past.' (Krikler 2023: 7).

Through the persecution of both the Yazidi and the Bosniaks it is clear that the destruction of cultural property and the mass killing of people chiefly occur in tandem. The interconnection of biological and cultural genocide is driven by a common goal, the erasure of a particular national, ethnic, or religious group; an objective which includes both the eradication of human life and the destruction of the physical objects that help to construct a group's memory, collective identity, and ultimately, personhood. Thus, having evidenced the interdependent relationship between the two forms of genocide, I now turn to the following questions. How does genocide unfold during conflict? And importantly, when are cultural and biological genocide carried out in relation to one another?

Ten Stages of Biological Genocide and Cultural Genocide

Building upon Raphaël Lemkin's concepts of biological and cultural genocide, Dr Gregory H Stanton, President of Genocide Watch and former head of the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, developed ten stages of biological genocide. The stages are defined as follows: classification, or the division of groups into 'us and them' categories by 'ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality'; symbolisation, the use of visual markers to identify those targeted; discrimination, a step in which 'law[s], custom[s], and political power [is used] to deny (...) rights' to the targeted group; dehumanisation, the humanity of the group is denied through propaganda and indoctrination; organisation, informal militias or state-led military units plan genocidal killings; polarisation, the targeted group is further separated from the population using propaganda and laws; preparation, final plans are made for the elimination of targeted peoples; persecution, 'victims are identified and separated by national, ethnic, racial or religious identity'; extermination, genocide is carried out systematically; and denial, killings are refuted and evidence is eliminated, allowing for future genocidal acts (Stanton 2023). It is important to note that though Stanton (2023) separates biological genocide into distinct stages, 'the process is not linear.' Classification exists at the centre, imperative to all other stages, and the stages often occur simultaneously (Global Citizenship Videos 2020; Stanton 2023).

Having determined the process of biological genocide, I now turn to cultural genocide, identifying where cultural destruction occurs within genocidal stages. At its origin, Lemkin conceptualised 'cultural genocide' as a 'technique of implementation' of biological genocide (Luck 2020: 26). This idea is echoed by Elisa Novic in her piece, *The Concept of Cultural Genocide*, asserting cultural genocide as 'the total destruction of a culture so the identity of people ceases to exist', and as 'an intrinsic characteristic of every process of genocide, which can be empirically observed' (Novic 2016: 4). It is clear, cultural genocide is embedded within the stages of biological genocide.

First, cultural property, and/or its destruction, serves as a vehicle through which to divide within the key stage of classification, promoting an 'us versus them' mentality dividing people by 'ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality' (Global Citizenship Videos 2020; Stanton 2023). Artefacts and cultural symbols may be harnessed to physically identify those persecuted during the symbolisation stage, a key example being the use of the Jewish star of David by the Nazi regime. Examining further, the destruction and manipulation of a group's cultural artefacts aids in both discrimination and dehumanisation, allowing for victimisation of the persecuted and increasing the power of the dominant group. During the organisation stage, physical heritage can be used as an element to aid in indoctrination. Additionally, cultural property manipulation is a powerful mechanism through which to spread animosity and hostility, or to sway cultural narratives through propaganda during the polarisation stage, leading to total loss of control by the targeted groups. During the final genocidal stages of preparation, persecution, and extermination, again physical heritage is employed to further indoctrinate and spread fear. Physical artefacts are often seized or destroyed to deprive groups of possessions, to strip away humanity, as well as to eradicate the physical traces of the persecuted group, allowing false historical claims and narratives. Finally, cultural property is evidence to be eliminated during the realisation of the culminating genocidal stage, denial (Global Citizenship Videos 2020; Stanton 2023). For greater clarity, I now examine one of the most known illustrations of biological and cultural genocide in recent history, World War II and the Jewish Holocaust.

Biological and Cultural Genocide of Jews in World War II

The Jewish Holocaust of World War II, 1939-1945, resulted in the widespread 'systematic extermination

of between 5 and 6 million Jews' (Heinsohn 2000; Niewyk 2004: 127). Adolf Hitler, a radical anti-Semite, headed the 'final solution to the Jewish problem', a plan to eliminate the entirety of the 11 million European Jewish population (Niewyk 2004: 128). The genocidal campaign consisted of 'extermination centres', in which approximately 3 million died, and the 'Einsatzgruppen', or mobile killing squads, who were responsible for murdering 1-2 million Jews (Niewyk 2004: 129).

Concurrent with the devastating loss of Jewish lives, the destruction and manipulation of Jewish cultural heritage amidst the World War II was unparalleled. The ravaging of monuments, archives, libraries, and the spoliation of cultural property occurred in mass scale, with Jews victims of the '[Nazi] Third Reich's broad-scale acquisition and destruction of European cultural heritage' (Moustafa 320; Zelman 5). Due to the sheer scale, the exact numbers regarding the looting and damage to Jewish cultural property remain unclear; however, it is known that around 16,000 pieces deemed 'degenerate art' were destroyed, and more than 60,000 looted cultural objects were returned to France following the war (Zingeris 1999). Bearing in mind the interconnection between biological and cultural genocide, we now examine the Jewish Holocaust through the lens of Stanton's stages of genocide.

In the early stages of the genocidal campaign against the Jewish people, cultural property was quickly harnessed as a weapon through which to divide, symbolise, discriminate, and dehumanise. The Nazis' 1937 *Degenerate Art* exhibition is a particularly poignant example. Two years prior to the start of World War II, Joseph Goebbels, from the Third Reich Ministry of Propaganda, headed a 'systematic purging of German museums and public collections', segregating over 16,000 works of art, 'paintings, drawings and sculptures' that were 'incompatible with Nazi values' (Schuhmacher 2024). A selection of pieces was chosen for a touring exhibition throughout Germany, the rest burned (Schuhmacher 2024). The art show served to highlight pieces that were considered an attack on German culture, and 'mirrored [the] "racial deficiencies"' of their creators, an extension of the Nazi 'racial science' (Schuhmacher 2024). A large majority of these works were pieces by Jewish artists, or works promoted and owned by Jewish art dealers and critics. The degenerate artworks were cultural objects weaponised to divide Jews from the German population, acting as symbols of Jewish racial inferiority, and served as discriminatory and dehumanising propaganda, occurring within the first four stages of genocide (Schuhmacher 2024; Stanton 2023).

During the later stages of organisation, polarisation, and persecution, the star of David, a cultural symbol of the Jewish faith, was manipulated by the Nazis as an 'identifying badge (...) used to segregate Jews from the rest of the population and reinforce their inferior status' (Holocaust Encyclopedia). Additionally, the destruction of physical heritage during later stages is exemplified by the infamous 'Kristallnacht [or] the Night of Broken Glass'. In 1938, the Third Reich not only murdered approximately 100 Jews, and arrested 30,000 in a single night, they also destroyed 267 synagogues (Holocaust Day Memorial Trust). Finally, within the final stages of extermination, and ultimately denial, post-Holocaust, mass destruction of cultural property, included;

> desecration of cemeteries and synagogues, which were often set on fire and destroyed together with precious Judaica, including Torah scrolls. Jewish libraries and archives with precious books and documents (...) were set on fire, destroyed or looted (Pasikowska-Schnass 2023).

Cultural Property Protection and Crimes Against Humanity

The relationship between cultural property destruction and the decimation of human life is exemplified through the egregious human rights violations and cultural erasure committed against the Yazidi, the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims, and the Jewish peoples. It is clear that the two forms of genocide rarely transpire without the other. Krickler (2023: 13) observes in her exploration of cemetery destruction during genocide, 'the target is the collective. Therefore, genocide is an attack on something greater than mass murder: It is an attack on the communal structures—tangible and intangible—that hold groups together as a collective.' This begs the question, if the two forms of genocide are inextricable, can the protection of cultural property act as a vehicle through which to protect human life? In essence, by protecting one, do you protect the other?

CPP as Safeguard: Forewarning, Resistance, Empowerment, and Reconciliation

I have demonstrated that cultural genocide is embedded within the stages of biological genocide, and though the stages of biological genocide are not linear, as 'societies develop more and more genocidal processes, they get nearer to genocide' (Stanton 2023). Thus, if cultural property is protected, a genocidal stage may be stopped or slowed, interrupting the ultimate progression towards loss of human life. Building upon this notion, I now argue specific mechanisms through which CPP can be utilised to safeguard against humanitarian crimes situated within Stanton's model.

First, cultural property destruction serves as a forewarning. Loss of physical heritage functions as a tangible indicator of increasing tensions and risks

of biological genocide. As seen within the genocidal stages, the destruction and manipulation of cultural objects often precludes mass loss of human life. Cultural genocide is an 'attempt to erase all visible evidence of "the other"—all of which (...) express genocidal intentions' (Krickler 2023: 13). Hence, monitoring the destruction of heritage allows for early warning signs of escalating conflict and subsequent intervention. During the early stages of biological genocide, classification, symbolisation, and discrimination, the destruction or manipulation of physical heritage can be utilised to mobilise international and national early intervention by state actors, intergovernmental organisations, and human rights groups. CPP can also be harnessed as a preventive measure, protecting cultural property that 'transcend[s] ethnic or racial divisions [and] (...) promote[s] tolerance and understanding' (Stanton 2023).

Secondly, CPP functions as resistance. The destruction of cultural property 'is often a matter of domination, and [its] protection [an act] of resistance' (Clack 2022). Within the dehumanisation stage, group members face genocidal rhetoric (Stanton 2023). Physical heritage works to affirm a group's worth through materiality and directly challenges attempts to erase a group's memory and collective identity. 'Attacks on (...) tangible (...) heritage are not only forms of propaganda by deed, but serve to deny people their very identities – their sense of self' (Clack 2022). Thus, CPP increases a collective's ability to resist genocidal ideologies in the midst of discrimination, dehumanisation, and polarisation. Communities maintain cultural memory, reinforcing a sense of continuity and identity that counteracts the erasure of humanity.

Third, CPP acts as empowerment. The preservation of cultural property enhances a community's agency and ability to assert its humanity, also defying discrimination, dehumanisation, and polarisation. Protection of physical heritage increases a group's societal power and resists victimisation. Cultural property serves as the 'polyvalent glue of society (...) carrying the internal and external empowerment process' (Küver 2017: 1). When cultural objects are protected, communities claim their worth and are less likely to be marginalised, fostering resilience and cohesion.

Fourth, CPP serves as a basis for reconciliation post-conflict. Cultural property protection is instrumental in preventing the final stage in Stanton's model, the denial of atrocities (Global Citizenship Videos 2020; Stanton 2023). Cultural property is material proof of a group's existence and worth. Recognising, restoring, and repatriating heritage that suffered destruction, manipulation, and spoliation heals collective trauma, lays a foundation for dialogue, provides economic value for rebuilding, and assists in averting future humanitarian crimes. Clack (2022) concurs that 'just as the destruction of cultural [property] can drive conflict, its protection and restitution can serve as a driver of resolution and post-war recovery.'

Concluding Thoughts

> 'Cultural heritage cannot be separated from people – it is people. When we protect one, we protect the other' (Clack 2022).

The current consideration of heritage protection as separate from human rights violations in conflict is flawed. This chapter has asked the question, how can cultural property protection be harnessed in the prevention of humanitarian crimes? I have argued that the theoretical connections identified between people and physical heritage justify the use of CPP in the safeguarding of human lives in conflict, citing correlations between human beings and cultural property through personhood and social agency. Furthermore, memory and collective identity increase cultural objects' importance as elements of people, not solely of singular individuals, but as a part of innumerable people, pieces of a greater collective personhood. Thus, the destruction of heritage serves to weaken a group's cultural foundation. As shown through Stanton's stages of genocide, the erasure of a group is easiest when the structure becomes fragile, allowing for rhetoric avowing the targeted people's absence of culture, absence of history, absence of humanity. When considered alongside Stanton's model, CPP provides a safeguard against biological genocide, and a system through which to forewarn, resist, empower and reconcile during conflict.

However, the use of CPP as a safeguard against humanitarian crimes opens up several avenues in need of additional study. First, the exactitudes of using cultural property protection in order to prevent biological genocide needs to be investigated. In a broader sense, what must be done to assure cultural property is viewed conjunctively with the protection of human life, and as a means to prevent humanitarian crimes? More specifically, what concrete steps should be taken to incorporate CPP in national and international peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts before, during, and after armed conflict. The formation of a standing UN Rapid Response Force, which has been proposed but not yet come to fruition, would provide a key opportunity to include cultural protection specialists within international rapid deployment armed forces (Genocide Watch; Koops and Novosseloff 2017). Second, more research is needed to understand intentional versus spontaneous cultural property destruction and its impact on CPP as a genocide safeguard. In other words, both deliberate and organised attacks on physical

heritage, and inadvertent mob-driven destruction must be considered. Third, the manipulation and weaponisation of CPP based on political agendas and international relations must be explored. How susceptible is CPP to politicisation and global power dynamics, and do international organisations such as the United Nations provide adequate neutral enforcement of universal CPP measures? Fourth, it is key to acknowledge that what can be considered cultural and biological genocide proves contentious. In consideration of highly polarising conflicts, such as the war between Israel and Hamas, how can universal agreements be reached on what constitutes cultural genocide and how are international CPP efforts put into action? Lastly, the scale of CPP required in order to prevent cultural erosion and loss of human life proves subject to change based on differing conflicts. This begs the question, who decides the cultural objects worthy of protection and what qualifies said objects as important enough to collective personhood to ensure safeguarding?

Ultimately, cultural property protection must be considered much more seriously in the prevention of humanitarian crimes. It is clear that the current attitudes towards physical heritage in conflict result not only in the devastating loss of cultural objects, but also the grave loss of human life. When properly harnessed, CPP has the potential to assist in preventing biological genocide. Fundamentally, cultural property is not merely physical objects, it is people, it is identity, it is memory. It is the right to exist, and to have existed, it is the right to humanity.

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Chapter 9.
Rohingya Narratives Beyond Victimhood: Responses to Reporting on Heritage Destruction

Saqib Sheikh and Carolyn Morris

Introduction and Methods

The plight of the Rohingya people received relatively scant coverage in the international press on their struggles until the pogroms in 2012 in Rakhine State drew considerable attention. Coverage since then has focused largely on the scale of the physical destruction of their ancestral homes, the levels of persecution they are subjected to by the ruling authorities during military assaults, the numbers who have migrated since then, and the squalor and increasingly difficult conditions they face as undocumented refugees in camps or urban clusters. This chapter argues that comparatively less media attention has focused on the destruction of their cultural heritage and the existential threat of cultural erosion due to unique barriers in Rakhine State. The reporting that did occur was less likely to explore the cultural dimensions, mainly focusing on human rights abuses unrelated to tangible heritage destruction. While reporting on the humanitarian crisis remains crucial, this chapter raises ethical concerns around this overemphasis to understand how the international media might play a role in propagating victimhood representations, which may foster heritage destruction and hamper cultural preservation. The chapter then explores the broader implications of victimhood portrayals on the Rohingya people, emphasising the complexities and reservations involved in defining and preserving Rohingya identity. Finally, this chapter highlights the need for reflective coverage of cultural heritage destruction, which embraces the complexities of the identities and the ongoing situations of those communities on which they are reporting.

Methods

Research for this chapter involved conducting online semi-structured interviews with five participants, consisting of one academic at the National University of Singapore and four Rohingya activists based in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Canada. They were each selected through purposive sampling, assuring that findings were grounded in concrete experience with Rohingya cultural preservation and advocacy. Four participants were recruited through established connections in the authors' networks, with one interview procured through unsolicited outreach. Utilising semi-structured interviews, participants answered a core set of questions in each session. The content included questions on the participant's background experience, views on media representations of Rohingya and real-life examples, and the impact on the Rohingya's collective identity and preservation efforts. The interviews were then transcribed and thematically analysed, with emerging key themes then unpacked. This research adhered to ethical guidelines by obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining transparency of the chapter's intent with the interviewees. Limitations of this research include the sample size and a reliance on self-reported data from activists and academics, restricting its generalisation.

Context of Genocide and Cultural Destruction of the Rohingya People

Despite a level of civic representation post-independence, an accelerated campaign of disenfranchisement and repression of the Rohingya in their ancestral homeland of Arakan, or what is now called Rakhine State in Myanmar, began in the 1960s by the military junta, with restrictions on the naming of their cultural sites and other forms of cultural expression. The decades that followed were punctuated by a series of deadly military assaults, including Dragon King 1978 and Operation Clean and Beautiful Nation in 1991-92, leading to a mass expulsion of Rohingya from their homeland (Constantine 2012). After the most recent assault in 2017, the majority of their population now resides as a stateless diaspora in the region.

One root of the historical discrimination towards Rohingya grew out of the Burmanisation policies following independence from British colonial rule, as identified by Lee and González Zarandona (2019). A wave of Indian labourers migrating to Myanmar, who were often Muslim, had found economic and social favour with the British, producing heightened resentment from the native Buddhist population. Hence, the Muslim Rohingya were marginalised amid

rising ethnic tensions in the country and perceived as 'colonial-era imports' undeserving of citizenship rights, despite their presence in Rakhine State pre-dating colonialisation (Lee and González Zarandona 2019: 525). Burmanisation efforts promoted assimilation towards a homogenous cultural and religious national identity around the Buddhist Bamar majority, often culminating in the disenfranchisement and alienation of certain ethnic minorities in Myanmar (Hogan 2018). While both state and non-state actors implemented the destruction of minority identities, including controversial attacks by Buddhist monks (Strathern 2013), it remained a government-sponsored endeavour and was 'therefore perceived as legitimate within that state's legal framework' (Lee and González Zarandona 2019: 521).

State-led discrimination and oppression, characterised as genocide by the UN, has meant the strategic containment of the Rohingya people, with the Myanmar government regulating their mobility and restructuring access to vital public services, education, and career opportunities, particularly outside of Rakhine State (Human Rights Council 2018). The Rohingya people have traditionally been an agrarian farming community functioning through the oral transmission of their history and culture. Thus, much of their heritage is distinctly intangible, expressed in the form of oral storytelling, craftsmanship and expertise, customs and practices. Geographical confinement to rural areas, especially increasing in 2012, compounded by limited access to the resources offered in other parts of Myanmar, has resulted in lower literacy rates and more precarious infrastructure (Bauchner 2022). Consequently, the establishment of institutions for the formalisation and preservation of cultural heritage has been stifled.

Denied the ability to build their own cultural institutions in their homeland and with many of their ancestral villages burned by the military, many in the diaspora now raise concerns about the erosion of their remaining cultural identity and heritage, with the majority of the community facing the pressures of assimilation in the context of survival in host states. One of the primary issues, as pointed out in an interview with Ahtaram Shin, a Rohingya activist and writer based in Cox's Bazar, the largest Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh, is that Rohingya are at risk of losing their own unique language, made more acute by competing scripts employing the Arabic, Roman, and Sanskrit characters that have been developed from the 1980s onwards (Shin 2023). While the Hanifi script recently gained acceptance by the Unicode Consortium for digital use, it has yet to be popularised among the Rohingya community due to being in diaspora and low literacy rates (Eberhard *et al.* 2021). Outside of this, as pointed out by Yasmin Ullah (2023), a distinguished Rohingya activist and human rights advocate, is the steady loss of traditions associated with the community.

Review of Coverage on the Rohingya Crisis and Heritage Destruction

Challenges Leading to Underreporting

This section critically assesses heritage destruction reporting by various stakeholders, including media outlets, supranational entities, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or the lack thereof, throughout the Rohingya crisis. Initially, it identifies the unique barriers that have hindered or contributed to the under-emphasis on heritage damage throughout the conflict. Following this, it scrutinises the coverage of tangible heritage destruction during the 2012 and 2017 campaigns of violence, specifically concentrating on the destruction of mosques in Rakhine State. Finally, this section turns its attention to how the crisis has been framed by humanitarian or political narratives, identifying Rohingya as mere victims and thereby enacting a form of heritage destruction itself.

Distinguished with its reputation as having 'one of the world's most restrictive media environments' (Lee and González Zarandona 2019: 525), Myanmar maintains stringent control over its national media outlets, directly shaping domestic narratives about its treatment of the Rohingya population. Rigorous regulatory measures have also been exercised to limit the reporting by international journalists on violence against Rohingya in Rakhine State, notably illustrated by the imprisonment of two Reuters journalists attempting to cover human rights violations (Naing and Thant 2018). Leading up to the 2017 campaigns of violence, instances were reported where Rohingya villagers who shared their experiences with the UN Security Council delegation faced threats from Myanmar security agents, with some community members even disappearing (Rahman and Ellis-Petersen 2018). Within this environment of suppressed domestic and international press freedoms, human-rights-based reporting often takes precedence, influencing the scope of documentation information. Coupled with the reality that the Rohingya community mainly possesses intangible forms of culture, heritage destruction assumes a lower priority in the international media amid multiple barriers.

An Analysis of Cultural Heritage Destruction Reporting and Media Narratives

While the preceding section elucidates the barriers contributing to underreporting heritage destruction, this section delves into reported instances and

associated risks. While human rights actors have had a longstanding involvement and understanding of the persecution occurring in Rakhine, Laura Brandén (2018: 4–5) examines the sudden spark or 'instantaneous' international public attention and reporting by news outlets, a development she attributes to a feedback loop with social media platforms that began featuring the unfolding events in Rakhine State. Notably, this brought about the initial positive effect of raising global awareness of the human rights violations against Rohingya. Prominent stakeholders, such as Physicians for Human Rights, the USA Department of State, Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières and others, have issued comprehensive reports detailing the devastation wrought by the military and civilians in 2017 (Messner *et al.* 2018). Satellite imaging provides unequivocal evidence of Rohingya villages razed to the ground, although some were 'quickly remodelled by Myanmar's authorities, erasing evidence of Rohingya connections with those places' (Goldberg 2018; Lee and González Zarandona 2019: 531). While these reports chronicle the physical destruction of villages, schools, and mosques, in contrast, their analysis primarily centres on systematic discrimination, vulnerable conditions in Rakhine State, and inflicted violence and massacres (Human Rights Council 2018). However, there is a notable absence of analysis of the cultural heritage dimensions of the destruction perpetrated by the Myanmar military.

International mainstream media reporting on the Rohingya in Rakhine State during spikes in the conflict is instructive as to the lopsided emphasis on the Rohingya as conflict victims without considering the implications of their ethnic cleansing from the land on heritage destruction. An analysis by Michelle Lee (2021) of media coverage by the US and UK flagship papers, the New York Times and the Guardian, show significant upticks in coverage around the period of 2015 and 2017 to 2018, when the situation on the ground for the Rohingya deteriorated dramatically, leading to a mass exodus and refugee crisis in Cox's Bazar, but coverage outside these years when the violence has been less active also has decreased. Ahmed and Hassan (2024) describe the dramatic shift in the tone and perspective of coverage in Western media from 2017 onwards, with a strong focus on humanitarianism and the military's authoritarianism. An analysis of framing cues by Tien Vu and Lynn (2020) shows a disproportionate emphasis by the New York Times compared to regional papers on the conflict and violence aspect of the situation at this time, highlighting the suffering of the fleeing Rohingya. Irom, Borah and Gibbons (2020) further show in an examination of the visual frames by *The New York Times* and regional papers of that period that massed photos of the Rohingya were most commonly used, the tendency to depict them as a group most employed by *The New York Times*.

Western media, in contrast to regional media, were more likely to highlight the historical context of the Rohingya presence in the land, but mainly as a necessary method to situate the group for their less aware audience (Irom *et al.* 2021). Their real-time coverage of the destruction of Rohingya villages avoided direct reference to cultural destruction, and even, for example, a report by the BBC two years later on the construction of government buildings over the land of Rohingya villages avoided mention of the historical dimension of their ethnic erasure (Head 2019). Many of these historical descriptions were presented in the form of simplified timelines that often miss key issues of contestation. CNN, for example, in their breakdown, gives snapshots of the historic formation of modern-day Myanmar but also first mentions the Rohingya issue as an ethnic conflict emerging in the 1960s, evading any back-tracing of their ancestral claims to the land (Hunt 2017).

This is not to say that mentions of Rohingya cultural heritage destruction are completely absent, but merely an often overlooked aspect submerged under the litany of other human rights violations being reported on. Beech (2017), for example, while having extensively reported on real-time crimes of village destruction and military abuses, also devoted space months later to report on the more concerted efforts by the military regime to erase historical traces of Rohingya presence from the land. This includes landmarks that point to a multicultural heritage of both Rohingya and Rakhine presence in locations such as Sittwe, including the demolition of mosques throughout Rakhine State since 2016. Research by Lee and González Zaradona (2019) specifically examines the 2012 devastation of the Jama Mosque, a prominent place of worship on the Sittwe High Street. It has remained closed, guarded, and under surveillance by Myanmar security personnel to 'prevent all access and routinely prevent photography' (Lee and González Zaradona 2019: 529). One of their interlocutors mourns the feelings of communal loss and the inadequate protection of 'our identity, our faith and our history and our heritage' (Lee and González Zaradona 2019: 528). Regional reporting often explained the government's justifications for these operations, namely, to clear 'illegal buildings' in adherence with a ban on the construction of religious structures (VOA News 2016). Meanwhile, Aung San Suu Kyi continued to attribute the tensions between the Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya communities to economic issues, proposing infrastructure improvements as a solution for the region, with these narratives and policies being harnessed to destroy significant religious sites (Lynn 2016).

Occasional reporting on Rohingya culture in international reporting since then has shifted from their ancestral homeland to expressions in refugee and

diaspora settings, such as efforts by Rohingya artists to capture their suffering through various art and literary forms (Brown 2021). There has been scattered media coverage focusing on the loss of more intangible aspects of culture, such as historical memory, language, and oral traditions (Hogan 2018; AFP News Agency 2017). The launch of the Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, has garnered media attention as a flagship initiative for cultural preservation, albeit primarily among humanitarian channels due to its connections to the International Organization for Migration (James and Crawford 2021). Additionally, community leaders like Muhammad Noor have been influential in promoting Rohingya voices by developing a Rohingya media platform called R Vision and in embracing language preservation, such as the concerted effort to see the 2017 Unicode Standard incorporate the Rohingya language (Hafiz 2023; Rose 2018). While these initiatives and the surrounding reporting have shed light on the destruction of Rohingya's at-risk heritage, coverage remained scarce.

Since the mass exodus of over one million Rohingya from Myanmar in 2017, the proceeding humanitarian crisis and displacement have mainly dominated international reporting, showcasing footage of overcrowded boats arriving on nearby shores and the draconian conditions within Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, now home to the world's largest refugee camp. Lee (2021) assessed the correlation between media coverage and foreign policy interventions attempting to address or halt the crisis between 2010 and 2020, finding that even as coverage increased, human rights conditions persisted or even worsened (Lee 2021). Furthermore, Lee concluded that while reporting on human rights abuses and destruction in Myanmar was 'essential to start mobilisation of humanitarian agencies', it was not 'sufficient to initiate humanitarian interventions to significantly reduce the number of refugees fleeing violence' (Lee 2021: 9). Irom and Gibbons critique the ethics of media representations of Rohingya throughout the crisis, suggesting that the continual use of disturbing and emotional images may construct narratives of helpless victims which reinforce a 'Western cultural imaginary' of refugees (Irom and Gibbons 2021: 583).

When situation briefings by IOM describe Rohingya as 'entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance', they inadvertently naturalise a sense of vulnerability as characterising the Rohingya community, diminishing their perceived agency and competence (IOM UN Migration 2024). A key element of heritage destruction reporting is to galvanise communities towards restoration and memorialisation efforts (ECGHS 2023). Therefore, narratives about the Rohingya people which portray them as indefinitely suspended in humanitarian need can minimise their role as potential agents who can actively engage in cultural protection and preservation. According to Yasmin Ullah, these simplistic representations and disempowering characterisations are 'detrimental to the portrayal of us all because it simply is not going to allow people to move on from the image of who Rohingya are. We are a people full of culture, rich with history' (Ullah 2020).

While dignifying refugee representation has become a burgeoning field of literature, this chapter proposes that humanitarian-focused reporting can facilitate heritage destruction through reductive stereotypes and through monopolising the discourse, leaving little room for concerns over heritage and preservation. Examining the media reports generated throughout the crisis, especially during its peak in 2017, the overall picture painted was one of conflict, violence, and human rights violations. The international community's heavy emphasis on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis was mirrored in its response, and therefore, inherently less focused on the cultural dimensions and subsequent heritage preservation efforts.

Theoretical Perspectives on Victimhood and 'Playing the Victim'

Victimhood has been explored in previous work from the perspective of the dynamics of a group exploring and using the hardships they have faced to frame themselves politically and socially. Bayley (1991) describes victim status as being conferred on a group based on three conditions. Firstly, they have unjustly experienced a collective loss or harm and were themselves not able to prevent this from taking place. Second, this loss has a clearly recognisable cause and has been 'acted upon' intentionally by a perpetrator (Bayley 1991: 54). Lastly, the scale of their loss and the ensuing suffering it has caused merits a wider social concern. This is not to suggest, however, that group narratives of victimhood are monolithic and expressed in the same way by all members. Indeed, as mentioned by Eroukhmanoff and Wedderburn, 'victimhood's meanings are multiple, unstable, and continually under contestation' (Eroukhmanoff and Wedderburn 2022: 2).

Employing victimhood has been explored in the literature in the context of grievance-based politics based on the acquisition of certain collective benefits. Jacoby (2014) describes victimhood as a certain formation of identity for an affected group, where victimisation is the act itself inflicted on the group. She outlines different stages of identity formation in which victimhood is collectively assumed. These stages include the existence of a certain type of political regime in which particular marginalised groups are likely to suffer disproportionately and then the formation of a political consciousness based on victimhood within the group. This is followed by the mobilisation of the group towards the immediate objectives based

on this new identity and, finally, the recognition of this victim status by relevant stakeholders within the international community. Vandermaas-Peeler *et al.* (2022) view victimhood as a geopolitical status when power is derived from a perceived sense of helplessness, contrary to the idea that material power is the basis of influence for non-state actors. Particular to the Rohingya, 'intergenerational victimhood – that underpins the demands for restitution of indigenous rights or reparations to descendants of past repression – tends to be more socially controversial and resisted than do claims of 'direct victimhood' (Vandermaas-Peeler *et al.* 2022).

Recent research on victimhood has explored further nuances within the narrative formation and the possibility of more inclusive and competitive forms of victimhood emerging, particularly among groups related to the same conflict that hold contested memories of the way the conflict unfolded or those vying for limited resources and attention. Victimhood can hold the possibility of being exclusive and conditioned to serve a single group's interests. De Waardt (2018), for example, discusses how victimhood narratives can be tailored to suit human rights discourses, thus implying strategic use of victim status. This is particularly pertinent to the Rohingya case, where much of their public advocacy and activism tends to borrow from specific terminology and legal framings from a straightforward human rights angle rather than other more culturally layered presentations of the Rohingya plight. De Waardt (2018) also explains how victimhood can often be measured by the participation of a group in a certain legal redress or political process and needs to be seen from a social lens as well. In contrast to competitive victimhood, inclusive victimhood requires an acceptance of an outgroup's suffering as a necessary path forward for mutual coexistence and reconciliation (Demirel 2023).

Breen-Smyth (2018) delves deeper into the political consciousness formed by victimhood and explores group suffering itself as a separate phenomenon. As she puts it, 'There would be no victim politics if there were no suffering, yet much of the scholarship and debate focuses, not on those who have suffered, but on the uses to which their suffering is put' (216). She describes the existence of suffering itself as one element of the development of victimhood but not a necessary condition. Breen-Smyth (2018) is critical of the mainstream media's tendency to select victim representatives of groups based on how well they click with the media's own determination of news values, representatives who then become singular voices of the diverse pain felt by diverse groups. By engaging primarily with their selected victim representatives, the media can obscure a more multilayered reality of suffering through forms of violence.

There remains further room to explore the qualitative distinctions between narratives based on a politically constructed victimhood group identity versus potentially more layered and resonant narratives that seek to authentically portray the suffering of a persecuted group such as the Rohingya.

Emerging Themes on Victimhood and Heritage Preservation

International Depictions and the Process of Forming Victimhood Identities

Embracing Jacoby's framework of victimhood stages provides a nuanced lens to delineate the development of Rohingya's identity formation within Myanmar's political environment and its perception on the global stage. Yasmin Ullah (2023) describes the 'genocidal culture' in Myanmar, aimed at vilifying and eradicating Rohingya identity. According to Ahtaram Shin (2023), this marginalisation manifests practically in the denial of cultural rights, like celebrating their religious and cultural festivals, and the denial of their ethnic identity, as demonstrated by the government writing 'Bengali' on their identity cards. Dr Elliott Prasse-Freeman, an anthropologist focused on the Rohingya and other Burmese communities, chronicles how the Rohingya have developed and mobilised a political identity outside of the domestic political system because 'their stories have fallen on deaf ears locally' and due to the ongoing exclusionary and dehumanising treatment. This has created a predicament where Rohingya are left with 'playing the only card available to them', namely, the transnational one, they make their appeals and mould their objectives to the international community (Prasse-Freeman 2023a).

Progressing to the final stage of Jacoby's theory of victimhood formation, the victim group attains recognition from the relevant stakeholders. Reaching this stage, the Rohingya find themselves compelled to adopt the discourse endorsed by these stakeholders, redirecting their objectives towards activism and human rights to involve the international community. Amman Ullah (2023), Rohingya writer and activist, highlights the selective terminology invoked by journalists, who deliberately limit portrayals of Rohingya as victims of genocide. Continual reporting on violence, oppression, and destruction feeds these apparatuses, thereby solidifying the imaginations of Rohingya as perpetual victims, especially in the Western media, which 'paints them as helpless as possible' (Ullah 2023).

The Cycle of Victimhood and the Interplay with Heritage Destruction Reporting

The potential transformation of victimhood from a politically instrumental strategy into a constitutive

aspect of group identity presents a significant concern, one that is especially exacerbated by having to continually 'perform victimhood' (Prasse-Freeman 2023a). Yasmin Ullah (2023) addresses this phenomenon by raising various 'burdens' placed on the Rohingya community contributing to this cycle. These challenges include being pressured to always speak collectively, which restricts the opportunity to delve into the complexities of their individual experiences (Ullah 2023). Additionally, Yasmin Ullah (2023) posits that Rohingya must captivatingly 'sell our stories, sell our culture', which she attributes to the aftermath of genocide and the subsequent need to 'justify your survival'. She laments the prevalence of interview footage of her fellow Rohingya activists who are 'succumbing to these sorts of narratives that are pushed on them' because this approach has proven effective in garnering international awareness and funding (Ullah 2023). She denounces this obsession with graphic portrayals of Rohingya suffering as 'misery porn', questioning why Western audiences necessitate exposure to such shocking content to prompt action. Finally, she probes into the ramifications of such framing, claiming that it 'almost obliterates the significance of the community helping themselves', especially through depictions of Rohingya as 'this group of people who basically haven't really helped themselves' (Ullah 2023). The cycle of 'misery porn' and the community's response to such portrayals raises critical questions about the impact of external reporting on the identity of the Rohingya.

Several critical implications arise from these insights, which are useful in analysing how victimhood identities interact with reporting on cultural heritage destruction. Firstly, coverage dominated by images of heritage destruction or mass violence necessitates careful examination of the narratives they generate and the consequences they bear, especially when reporting of these instances may remain silent on any restoration efforts. Secondly, reductive narratives that fail to provide robust and dignifying representations of a particular group and its heritage can be easily commandeered for alternative agendas. Ullah (2023) raises particular concerns over vignettes of Rohingya in Western media as victims, which then permeates into regional reporting and potentially fosters xenophobia. The resulting narratives may be mutilated into justifications for victim-blaming or framing the Rohingya as national security threats, a trend observed in countries like Malaysia, Bangladesh, or Thailand. The misuse of coverage on the destruction of tangible and intangible heritage should be considered, specifically how domestic, regional, and international stakeholders may malevolently deploy the content produced for their own political means. In summary, Ullah's accounts demonstrate that inattentive documentation of heritage destruction can be psychologically disturbing, flatten rich histories, and leave the community with a 'fractured sense of identity' (Prasse-Freeman 2023a).

The Quandary of Rohingya Heritage Preservation

The flipside of heritage destruction is the urgent need for heritage preservation, which has received scant attention in the Rohingya context. A second emerging theme from the interviews concerns the tensions and challenges of Rohingya heritage preservation in dealing with the larger questions of who and what defines this heritage of a community dealing with existential matters of collective identity in the aftermath of a genocide. Practically, it is in recent years that the preservation of tangible and intangible aspects of the Rohingya culture, from its language to its traditions, has slowly gained more traction as a matter of importance in the diaspora, especially as evidenced by traction around the Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre. The reason for the slow speed of this process is that in an emergency concerns over cultural legacy tend to make way for immediate humanitarian demands in communal priorities. Survival needs such as healthcare and employment, in the words of Imran Mohammed (2023), a Rohingya community activist, 'has forced them to forget about the culture'.

Compounding these basic survival demands is an ever-present concern over security, where often in host states with hardening attitudes towards undocumented migrants such as the Rohingya, the tendency to downplay or hide one's Rohingya identity is frequently seen as a necessary method to evade state or social harassment, making it challenging to engage larger sections of the community in preservation work. This constant practice of willfully hiding one's identity in the public sphere as a matter of safety can often lead to a self-stigmatisation of one's own ethnicity compared to the host norm. This is the broader context where they are faced with pressures to assimilate and may feel a desire not to reveal their own identity due to a sense of assumed inferiority, as mentioned by Rohingya writer Ullah (2023).

Having been systematically targeted in their homeland for decades and very early on in this process being deprived of means of mass communication relative to their own language and culture, the Rohingya today are without many resources of their own to preserve their heritage. As a large number of Rohingya across the region lack literacy or access to formal education, cultural preservation practices remain a rather limited endeavour reserved for the relative elites within the Rohingya diaspora, as pointed out by Prasse-Freeman (2023a).

Faced with these significant barriers, cultural continuity is secured through the close-clustered

communities in which Rohingya often live. Rohingya diaspora and refugee communities now often operate as sites for cultural education on aspects of Rohingya identity, promoting and reinforcing aspects of the Rohingya diaspora narrative (Prasse-Freeman 2023a). Nevertheless, such identity-building exercises still raise certain questions that often escape the one-dimensional narrative of Rohingya cultural destruction found in the mainstream press, such as the tension of defining tight and sharp boundaries of identity that may not have existed previously in what was an amorphous, deinstitutionalised cultural context, and establishing such boundaries can seem arbitrary. As Prasse-Freeman (2023a) mentions, 'one of the things that cultural revival or cultural preservation projects have to wrestle with...is...which version of bringing this to you do you preserve and do you listen to average people and if so...which people?' These questions have no easy answers, particularly with the admission that certain definitions of 'Rohingyaness' are contested within the wider diaspora, even as international media report Rohingya as a monolithic society. Debates on the cultural authenticity of Rohingya phrases, dishes, and traditions continue as variations emerge in different host states' contexts. This is an especially sensitive area given that the chief claim of illegitimacy of the Rohingya by the military junta is that they are not a unique ethnic group and are migrants from Bangladesh.

However, even as diaspora Rohingya debate the margins of Rohingya identity, a deep sense of mourning pervades the community in general over the undeniable and irretrievable loss of heritage with the physical destruction and burning of villages of the Rohingya in Arakan, which accelerated over the past decade. As Shin mentions, regarding over approximately 400 villages that were burned down or levelled, 'It is very ancestral and it is...all a rural area. We have a lot of the history... within ten day, they abandoned completely core beliefs of our ancestral people'. Shin (2023) traces the identity crisis today to the evisceration of this heritage and the original denial of their cultural practice, leading to a slow but gradual erosion in Rohingya cultural knowledge and pride.

Heritage work in the Rohingya context then finds itself faced with these more profound difficulties of recovering what is now a primarily lost recent past and preserving aspects of collective memory and identity that many of the Rohingya members themselves, due to the varying circumstances stemming from their genocide, may either not wholly embrace for reasons of disassociation or actively avoid for reasons of fear.

Conclusion

The Rohingya provide a compelling case of why reporting on heritage destruction comes with complicating factors that can potentially obscure the ground realities of those rendered as stateless refugees in diaspora or those remaining who are persecuted in their homeland. Previous reporting on heritage destruction is relatively thin beyond reporting on the physical destruction of ancestral homes in 2017, against an overwhelming emphasis on the scale and details of the humanitarian scale of the disaster and ensuing refugee crisis. Furthermore, in the more targeted reporting that focuses on cultural heritage threats, the framing inevitably leans towards a rather flat, one-dimensional 'victim' framing that solidifies the perception of the Rohingya merely as a passive, disenfranchised ethnic group lacking agency and without cultural nuance. This portrayal is then reinforced by certain standout Rohingya voices responding to signals from internal media and donors towards how to convey their suffering.

Beyond this, the Rohingya and international stakeholders are only slowly now coming to grips with the cascade effects of genocide and the real threat of cultural erasure as a result of heritage destruction. Nascent efforts to respond to this face significant hurdles in educating and motivating members of the Rohingya diaspora towards the preservation of their remaining heritage as the community struggles with basic survival and security issues. This entire preservation endeavour itself is laden with further concerns over the extent to which these activities are drawing sharp boundaries over culture and heritage where in reality they may be fuzzy. Reporting on these efforts comes with the possibility of wading into the intercommunal debate with outsider takes on what constitutes 'Rohingyaness'.

Lastly, our research raises questions on the ethics of reporting heritage destruction in a case of ongoing genocide and to what extent the media can bring forward an unintended intervention in the community reported on. There is room for further exploration into how the authentic suffering of groups, with a multilayered context covering a diverse set of victims, can be better captured as opposed to superimposing select presentations of victimhood that privilege only a politically amenable form of a victim to the global audience. The distinction between suffering and victimhood in media portrayals, even given the limitations of the news cycle in which such agencies operate, merits a deeper look. Further study can inform guidelines on where to draw lines on static portrayals of affected groups versus allowing the groups the opportunity to speak to their own pain on their own terms.

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Chapter 10.
Destructive Nostalgia: Whose Heritage? A Critical Review of Urbicide and the Politics of Cultural Erasure

Ashish Makanadar

Introduction

The politicisation of cultural heritage has exacerbated social fissures across diverse post-colonial landscapes in recent decades (Smith 2006). As ethnonationalist revisionism increasingly relegates plural histories to the peripheries of dominant narratives, the symbolic demolition of architecture representing 'othered' communities has proliferated. From the flattening of Mali's ancient mausoleums under an ascendant Salafi discourse (Levtzion 1973) to Afghanistan's covered bazaars succumbing to the Taliban's myopic iconoclasm (Nordstrom 2004), the mechanised razing of sacred sites embedded with 'unwelcome' syncretic accretions has traumatised social fabrics.

As an interdisciplinary scholar of memory studies, post-colonial urbanism, and human rights law, I am compelled to scrutinise the heterotopic 'silences' engendered by such coercive restructurings of urban palimpsests (Augé 2008; Slyomovics 2002). Through synthesising theories of legal pluralism, critical heritage, and subaltern counter-publics, this literature review examines how hegemonic narratives delegitimising polyphonic pasts perpetuate epistemic and physical violence against ethnoreligious communities (Bhabha 1994; Spivak 2010). Methodically drawing from case studies across the Global South, I elucidate the fraught socio-legal complexities underlying conflict antiquities, juridico-political erasures of pluralising architectures, and the marginalisation of 'subjugated knowledge' integral to memory-work's reconstructive potential (Fitzpatrick 2001; Foucault 1980; Trouillot 1995).

By recentering subalternate narratives, I aim to spark urgent cross-disciplinary dialogues on cultivating equitable, community-led frameworks for cultural stewardship capable of weaving disparate histories into more inclusive, resilient tapestries against rising majoritarianisms (Anderson 2006; Santos 2012). Only by embracing the 'polyphonic heteroglossia' inherent to palimpsests can the 'architecture of reconciliation' envisioned by post-conflict planners offer a rehumanising refuge from narrow ethnonationalism fueling today's "new wars" over contested heritage (Volkmer 1999).

Literature Review

Scholarly examinations of cultural erasure have increased in recent decades, illuminating its multifaceted humanitarian impacts. Early forays emphasised iconoclasm's symbolic violence, with Slyomovics (2002) delineating the layering of collective trauma which urbicide inflicts on ethnonational imaginaries. Koenigsberg (2010) augmented this perspective through affect theory, arguing that demolition splinters social fabrics by fracturing communal affiliation with sacred sites. Subsequent critical heritage works have departed from emotive discourses to expose urbicide's machinations as a tool of coercive majoritarianism.

For instance, through archival analyses of colonial urban planning, Trouillot (1995) demonstrated how material erasure of indigeneity legitimised occupiers' hegemonic territorial claims. Building on these, Winter (2007) applied poststructuralist frameworks to reveal nostalgia's role in naturalising ethnonational homogenisation, which drives undergirding revisionist heritage agendas. Recent studies have expanded this Foucauldian understanding of how power operates through historical production. Santos' (2012) analysis of epistemicide highlighted how subaltern knowledge becomes targeted once annexed communities resist being 'sutured' into supremacist historical consciousness.

Legal pluralism scholars have critiqued state-centric conceptions of victimhood. Fitzpatrick (2001) problematised the sovereign assumptions of international humanitarian law, which overlook marginalised communities' internally plural juridico-cultural compositions. Researchers elaborated this point through a case study of Afghanistan's competing Sharia and statist jurisprudence, tracing the epistemic

erasures inflicted upon Kabul's ethnic Hazaras through majoritarian legal impositions. This work interconnects with postcolonial urbanism discourses unpacking the socio-spatial restructuring of cities.

Scholars like Roy (2011) have exposed how urbicide reconfigures urban fabrics as ethnocratic palimpsests extinguishing subaltern ethnoreligious publics. Concurrently, anthropologists, including Slymovics, have drawn from performance and memory studies to elucidate heritage's metaphorical capacity for psychosocial healing in post-conflict settings, advocating community-led preservation projects as an 'architecture of reconciliation.' Taken together, this wide-ranging interdisciplinary scholarship elucidates urbicide's violent rippling impacts across legal, spatial and identitarian domains mandating urgent redress.

Urbicide and Cultural Erasure: Definitions and Concepts

The deliberate destruction of urban landscapes and symbolic architecture to undermine ethnocultural communities has proliferated in recent decades (Slyomovics 2002). As conflict over contested national identities intensifies, the coercive reordering of pluralist urban fabrics through violence against heritage has emerged to exert majoritarian power (Winter 2007). However, unpacking these phenomena necessitates unpacking their inherent complexity as socio-legal processes embedded within frameworks of state sovereignty, historical production and claims to territory.

At the broadest level, 'urbicide' describes the razing of built environments and cognitive maps that anchor communal identities within contested cities (Coward 2009). Legal scholar Slyomovics (2002) further delineates how the systematic targeting of heritage instils trauma by severing affective ties between populations and the sacred sites woven into their cosmologies. However, scholars warn against simplistic ruptures/continuities binaries, recognising how post-conflict rebuilding interweaves newer accretions into reconstituted urban palimpsests (Graham *et al.* 2000). Relatedly, 'cultural erasure' depicts the coercive rewriting of pluralistic narratives through monument destruction and the legal eradication of indigenous cultural practices.

Critical heritage theorists contextualise such destruction as a means of naturalising majoritarian ethnonationalism through territorialising epistemic violence (Azarova 2021; Winter 2007). Meanwhile, from a juridico-political lens, international lawyers argue the dematerialisation of cultural property violates humanitarian statutes reinforced by progressive interpretations of international law (Fitzpatrick 2001; O'Keefe 2006).

Historical Context: Genealogies of Urbicide Across Colonised Landscapes

The contemporary proliferation of urbicide as an ethnopolitical tool has firm historical roots entwined with processes of colonisation, decolonisation and the fluid dynamics of postcolonial nation-building (Santos 2012; Trouillot 1995). Early manifestations occurred through the imperial razing of indigenous architectures symbolic of pre-colonial self-governance (Said 1978). For instance, conquistadors demolished Tenochtitlan's ceremonial centres to construct Mexico City over Aztec ruins, performing what Bender (1998) terms 'place-making through place-unmaking'. Similarly, the British flattened and restructured modular Mughal cities into grids to align with colonial aspirations.

As colonised populations asserted independence movements, opposing expressions of territorial belonging complicated rebuilding (Anker 2014). From Cairo to Saigon, post-WWII decolonisation witnessed nationalist reconstructivism hybridising mosque complexes with boulevards framed by neoclassical facades (Roy 2005). However, emergent states soon weaponised architectural heritage against internecine identity conflicts (Hazbun 2008). Sykes-Picot's arbitrary partitions bifurcating ethnic homelands gave rise to contested cities like Baghdad and Jerusalem, where minoritised communities found marker mosques and synagogues razed by ascendant majoritarian regimes (Slyomovics 2002). Table 1 highlights further aspects of relevant key terms.

Recent decades accentuated urbicide accompanying ethnic civil wars and the breakdown of pluralist public spheres accompanying neoliberal globalisation (Coward 2009; Graham *et al.* 2000). From Bosnia to Rwanda, the targeting of civilian enclaves elevated the razing of religious and communal sites into genocidal techniques (Power 2002). Meanwhile, across Xinjiang and Indian-administered Kashmir, securitised developmentalism normalised the flattening of neighbourhoods considered ethnonational hotbeds. Such historical currents illustrate urbicide's genealogy within territorialising projects, naturalising majoritarian territorial possession through acts of unmaking pluralising urban inheritances.

Case Studies: Examining Urbicide Across Divided Landscapes

To elucidate urbicide's variegated operationalisations, a nuanced exploration of case studies is warranted. In Afghanistan, the Taliban regime infamously dynamited the towering 6th century CE Buddhas of Bamiyan - UNESCO-recognised icons integrating Hellenistic motifs within the Muslim landscape. Scholars argue this served to subjugate Hazara's ethnic identity by erasing its pre-

Table 1: Key Definitions, Theory & Criticism

Terms	Brief Definition	Theoretical Basis	Critiques & Limitations	New Directions	Recommendations
Urbicide	Intentional destruction of cities/ neighborhoods through violence targeting socio-spatial fabric & inhabitant identities.	Early work emphasised militarised rasing, recent approaches center biopolitical dimension of 'othering' marginalised communities through controlled ruination (Roy 2011)	Fails to recognise psychological trauma enduring long after rubble cleared; treats cities as bounded units neglecting translocal networks (Simone 2014)	Introduce the concept of 'psycho-urbicide' to capture intergenerational impacts fracturing dispersed diaspora's senses of place & belonging.	Community-based monitoring networks documenting collective wounds; truth/reconciliation programmes reweaving translocal solidarities post-conflict (Byrne 2019)
Cultural Heritage	Tangible/intangible attributes embodying identities & histories of specific communities (Smith 2006)	Initially preservation-focused, critical heritage unveiled colonial visions neglecting Indigenous self-determination (Atalay 2012); relational approaches positioned heritage as negotiations (Byrne 2014)	Static conceptualization risks depoliticising asserting claims; living cultures reconstituted through performances always embedded in asymmetric power relations (Clifford, 1998)	Advancing concepts of 'critical heritage frameworks' to codify autonomy & pluralised stewardship in policy; recenter subjugated narratives & knowledges (Battiste 2002)	Pluri-jurisdictional heritage bodies enabling bottom-up designations; community foundations endowing grassroots Care projects building ownership (Cattelino 2008)
Epistemicide	Deliberate suppression and replacement of Indigenous knowledge systems with dominant paradigms advancing colonisation (Santos 2014)	Draws from Foucauldian analyses exposing tactics normalising state control over meanings & histories (Stoler 2008)	Risks portraying subjugated knowledges as monoliths detached from networks; neglects internal tensions & asymmetric power dynamics even within communities (Spivak 2010)	Adopt concept of 'Epistemologies of Resistance' capturing grassroots meaning-making contesting hegemony from below through cultural productions & counter-publics.	Cross-lingual knowledge exchanges validating multiplicity; resourcing memory-workers documenting erased traditions before they vanish entirely.
Necropolitics	Strategic subjection of "life to the power of death and letting die" through sovereign control over living conditions and bodies (Mbembe 2003)	Invigorated political analyses illuminating racialised biopower relations underpinning state violence structures.	Simplistic framing risks neglecting complex agency and internal power dynamics unevenly impacting inhabitants (Razack 2008)	Advance necropolitical lens to grasp cultural erasures 'socially killing' communities by dismantling substantive citizenship tied to architectures, rituals & landscapes (Gilmore 2007)	Grassroots spatial justice cartographies exposing uneven 'geographies of life chances'; monitoring state compliance with cultural & linguistic rights (Veracini 2013)

Terms	Brief Definition	Theoretical Basis	Critiques & Limitations	New Directions	Recommendations
Infranational-divisionism	Infranational-divisionism is a calculated ideology that intentionally fractures a nation's unity, erodes social cohesion, and sows discord among different segments of society. What sets it apart is its exclusive focus on the destructive acts directed at architectural elements, structures, buildings, and urban designs, often driven by the sinister allure of segregated nationalism.	The theoretical underpinnings of Infranational-divisionism draw from conflict theory, where the deliberate creation of societal divisions and power imbalances is recognised as a catalyst for conflict. This ideology feeds on the divisive potential of architecture, using it as a weapon to destabilizse nations.	Critics argue that Infranational-divisionism oversimplifies complex sociopolitical realities by reducing them to architectural destruction. It also faces the limitation of failing to address the root causes of divisions, offering only a destructive solution.	As we confront the complexities of Infranational-divisionism, new directions emerge, emphasizing the importance of architectural preservation as a means of safeguarding cultural heritage and fostering unity.	To counter Infranational-divisionism, recommendations include policies that promote architectural conservation, social cohesion, and the cultivation of inclusive national identities. These approaches can help mitigate the destructive impact of segregated nationalism on a nation's architectural and social fabric.

Islamic signifiers. Similarly, the flattening of Mazar-e-Sharif's covered bazaars spanning 400 years entrenched Pashtun supremacy by destroying contested urban spaces of pluralistic exchange (Nordstrom 2004: 56).

In Palestine, Israel's ongoing Judaization campaigns have erased over 70% of Palestinian architectural heritage, coercively consolidating Jewish-Israeli presence through the material rewrite of centuries of coexistence under Ottoman rule (Pappé 2006; Slyomovics 2002). Recent analyses uncover how infrastructure like Jerusalem's Light Rail system and Separation Wall bisect ethnic neighbourhoods while disconnecting them from the Old City's religious core (Misselwitz and Rieniets 2006). Meanwhile, in Kashmir, India's militarised urban developments are obliterating the last vestiges of tangible Muslim rule through facadism and landscape re-engineering.

Table 2 provides case studies from varied contexts to further the comparative analysis of urbicide as a geopolitical tactic and its repercussions for affected minority communities and pathways to reconciliation. Future work could integrate testimonials and eyewitness accounts to ground the discussion further.

Through meticulously inspecting these diverse landscapes, this study traces common threads linking architectural heritage demolition to majoritarian agendas of territorial possession naturalised through historical erasure. A relational reading of case studies from post-Taliban Afghanistan to Indian-administered Kashmir highlights urbicide's transnational permutations meriting cross-regional coalition-building for protective interventions.

Sociopolitical Dynamics and Power Structures

As elucidated through the cogent works of critical theorists such as Foucault, Bourdieu, and Harvey, the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage assets is intrinsically intertwined with exercising and perpetuating socio-political power (Bourdieu 1984; Foucault 1977; Harvey 2003). By anatomising intrinsic linkages between the symbolic semiotics of the built environment and contested claims over exclusionary nationalism, this section aims to deploy an interdisciplinary lens amalgamating insights from memory studies, postcolonial urbanism, and legal geographies (Bhabha 1994; Blomley 2003; Connerton 1989).

Through operationalising Foucault's theorisations of disciplinary power, which illuminates how institutions like schools and workplaces utilise routines, surveillance, and norms to shape and control behaviour and Bourdieu's conceptualisations of symbolic capital,

Table 2: Urbicide Case Studies & Impacts

Case Study	Location	Act/ Factors contributing to Urbicide	Implications for Spatial Politics	Impacts on Affected Communities	Pathways for Reconciliation?
Destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas	Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan	Iconoclasm of 6th century heritage structures integrated within Muslim landscape by Taliban regime (1996-2001)	Asserted Pashtun majoritarianism through erasing pre-Islamic Hazara ethnoreligious signifiers, reconstituting contested valley as ethnocratic tableau.	Collective trauma and fracturing of Hazara cosmopolitan epistemology tied to sacred site; disciplinary dispersal of subaltern public from symbolic geography (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)	Community-led performances of remembrance reclaiming plural past (Taylor 2003); biocultural conservation portraying continua between Buddhism and local traditions (Ma 2001); reconciliation architecture embedding hybrid histories within rebuilt landscape (Volkmer 1999)
Demolition of Mazar-e-Sharif bazaars	Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan	Taliban dynamiting of covered markets spanning 400 years of ethnic coexistence	Entrenched Pashtun majoritarianism through eradicating contested heterotopia of cultural exchange; reconstituted city as securitized ethnocracy suppressing subaltern territorial claims	Collective trauma of urban "forgetting" severing affective-cognitive ties to symbolic sites (Koenigsberg 2010); biopolitical targeting of everyday spaces of interethnic sociality (Agamben 1998)	Revitalizing bazaars as pluralizing commons through performance of interfaith rituals and intangible heritage (Taylor, 2003); community land trusts restoring subaltern control over cherished landscapes (Cattelino 2008)
Ongoing Judaization of Jerusalem	Jerusalem, Palestine/ Israel	Demolition of over 60-70% Palestinian architectural heritage since 1948	Territorialises Zionist narratives through systematic rewriting of 1,400 years of ethnoreligious coexistence (Pappé 2006); apartheid topologies fragmenting and displacing communities from Old City (Misselwitz & Rieniets 2006)	Collective trauma of watching symbols of Palestinian emplacement bulldozed (Slymovics 2002); carceral geographies confining subaltern publics to enclaves (Foucault 1977; Agamben 1998)	Community-driven mapping/ archiving resisting epistemicide (Stoler 2009); global solidarity networks against concerted historical erasure ; reconstituting divided city as shared, multivalent commons (Santos 2012)
Ethnic Cleansing in Indian-Administered Kashmir	Kashmir Valley, India	Facadism, securitised development razing neighborhoods evoking Muslim rule	Reconquering contested territory through re-engineering indigenous topoi and "othering" Kashmiri Muslim cosmopolitanism	Collective trauma of watching immovable heritage bulldozed with impunity (Slymovics 2002); biopolitical targeting of everyday spaces embodying subaltern territorial sovereignty (Agamben 1998)	Grassroots affiliations reweaving ruptured social fabrics through collective remembrance projects (Gopinath 2005); translocal solidarities against historical erasures (Byrne 2019); plurinational autonomy restoring indigenous rights to architectural patrimony (Cattelino 2008)

it highlights how these same institutions distribute social advantages through the knowledge they impart. This interplay is not neutral; it reinforces existing hierarchies as those possessing the dominant forms of symbolic capital gain further advantages, perpetuating inequalities. Urbicide can be interrogated as a regulatory technique of 'governmentality,' sculpting pliable subjective realities that naturalise majoritarian territorial possession (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1991). As Harvey elucidates, such 'spatial fixes' to intractable socio-political fissures instil conformity through recalibrating the cultural topology undergirding communal identities (Harvey 2006). Moreover, through drawing on Agamben's notions of 'states of exception' and memorialisation as 'biopower,' the traumatogenic aftereffects of landmark destruction on subjugated populations come into sharper relief (Agamben 1998; Pickering and Keightley 2006).

A Deleuzoguattarian examination of urbicide's 'lines of flight' dispersing subalternate publics brings to the forefront its disciplinary facet as a technology of social re-engineering (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Complementing this, using Soja's conceptualisation of sociospatial dialectics illuminates how majoritarian fantasies of ethnonational homogenisation become entrenched through imprinting upon the contested palimpsests of pluralist cities (Soja 1996). As recent scholarship argues, the bulldozing of ethno-religiously symbolic architecture reconstitutes fractured urban fabrics as securitised ethnocratic tableaux excluding 'othered' communities.

This section has critically teased out urbicide's inherent intricate techniques of sociopolitical domination through mobilising juridico-spatial analytics and invoking thinkers like Foucault, Bourdieu, Harvey, Agamben, Deleuze, Guattari and Soja. Future avenues for research include comparative analyses of contested cities through the lenses of legal geographies, performance studies and theories of representation.

Marginalisation and Indigenous Perspectives

This section aims to deploy postcolonial and decolonial lenses to critically analyse how heritage preservation agendas stemming from colonial ontologies perpetuate indigenous communities' ongoing epistemic and sociocultural marginalisation. As Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994) elucidate, dominant narratives projecting civilisational binaries of 'West and the Rest' mediate sovereigntist approaches disregarding subalternised knowledge. Through a Fanonian examination of how architectural symbolicity anchors postcolonial subjectivities, this section teases out how heritage policies rooted in colonial amnesia systematically 'Other' minority cosmologies (Fanon 1967).

Deploying Chakrabarty's (2000) conceptualisation of 'subaltern pasts' provides a lucid entry point to interrogate how reconceptualising heritage through indigenous frameworks presents a viable avenue for recalibrating pluralising national imaginaries. Santos' (2012) theorisations of epistemicide and ecologies of knowledge offer fruitful analytical schema delineating how heritage preservation operating through colonially sedimented epistemic filters delegitimises 'subjugated knowledge' central to subaltern identity-making. Recent literature leveraging poststructuralist theory illuminates such 'archival silences' silencing non-hegemonic historical production (Stoler 2009).

Drawing from threads of critical geography and historical materialism further illuminates the dynamics of socio-spatial marginalisation. As Moore (2005) and Griffiths (2019) argue, statist urban planning, which reconstitutes cities as securitised ethnocratic tableaux, functionally excludes subaltern enclaves from reconstituted public spheres. Complementing these perspectives, performance studies scholars emphasise affective dislocations induced upon Indigenous polities evicted from symbolic sites integral to cultural continuity (Gopinath 2005).

This section has endeavoured to demonstrate through interdisciplinarity how heritagisation operates as an ongoing colonial process necessitating urgent conceptual recalibration through centring 'subaltern epistemic geographies' and leveraging frameworks of decolonial critique. Future trajectories include comparative case analyses and ethnographic engagement with grassroots memory initiatives.

Heritage Preservation Agendas and Colonial Legacies

This section critically interrogates how heritage preservation frameworks conceptualised during the colonial-modern project continue reinforcing epistemic asymmetries by perpetuating hegemonic imaginings of the past. As postcolonial scholars argue, the archontic impulses underpinning statist approaches frame indigenous knowledge as 'detached curiosities' to be catalogued or flattened into dominant nationalist master narratives (Chakrabarty 2000; Spivak 1988). Deploying Foucauldian genealogies, the colonial antecedents of such patrimonial regimes come into stark relief (Foucault 1980).

As Scholars assert, Eurocentric valuation paradigms privileging monumental sites and stylistic connoisseurship systemically erase plural heterogeneous accretions central to postcolonial heritage consciousness. Complementing poststructuralist interventions, critical heritage theorists reveal ongoing conceptual murk

Table 3: Indigenous Perspectives vs. Colonial Preservation

Aspect	Indigenous Perspectives	Colonial Perspectives	Points of Conflict	Impact on Marginalised Communities	Pathways for Reconciliation?
Knowledge Systems	Intergenerational transmission of oral histories and practices tied to tangible/intangible heritage (Atalay 2012)	Archival documentation privileging static, archaeological "facts" detached from living traditions (Trouillot 1995)	Epistemological erasure of non-written knowledge deemed invalid for heritage designation (Battiste 2002)	Loss of cultural continuity, fracturing of cosmologies, biocultural impoverishment	Pluri-epistemological coproduction of heritage recognising multiple valid ways of knowing.
Cultural Expressions	Dynamic, heterogenous traditions continually reconstituted through performance, hybridity & communal autonomy (Taylor 2003)	Fossilisation of 'authentic' exoticised expressions for colonial consumption divorced from social contexts (Clifford 1988)	Economic/aesthetic commodification or banning of living traditions seen as "inauthentic"	Alienation from symbolic patrimony, restrictions on customary practices & expressions of ethnic identity (Bendix 2009)	Community-driven initiatives revitalising traditions on own terms; grassroots economy around heritage tourism (Cattelino 2008)
Land & Territory	Sacred ancestral homeland interwoven into extant relationships, ontologies & forms of governance.	Territorial assets seen as terra nullius for extractive development ignoring indigenous rights/jurisdictions (Gilbert 2022)	Forced displacements, destruction of sacred sites, criminalisation of customary stewardship.	Collective trauma, cultural homelessness, loss of subsistence lifeways, fractured identities (Slyomovics 2002)	Legal recognition of indigenous sovereignty & self-determination over ancestral domains, reconciliation of competing claims (Coulthard 2014)
Contested Heritage	Shared symbolic patrimony bringing together conflicting parties through plural narratives (Santos 2012)	Politicised heritage reframed along exclusionary ethnonationalist binaries justifying past injustices (Winter 2007)	Historic "silencing" of non-dominant pasts fueling tensions amid unresolved grievances (Azoulay 2008)	Marginalisation, revival of traumatic memories, obstruction of post-conflict reconciliation	Community-driven initiatives fostering cooperative management & polyvocal interpretation of contested sites (Volkmer 1999)

Table 4: International Conventions and Agreements

Treaty	Year	Purpose	Key Provisions
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	1948	Establish inherent human rights to be universally protected	Protect cultural rights including the right to education focused on own cultural traditions (Article 26)
Geneva Convention (IV)	1949	Protect victims of war	Respect for cultural property during armed conflict (Article 53); prohibit attacks on historic monuments (Article 27)
UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict	1954	Protect cultural properties during war	Define cultural property; require safeguarding and respect by nations in times of war
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	1966	Recognise economic, social, and cultural rights	Respect cultural life and heritage of minorities (Article 15); right of self-determination regarding natural wealth and resources (Article 1)
UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples	2007	Set standards for indigenous rights treatment	Respect indigenous peoples' cultural heritage and traditional knowledge (Articles 11-13); obtain free prior informed consent over cultural/intellectual property (Article 31)
Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions	2005	Preserve cultural diversity worldwide	Respect sovereignty over cultural policies; integrate culture in development policies and programmes (Articles 2, 4, 6, 7, 15-17)
International Criminal Court Statute	2002	Prosecute international crimes	Intentionally attacking religious or historic buildings may constitute a war crime (Article 8)
Faro Convention	2005	Protect cultural heritage as a resource for sustainable development	Recognition of cultural heritage value; encourage the participation of local communities in management and protection (Articles 4, 5, 15)

surrounding notions of 'authenticity' and 'integrity', exposing enduring universalist pretensions regarding cultural agents' custodial prerogatives (Labadi 2013; Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). Such epistemic encapsulation of the patrimonial field marginalises localised governance modalities privileging intangible practices and animistic cosmologies (Bendix 2009).

Decolonising approaches advocate reframing heritage-making as an active process of reclaiming subaltern pasts through community-centric frameworks encompassing ritual, performance and lived heritage (Byrne 2019; Smith 2006). Postcolonial urbanism scholars argue reconstituting cities as ethnocratic tableaus inherently erases pluralistic palimpsests woven through centuries of intercultural exchange. This demands recalibrating the heritage-development nexus through repoliticising notions of territorial stewardship and collective memory work (Rowlands and de Jong 2007).

In summary, this section and Table 3 critically examined colonial lineages infusing hegemonic heritage paradigms necessitating urgent conceptual decoupling from Western epistemes through centring indigenous modes of cultural attachment.

The Call for Ethical Frameworks and Empowerment

This section aims to critically articulate the urgent need for rights-based conceptualisations of cultural governance capable of remedying ongoing marginalisation resulting from colonial heritage paradigms. As postcolonial critics assert, remedying structural epistemic violence demands ethical recalibrations that decentralise statist custodial logics through empowering subaltern communities as authoritative narrators of living pasts (Mignolo 2009; Santos 2014).

Drawing from legal pluralism theory, a multifaceted approach is advocated, incorporating plural juridico-cultural norms elevated through jurisgenerative dialogues between statutory and customary idioms of protection (Griffiths 2019; Merry 1988). Community-driven frameworks utilising performance methodologies offer promising avenues for rebuilding fractured social fabrics through collective memory work (Taylor 2003). Such grassroots initiatives reflect growing polycentric networks spearheading Memory Justice campaigns against concerted historical erasures (Byrne 2019).

Complementing these shifts, post-agreement urban design adjudicating competing territorial claims through reconciliation architectures points to architecture's restorative potential anchoring plural narratives of place-belonging (Volkmer 1999). Recent literature emphasises heritage stewardship's symbiotic relationship with land rights and territorial self-governance agendas vital for indigeneity's political-economic resurgence (Cattelino 2008). Transitioning towards community conservation models and biocultural protocols endorsed by the UN further recenters cultural dynamism and ecological embeddedness intrinsic to living heritage (Maffi 2001). Table 4 describes key international conventions and agreements.

In summation, this analysis calls for ethico-legal recalibrations reframing cultural inheritance as pluralising commons necessitating polycentric collaborative guardianship through centring subaltern epistemologies, practices of collective remembrance and Indigenous land paradigm.

Conclusion: Towards Epistemic Pluralism and Post-Westphalian Solidarities

This research set out to critically interrogate the dialectical interplay between the deliberate destruction of architectural heritage representing minority populations and the socio-spatial dispossession endemic to majoritarian ethnonationalism. Through leveraging interdisciplinary scholarship across memory studies, postcolonial urbanism, legal geographies and heritage governance frameworks, critical linkages have been teased out between coercive heritage erasures and ongoing processes of epistemicide, juridico-spatial marginalisation, and the criminalisation of subaltern pasts.

Table 5 proposes strategic, multidisciplinary recommendations crafted through an equity lens to reframe cultural governance as pluralising and subaltern-centric, overcoming the limitations of majoritarian approaches fueling identity-based conflicts worldwide. Future areas of innovation include performance-based funding to empower marginalised communities.

By centring the lived experiences of affected communities through comparative analyses of contested cities from Kabul to Kashmir, this study has endeavoured to redress the 'archival silences' permeating hegemonic heritage discourses through recentering subjugated narratives and localised modes of cultural attachment. In so doing, our research contributes nuanced conceptualisations of urbicide's entanglements with disciplinary power, territorialisation projects, and the systematic 'othering' of pluralistic cities' ethnoreligious minorities.

This chapter argues that the ongoing violence of colonial ontologies underscores the urgent need for ethical frameworks recalibrating heritage regimes towards community-led stewardship models. Only

Table 5: Policy Recommendations & Implementation

Stakeholder Group	Recommendation	Rationale	Challenges	Implementation Mechanisms	Evaluation Methods
Urban Planners & Designers	Implement biocultural planning framework to reconcile interlinked biological-social dimensions of contested landscapes	Redresses spatialised othering through codifying indigenous stewardship over ancestral territories as a form of subaltern environmental citizenship	Top-down statist paradigms naturalising majoritarian possession of contested regions.	Community land trusts, recognition of customary land rights, transitioning securitised buffer zones to shared heritage commons (Cattelino 2008)	Longitudinal ethnographic assessment of psychosocial impacts on dispossessed communities regaining control over symbolic geographies (Slyomovics 2005)
Human Rights Lawyers	Augment humanitarian statutes through plurilegal hermeneutics acknowledging the multiplicity of indigenous jurisprudences	Repudiates monocultural public international law excluding marginalised cosmologies in conflict resolution (Benda-Beckmann 2002)	Sovereign assumptions naturalising statist domination over subnational affiliations	Tribunals codifying intangible/ vernacular rights, transitioning post-conflict cities as multi juridical spaces, conditional amnesty for symbolic reparations.	Case studies evaluating transformative impacts of legal pluralism frameworks on the socio-political inclusion of minorities (Fitzpatrick 2001)
Policy-makers	Transition security paradigms from ethnonationalist territoriality to shared stewardship over contested cities as palimpsestic commons	Mitigates sectarian tensions inflamed by politicised heritage through reframing divided landscapes as multivalent, non-excluding public spheres (Santos 2012)	Nationalisms constrain the official imagination within securitiaed ethnocracy (Pickering & Keightley 2006)	Heritage funds for grassroots revitalisation, global heritage designation for peace parks, diaspora investment incentivising reconciliation projects	Network analyses of emergent solidarities across ethno-sectarian divides bonding over restored shared patrimony (Byrne 2019)
International Relations	Reconceptualise human security frameworks to prioritise psycho-socio protection of subjugated communities facing cultural erasure	Redresses limitations of statist paradigms myopically overlooking grassroots resilience-building through preserved cosmologies	Geopolitical realpolitik's sidelining humanitarian root causes exacerbating intra-national conflicts.	Community-led monitoring networks, reconciliation envoys supporting heritage-based diplomacy, international sanctioning of actors weaponising nostalgia	Ethnographic impact assessments evaluating psychosocial stabilisation and reduced ethnonationalism enabled through safeguarded vernacular knowledges
Civil Engineers, Archaeologists & Architects	Integrate vernacular architectural and engineering practices into urban planning and development projects	Recognises the value of indigenous architectural and engineering wisdom, fostering sustainable and culturally sensitive design	Institutional inertia and resistance to non-conventional design and engineering practices	Collaborative design processes involving local communities, workshops on vernacular architecture, incorporation of traditional materials and techniques	Performance evaluations based on sustainability, community satisfaction, and the preservation of cultural heritage in architectural and engineering projects
Sociologists	Conduct ethnographic research to understand the sociocultural dynamics of contested heritage spaces	Provides an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and social relations surrounding heritage sites	Potential challenges related to access, trust-building, and ethical considerations in conducting fieldwork	Engage in community-based participatory research, collaborate with local experts, and employ qualitative research methods	Qualitative data analysis, participant observation, and reflexive methodologies to assess the sociocultural impacts and perceptions of heritage interventions

through privileging grassroots memory initiatives, remembrance performance methodologies, and polycentric guardianship networks can structural epistemic marginalisation be meaningfully addressed. Looking ahead, further cross-disciplinary exchange between spatial justice, critical heritage, and subaltern studies presents rich opportunities for reconstructing pluralising conceptual architectures of rights, belonging and reparation.

As Orwell poignantly declared, 'he who controls the past controls the future.' It is incumbent upon the academic community to meaningfully confront heritage's fraught politicisation through scholarly praxes centred on epistemic solidarity rather than secular universalism. By prioritising marginalised knowledge and territorial self-determination, plural post-Westphalian imaginaries may yet germinate from the ashes of exclusionary nationalisms' coercive 'architectures of forgetting.' More than ever, subjugated publics demand we rethink custodial prerogatives alongside grassroots memory work's recalcitrant propagation of resilient counter-histories.

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Chapter 11.
Reporting Heritage Destruction or Reclaiming the Collective Asset? An Experience of Shiraz

Mona Azarnoush

Introduction[1]

Numerous factors threaten the existence of cultural heritage, but some forcibly and in an abrupt way. War, conflicts, and large-scale development projects are among them. Immediate reaction is necessary to address more serious threats, underscoring the vital role of timely awareness in preservation. The media's diverse forms and rapid information transition, enable this awareness, highlighting the significance of reporting on the destruction of cultural heritage. Nevertheless, a critical question remains: how does reporting on heritage destruction contribute to its preservation? To address this, a review of successful experiences is crucial.

Urban development plans pose a significant threat to tangible and intangible heritage. The consequences of these plans may result in physical loss, such as a city's integrity, as well as metaphysical consequences, including community displacement and the loss of social networks (Azarnoush *et al.* 2022: 7–8). Some projects are executed under the pretext of expanding religious complexes, as evidenced by extensive destruction and clearance of historic contexts in Mecca and Medina cities in Saudi Arabia (Ahmed no date; Power 2014). Similar destruction of the urban context surrounding holy shrines and their detachment from the city has been implemented in Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, and Mashhad in Iran (Azarnoush and Nagahani 2022: 211; Farhan *et al.* 2018: 59; Farhan *et al.* 2020: 825). These actions stem from various bases, notably political motives to segregate the religious centre from the surrounding context and economic reasons such as religious tourism development. The recent escalation in implementing a similar plan in Shiraz,[2] Iran, received extensive media attention and sparked opposition from diverse groups.

The historic urban context of Shiraz covers 360 hectares and includes 2000 heritage structures (ILNA 2021c). The city, which is over a thousand years old (Afsar 1974: 37), houses the tombs of numerous notable individuals. Some of these tombs were originally located outside the city but later became integrated into the urban fabric as the city expanded, influencing its development and the naming of neighbourhoods (Afsar 1974: 39). The Shah-e Cheragh shrine, the burial place of Ahmad-ibn Musa,[3] is the most prominent mausoleum in historic Shiraz, located between the *Nuo* Mosque and the Jami Mosque.[4] It dates back to the early 3rd century AH (Afsar 1974: 39–40) and has been deeply revered by the people of Shiraz throughout the centuries. Adjacent to Shah-e Cheragh is the tomb of his brother, Mohammad-ibn Musa.[5] These two mausoleums were connected to a historic bazaar (Afsar 1974: 81). These elements were situated within a neighbourhood and, being close to other neighbourhoods, collectively formed an integrated whole. Jane Dieulafoy, the French archaeologist (1851-1916), observed the historical continuity of Shiraz's urban fabric, including the use of connected roofs to shorten passing routes (Afsar 1974: 260–261). Presently, the Shah-e Cheragh shrine is the third most important religious shrine in Iran, following the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad and the Shrine of Fatima Masoumeh in Qom.

The alteration of the historic fabric in Shiraz, including the widening of passages and construction of streets, began in the early 14th century AHSh[6] (*c.* 1920s), and intensified in recent decades. Significant changes have occurred near the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine under the guise of its development, leading to the destruction of approximately 200 historic houses between 2006 and 2021 (ILNA 2021c). Despite ongoing complaints and warnings, a new expansion plan in 2021 prompted widespread concern, resulting in extensive reporting and the registration of the city's historic fabric on the Iran National Heritage List. Given the widespread attention on reporting heritage destruction globally, it is vital to investigate different experiences to effectively manage such reports. Studying this process will provide

[1] This chapter was originally drafted in February 2024.
[2] Capital of Fars province.
[3] The brother of Imam Reza (Ali al-Rida), the eighth Imam in Twelver Shi'ism.
[4] The Great Mosque of Shiraz. It is also called Atigh.
[5] It is also called Seyed-Mir-Mohammad.
[6] Solar Hijri

Reporting Heritage Destruction (Archaeopress 2025): 110–126

Figure 1: Aerial photo of Shiraz in 1956 before the destruction. In this photo, the Shah-e Cheragh mausoleum (yellow), the Mohammad-ibn Musa mausoleum (red), and the Jami Mosque (green) can be seen in the integrated and dense fabric of the city (background photo: https://abanpress.ir/headlines/46069/1401/04/0).

valuable insights into the historical evolution of this urban context, including the methods of destruction, reactions, stakeholders, and the project's winners and losers. Furthermore, examining this case as an example of a destruction report will shed light on various aspects, such as the implications and outcomes of reporting, the methods and results of it, and the requirements for effective destruction reports.

Methodology

The current study employed the interpretation method (Groat and Wang 2002: 136; Quinlan 2017) and gathered data from various sources, including both official and unofficial online media such as channels, news sites, and social networks. Using Google Chrome, the term 'destruction of Shiraz's historic context' was searched from 2012 to the end of 2023, and the findings were categorised based on date, report type, title, and content. Direct interviews with knowledgeable interviewees and review of documentaries and aerial photos complemented the collected information. The research outcomes were structured to achieve two main goals: understanding the destruction process and aspects, and categorising reports based on the research objectives. Accordingly, the current chapter provides a brief background of Shiraz, discusses the process of historic context destruction and related events, and reviews the details of the reports in the results and discussion section to fulfil the research objectives.

The Background of the Historic Context of Shiraz

Although Shiraz has pre-Islamic remains in its vicinity, its founding is associated with the early Islamic period in Iran between 65 and 80 AH (684 to 699 CE) (Afsar 1974: 24; Echragh 1972: 22–23). The city reached its peak during the Zand era (1751–1794), with notable buildings and gardens from this period (Echragh 1972: 23; Emdad 1960: 102). The historic houses in Shiraz are significant as they link three consecutive periods: Zand, Qajar (1789-1925), and Pahlavi (1925-1979), a rarity in other Iranian cities (Memarian 2021: 27). Until the 14th century AHSh (*c.* 1920s), the city had a diverse range of functions, creating a dense and coherent context (Figure 1).

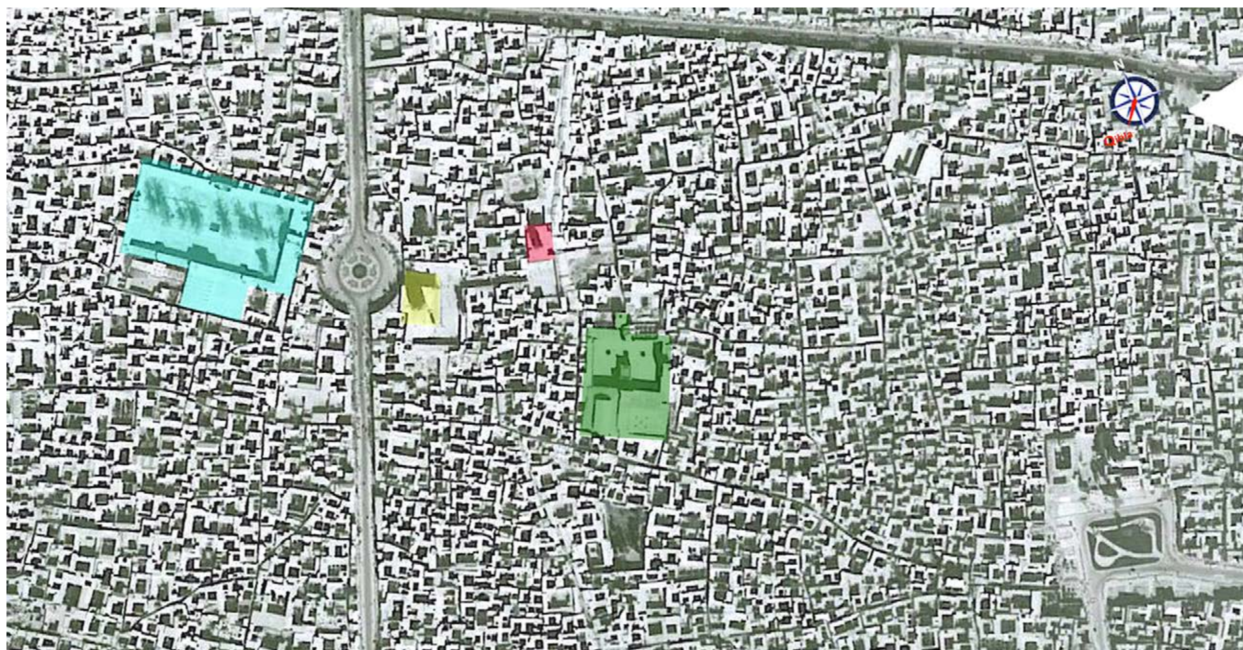

Figure 2: Aerial photo of Shiraz in 1966, after the construction of Ahmadi Street and Square between Shah-e Cheragh mausoleum (yellow) and the ‘Nuo’ Mosque (blue). The Mohammad-ibn Musa mausoleum (red) and the Jami Mosque (green) also can be seen (background photo: https://www.nasim.news/بخش-شهری-166/2376277-احیای-زندگی-تنها-راه-نجات-بافت-تاریخی-شیراز)

The Process of Historic Context Destruction Next to Shah-e Cheragh

The First Destructions: Pahlavi Era (1925-1978)

Shiraz, like other Iranian cities, changed during the first Pahlavi era under Reza Shah (reigned from 1925 to 1941), including the construction of straight streets such as Zand and Lotfali-Khan, resulting in the destruction of many historic houses (Memarian 2021: 54). The development around the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine took place during Mohammad Reza Shah’s reign from 1947 to 1953, with the creation of Ahmadi Street and Square (Saeedi 2021: 322), which removed the connection between the shrine and the *Nuo* Mosque (Figure 2). Furthermore, after Mohammad Reza Shah visited Shiraz in 1969, efforts were made to develop the shrine, leading to the demolition of nearby markets and residential houses, particularly the bazaar that linked the two shrines. Some of the destroyed structures date back to the Atabeg period of the 12th–13th centuries CE (Afsar 1974: 81). Similar actions occurred in the city of Mashhad, northeast Iran, where a street was constructed around the shrine of Imam Reza, disconnecting it from its surroundings (Azarnoush and Nagahani 2022: 211; Saeedi 2021: 322). Despite complaints from shopkeepers near the Shah-e Cheragh shrine, the authorities did not address their concerns (EsmaeilDokht 2021). Additionally, long-term planning in Shiraz also demonstrated a disregard for its historic context. For instance, the 1968 master plan described the old roads as narrow and meandering, lacking traffic engineering principles, and emphasised that ‘apart from a few historic monuments, the residential areas lacked architectural and environmental value.’ It described these neighbourhoods as places with poor appearance and constructed with low-quality materials.[7] The difficulty of providing emergency responses, such as Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and first responder access, due to the shape of the roads is another weakness of these neighbourhoods, as noted in the master plan (Echragh 1972: 55–56). The potential risk of this approach lies in the fact that past instances have demonstrated how the poor condition of buildings had been used as a reason for demolishing the historic context in other Iranian cities, like the area surrounding the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad (Saeedi 2021: 321). The first official development plan for Shah-e Cheragh, called the Religious Tourism Plan, was established in 1976 by the Shrine’s Board of Trustees and EMCO consulting engineers. This plan aimed to create a vast open space capable of accommodating 30,000 people simultaneously. However, if implemented, a significant portion of the context surrounding the shrine would have been demolished (EMCO-IRAN 1976) (Figure 3). The plan’s execution was likely halted due to the revolution in Iran.

[7] Most of the materials used in constructing the buildings were soil-based materials such as clay, brick, and straw clay.

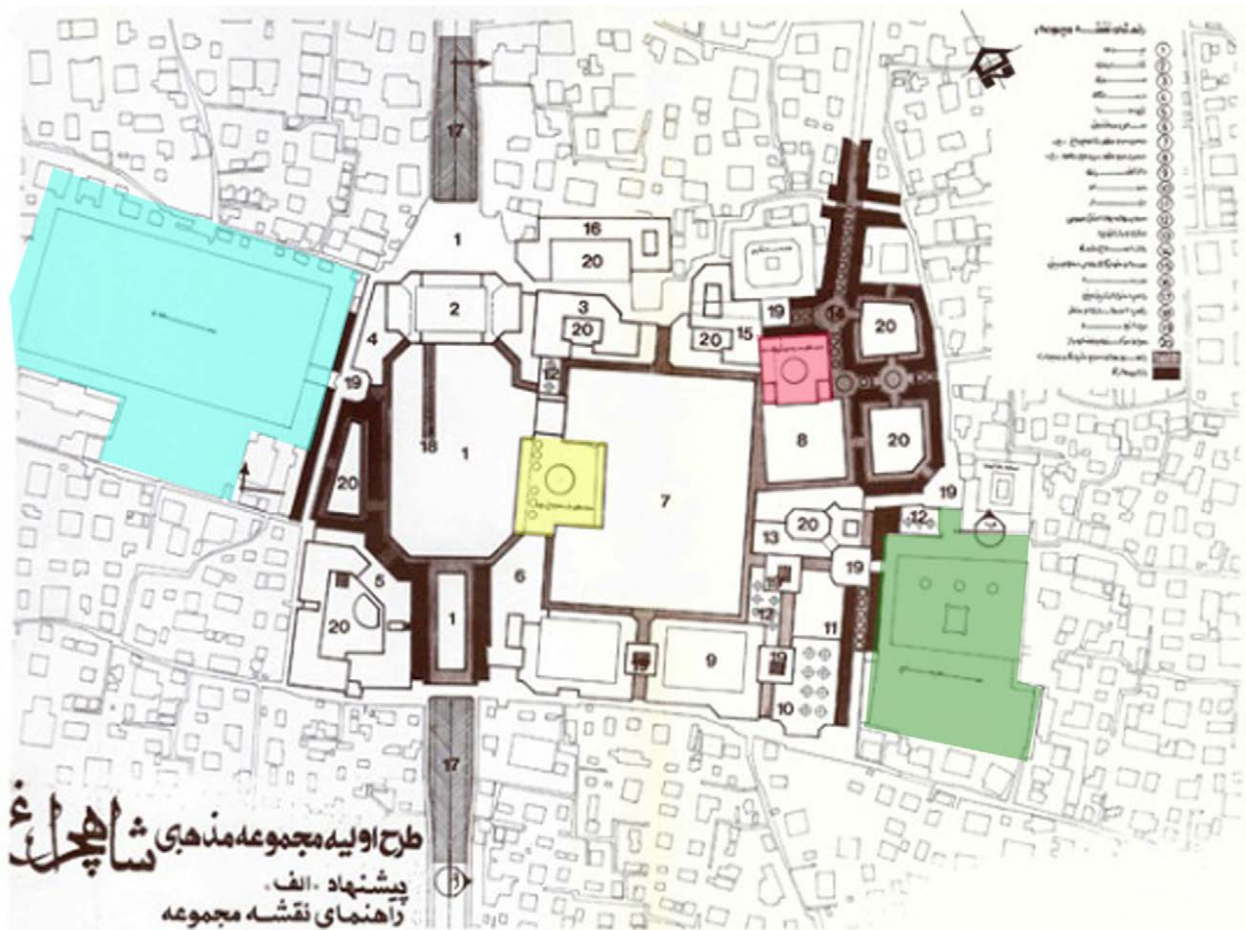

Figure 3: The EMCO's Religious Tourism Plan for Shah-e Cheragh shrine's development. This map shows the amount of urban fabric destruction surrounding the Shah-e Cheragh mausoleum in the proposed plan. (Shah-e Cheragh mausoleum (yellow), the 'Nuo' Mosque (blue), the Mohammad-ibn Musa mausoleum (red), the Jami Mosque (green)) (http://www.emcoiran.org/ShowProjectsDetail/83/).

Post-Revolution Developments: The Beginning of the Bein-al-Haramain Project (1980-2006)

Following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the destruction of the street and historic buildings adjacent to the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine continued. In the 1960s, a street was constructed to the west of the shrine, destroying part of the historic context (SHARGH 2022b). The plan for connecting the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine and the Seyed Alaeddin Husayn mausoleum,[8] the *Bein-al-Haramain*[9] plan, in 1994 led to the renewed demolition of historic houses in Shiraz (ISNA 2015b). It took three years to acquire and demolish houses which led to the destruction of approximately eight hectares of historic context, with the creation of a new street (MEHR 2022; AFTABNEWS 2023). These demolitions occurred without formal approval (Kalantari 2023), leaving the area unconstructed for around nine years (Figure 4). This plan served as a pattern for a similar one in Qom, named the Haram-to-Haram plan (ISNA 2015a).

[8] Also known as Astana.

[9] Means between two shrines.

The Escalation of Destruction, Loss of Over One Hundred Historic Houses and Cancellation of the Development Plan (2007-2021)

Analysis of aerial photographs suggests that the *Bein-al-Haramain* complex project resumed in 2007 during the Ahmadinejad administration (Figure 5). Despite its name, this project included the construction of structures such as a hotel, city council, and commercial complex, which were unrelated to the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine according to shrine officials' statements (Sahraeiyan 2023). The implementation of this project led to the loss of continuity among historic neighbourhoods in the area. Despite an order to halt the development plan in 2008 during the visit of Iran's supreme leader to Shiraz (Soleyman Noori 2021), the project was revived in 2009, encompassing a 40-hectare area (FarsMRUD, no date). Subsequently, the plan was

Figure 4: Aerial photo of Shiraz in October 2003. The destruction of the historic fabric between the Shah-e Cheragh complex (red dotted line) and the Seyed Alaeddin Husayn mausoleum (brown) is obvious (background photo: Google Earth 2003).

Figure 5: Aerial photo of Shiraz in June 2007. The beginning of the constructions can be seen between the Shah-e Cheragh complex (red dotted line) and the Seyed Alaeddin Husayn mausoleum (brown) (background photo: Google Earth 2007).

approved and executed in 2010, resulting in various measures such as the blockage of Ahmadi Square and the demolition of previous access points (AFTABNEWS 2023; Jamshidi 2023; Kalantari 2023). The construction of 9-Dey Street around 2012 led to the demolition of 130 historic houses in Shiraz's valuable context, resulting in the construction of a multi-storey car park and a street instead (ILNA 2021c) (Figure 6). After the establishment of the Rouhani government in 2013, demolitions persisted, with additional historic houses being demolished in September and October 2014 (ISNA 2014a; MEHR 2014; SERAT 2014). The demolitions of this phase were with force and violence, occasionally encountering resistance from the local populace (see

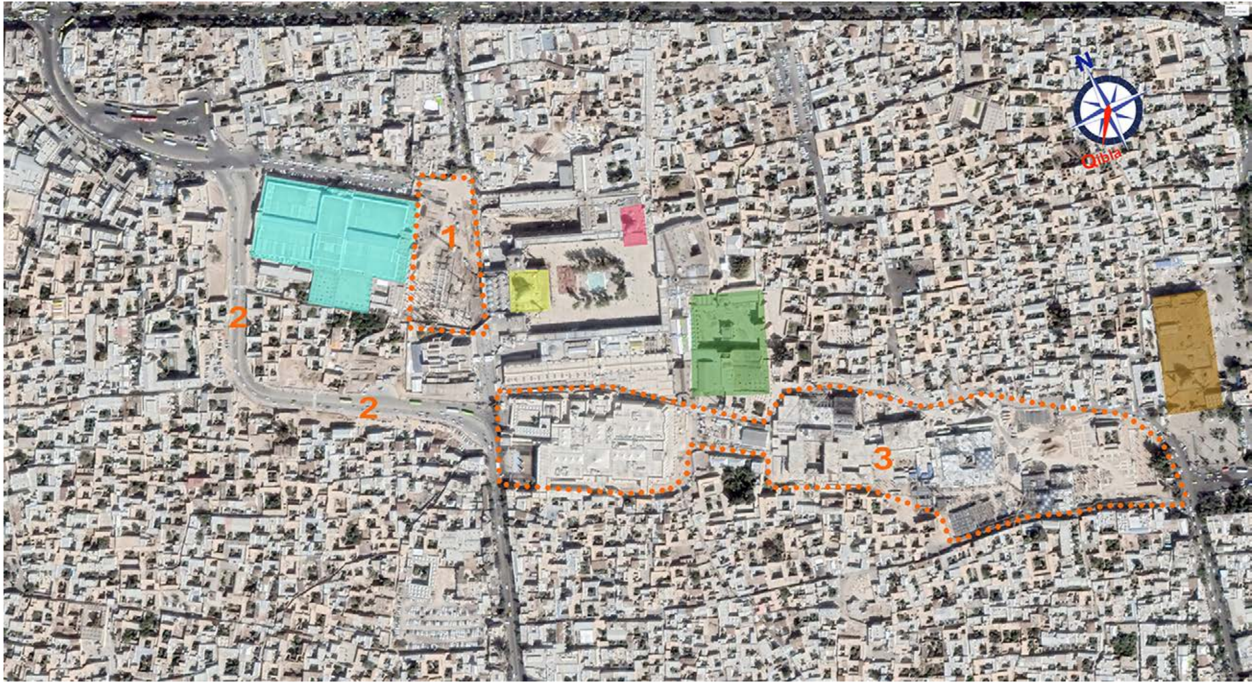

Figure 6: Aerial photo of Shiraz in February 2012. In this photo, you can see the blockage of Ahmadi Square (1), the construction of 9-Dey Street (2), and the continuation of the constructions between the Shah-e Cheragh complex and the Seyed Alaeddin Husayn mausoleum (3) (background photo: Google Earth 2012).

HAMSHAHRI 2014b).[10] Following media coverage, a parliament member from Shiraz, also a member of the Shrine's trusteeship, denied the destruction of any National Heritage registered houses. Threatening the reporters,[11] he stated that the situation had been exaggerated, leading to political controversy, and called for accountability for those who spread the news (ISNA 2014b).

On October 14, Pirouz Hanachi, the then Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and Secretary of the Supreme Council of Architecture and Urban Development revoked the 'Development Plan of the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine Resolution of 2010' due to non-submission of maps and supplementary documents, lack of approved action criteria maps, and contradiction with the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO) rules in the sixth paragraph of the resolution (ISNA 2015b). He also ordered a review of the detailed plan with a focus on preserving the historic context (GOVERNMENT OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN 2014). Consequently, all activities were halted within the historic context of Shiraz (ISNA 2015b), prompting protests from some individuals and officials who supported the resolution, including the Shiraz Friday Prayer Imam[12] (RAZAVI NEWS AGENCY 2017). Published news reports (see Karimi 2015), and a review of aerial photos reveal the demolition of several historic houses in 2015 (Figure 7).

In 2017, news agencies reported the restoration of several houses following a period of no updates on destruction activities.[13] In the same year, Iran's first comprehensive urban conservation plan was announced in the historic context of Shiraz. This initiative received support from the Iranian Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, Urban Regeneration Corporation of Iran, ICHHTO, and Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, with the cooperation of the Italian group led by Professor Jukka Jokilehto, Dr. Mehr Azar Soheil, and Dr. Carlo Cesari (IRIB NEWS Agency 2017; MEHR 2017). But, in February 2018, two historic Qajar houses registered on the Iran National Heritage List were demolished by bulldozers during the night. The executive power of the annihilators prevented both the ICHHTO representative and the head of the police station from entering the enclosed area (HAMSHAHRI 2018). ICHHTO issued a statement emphasising the

[10] The head of the Organization of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism sent five letters to the office of the Supreme Leader, the Minister of Interior, the Attorney General of the country, the Governor of Fars, and the guardianship of the Shrine of Ahmad-ibn Musa, demanding an immediate halt to the destruction of the historic fabric of Shiraz (ISNA 2014a).

[11] The term 'reporter' in this chapter encompasses not only official media reporters but also experts and cultural heritage enthusiasts who utilise the media to share direct information.

[12] He complained about the suspension of the access construction to the shrine (RAZAVI NEWS AGENCY 2017).

[13] However, the aerial photos review shows that the historic context's destruction continued during this time.

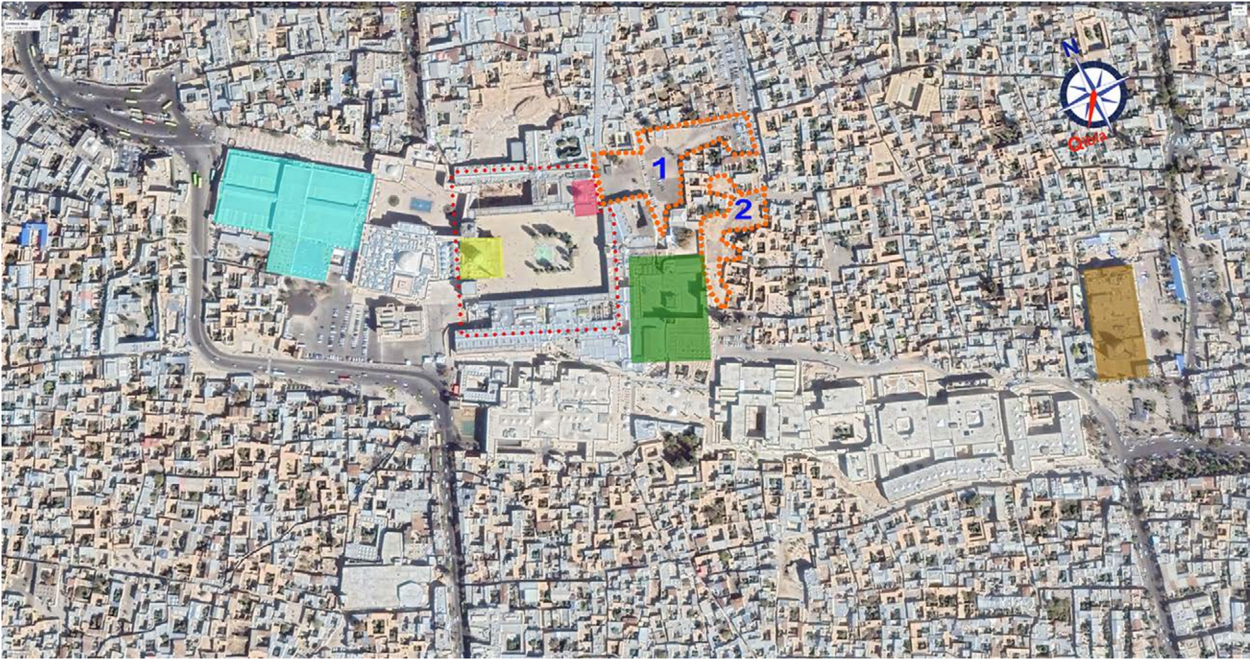

Figure 7: Aerial photo of Shiraz in December 2015. In this photo destruction of 2014 (1) and 2015 (2) are shown. Also, the constructions between the Shah-e Cheragh complex (red dotted line) and the Seyed Alaeddin Husayn mausoleum (brown) seem to be completed (background photo: Google Earth 2015).

intention to pursue legal action. In this statement, the director of the development plan was introduced as a destroyer (HAMSHAHRI 2018). In April 2018, a working group led by the head of ICHHTO was formed to investigate the destruction of Shiraz's historic context. This group included representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Information, the Judicial System, Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, and the ICHHTO (MEHR 2018). As a result, the destruction was halted again. Subsequently, in 2019, media reports about the repair, restoration and transfer of historic houses to the private sector were published (IRNA 2020).

The 57-Hectare Project: Undermining the Historic Context or Promoting Unity in Conservation Efforts (2021-2024)?

In October 2021, with the new government assuming office, reports on the destruction of Shiraz's historic context resurfaced with greater intensity. During President Ebrahim Raisi's visit, a plan was approved for Shiraz, which involved the formation of a three-person committee to re-evaluate the heritage status of 200 historic houses. Thus, approximately 57 hectares of Shiraz's historic context faced the risk of destruction (Figure 8). While visiting, Raisi expressed confidence in resolving the subjects that had previously halted the development plan for the Shah-e Cheragh shrine (ETEMAD 2021a). Before his visit, both the Shiraz Friday Prayer Imam and the city's mayor emphasised the need to resume the development project for the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine (SHARGH 2022b). These developments sparked concern among cultural heritage enthusiasts, leading to warnings being issued (ETEMAD 2021a; ILNA 2021c; MEIDAAN 2021; SNN 2021). Subsequently, following media coverage, the deputy heritage director of Fars province stated that no definitive decisions had been made yet (ILNA 2021a).

As a result, the activism of cultural heritage enthusiasts and the opponents of the proposed development plan intensified. Initially, a letter signed by 50 university professors was dispatched to Ezzatollah Zarghami, the then-minister of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts (MCTH),[14] requesting a halt to the project. The letter was not published in the media and received no response from the Ministry (ILNA 2021c). Subsequently, 180 university professors penned a letter to the President, cautioning against a reoccurrence of the detrimental outcomes of previous experiences like the Mashhad development project and constructing commercial complexes in the historic context of Shiraz (ILNA, 2021b). This letter was also forwarded to the Supreme Leader's office and received media coverage, featuring the names of university professors, scientific

[14] In 2019 the ICHHTO was converted into the Ministry and changed its name to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts (MCTH).

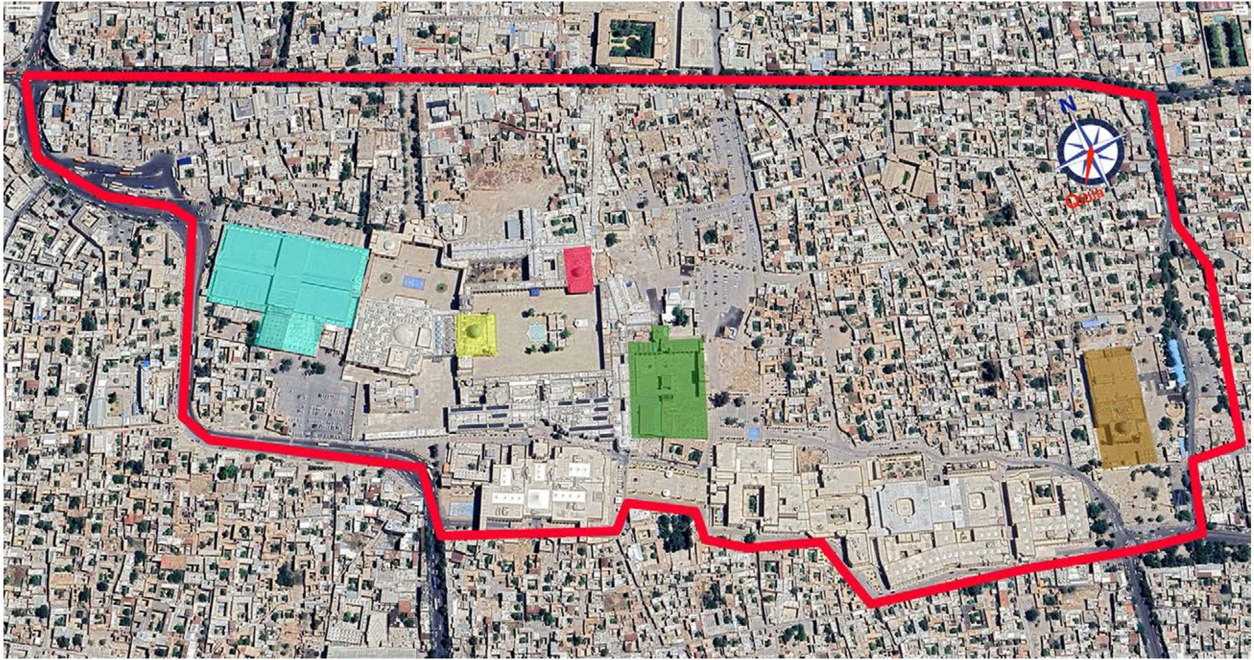

Figure 8: Aerial photo of Shiraz in March 2023. The approximate boundary of the 57-hectare project is delineated by a red line (background photo: Google Earth 2023).

experts, members of parliament, and religious scholars (ILNA 2021b; Soleyman Noori 2021). Simultaneously, the Iranian Architecture, Restoration, and Urban Planning Student Union requested Zarghami for a meeting involving the union's representatives, university professors, and cultural heritage activists to discuss the development plan and to seek a resolution. The union asserted the indispensable role of the MCTH in safeguarding Shiraz's historic context (Barikani 2022). At this stage, opponents of the development plan voiced their concerns directly through interviews and participation in various meetings.

In response to these reactions, supporters of the development plan persisted. City and provincial officials addressed a letter to the President highlighting the disorder surrounding the shrine and its associated social issues, expressing gratitude for the project's resumption. Denying the opponents' claims, they underscored the distinction between the development plan of the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine in Shiraz and the one in Mashhad (SHARGH 2022b). Similarly, Mossayeb Amiri, the then director of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, denied allegations made by opponents regarding the demolition of 200 historic houses and the construction of a commercial complex instead (ISNA 2022).[15] Subsequently, during a government board meeting, a Shargh newspaper reporter brought these contradictions to the attention. In response, the government spokesperson, categorising existing buildings in historic neighbourhoods into three groups, assured that no historic or registered buildings would be destroyed under the plan. This assertion prompted Gholamhossein Memarian, a university professor, to criticise the government's approach in an interview with Shargh newspaper, emphasising the need for comprehensive preservation efforts. He expressed concern over the absence of thorough expert assessment and warned that the failure to list all valuable buildings as national heritage could allow for misuse of this classification. He also highlighted the 'premature' nature of the plan (Hemmati 2022). In addition, on 19 February 2022, cultural heritage enthusiasts initiated a petition to register significant heritages within the historic context of Shiraz, collecting over 48,000 signatures by February 2024 (KARZAR 2022).

Amid mounting opposition, the plan appeared to have been halted. Nonetheless, in May 2022, the detailed plan for the shrine's surrounding area received approval, jeopardising a significant section of the historic context (AFTABNEWS 2023). Subsequently, in June 2022, the governor of Fars province issued an order expanding the territory of the Shah-e Cheragh shrine to 360 hectares, encompassing the entire historic context of Shiraz (TASNIM 2022). Decisions made during this meeting included the establishment of a fund for sanctuary development, the provision of low-interest

[15] During Amiri's tenure as the director of cultural heritage and tourism in Fars province, a part of the historic fabric of Shiraz had been destroyed (ISNA 2022).

housing construction facilities within the 360-hectare area, the classification of the expansive courtyard project as a national initiative, and the allocation of ten percent of proceeds from the sale of Road and Urbanity Department lands since 2008, for the acquisition of the area surrounding the shrine (IRNA 2022a; TASNIM 2022; YJC 2022). Consequently, starting in June 2022, owners of certain historic houses were notified of their properties' inclusion in the development plan and were warned that refusal to comply with the sale notice would result in the transfer of the property's assessed value to the government's account (Fekri 2022; ShabanSarvestani 2022). Accordingly, concerns about a potentially "covert approved plan" for development were raised by experts. In a letter to the governor of Fars, Gholamhossein Memarian articulated the ramifications of such actions and urged prevention (Fekri 2022).

In the winter of the same year, university students observed ongoing forced acquisition and destruction of the historic context. Within a week, over 60 houses received evacuation notices from the Road and Urbanity Department representatives of the province. Residents were threatened with water, electricity, and gas cuts if they resisted (Ghobadi 2023; Memarian 2023). Following this, the governor of Fars and the head of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism organized a visit, inviting journalists. During this meeting, the executive and construction vice president of Shah-e Cheragh Shrine emphasized the need to create proper access for pilgrims, attributing the delay in the project to the insecurity of the historical context caused by the presence of drug addicts. He also denied claims of property acquisitions and the demolition of the historic fabric, asserting that they, too, seek to preserve it (IKNA 2023).[16] In response to Memarian's letter and request to halt the project (ISNA 2023b), the governor of Fars dismissed it as a rumor and a personal opinion (Ghobadi 2023). Subsequently, Memarian addressed a letter to the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, asking to stop the project and critiquing the performance of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts in the same request (Ghobadi 2023). On February 8, 2023, a petition was initiated advocating for the registration of Shiraz's historic context in the Iran National Heritage list (KARZAR 2023). This media coverage and escalating protests led to a temporary halt of the demolition operation. However, the development plan resumed in May 2023, involving the acquisition of 30 houses by the Road and Urbanity Department, forced evacuation of residents from around ten buildings, and actions such as blocking entrances, removing windows, and discreetly destroying properties from within. Despite these events, relevant officials denied any destruction (Abbasi 2023; Mahmoudi 2023).

On 24 July 2023, Shiraz's 360-hectare historic fabric was officially registered on the Iran National Heritage List. Media reports characterised this registration as a national demand supported by the public and relevant institutions, including the MCTH (e.g. IRNA 2023). However, following the national registration, concerns emerged regarding the potential construction of a subway within the historic context of Shiraz, the lack of clarity regarding its routes, the absence of specific criteria for the historic context, and instances of theft within the historical area, including doors, windows, and valuable decorations from acquired historic houses (Hasanlou 2023; Rezaei 2024).

Results and Discussion

The previous section provided an overview of the destruction of Shiraz's historic context. This section aims to provide detailed information from reports to address specific questions and achieve the research objectives. Through this analysis, the section underscores the significance and essential elements of heritage destruction reports.

Identification of the Various Aspects of Destruction in the Reports

The Agencies Involved in the Destruction of the Historic Context of Shiraz

The continual destruction of Shiraz's historic context has persisted despite changes in the Iranian government over the past eighty years. Various reports have identified organisations such as the administrative organisation of the Shah-e Cheragh complex[17] and the Road and Urbanity Department of Fars as responsible for projects linked to this destruction (HAMSHAHRI 2014b, 2018; MEHR 2015). However, the culprits behind these actions have not been directly disclosed due to a lack of clarity, continuous denial, and officials' conflicting statements. One media outlet described the situation: 'Provincial officials claim that they do not have much information about the cause of destruction and they object to it without taking names from anyone' (TABNAK 2018). Despite the efforts of the cultural heritage organisation (ICHHTO) to hold involved parties accountable, no official responsibility was attributed for the vandalism (HAMSHAHRI 2014a; ISNA 2014a). Additionally, the flow of secret destruction persisted, its way facilitated by influencing the approval process for urban plans and developments.[18] This is evidenced

[16] Meanwhile, in September 2022, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development website mentioned the progress of land acquisition around Shah-e Cheragh with the collaboration of the Road and Urbanity Department of Fars Province and the project executor (MRUD 2022).

[17] In Farsi, this organization is called Astan.

[18] The authorities related to the implementation of the development plan of the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine, which was previously in the

by the unapproved development of the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine in contrast to Mashhad (HAMSHAHRI 2014a; ISNA 2014a). This ongoing pattern suggests the involvement of non/beyond-governmental forces driven by motives above financial gain, as witnessed by the continuation of destruction despite failed commercialisation efforts in the past twenty years in Shiraz.

Methods Employed in the Destruction of the Historic Context of Shiraz

Despite varying paces of destruction across different periods, the entities responsible for urban development in Shiraz have often employed coercive methods to acquire or demolish its historic structures. These actions have aimed to diminish the viability of living within the historic context and have directly impacted its residents. Coercive measures have included renting seized houses to addicts or people involved in criminal activities (IRNA 2018), cutting off utilities such as gas, electricity, and water (SHIRAZ1400 2018), prohibiting property repairs (SHIRAZ1400 2018), making houses unsafe (SHIRAZ1400 2018), announcement of property acquisition (TABNAK 2018), and compulsory purchase (IRNA 2018). Additionally, deliberate neglect and abandonment of properties (ILNA 2021c), clandestine night-time demolitions with power outages (HAMSHAHRI 2014a; HAMSHAHRI 2018), and rapid debris removal have directly targeted the historic context (HAMSHAHRI 2014b). These actions have resulted in the forced displacement of historic context residents, severing their ties to their homes, decimating neighbourhoods, and undermining living conditions, resulting in the original residents leaving the area.

Examining the Impacts of the Development Plan: Identifying the Victims

In addition to halting the 57-hectare project, the designation of Shiraz's historic context on Iran's National Heritage List could potentially mitigate conflicts and discrepancies, serving as an initial step in safeguarding cultural heritage.[19] However, past experiences indicate that national heritage registration in Iran does not completely prevent vandalism (e.g. Eligasht 2022; IRNA 2019; MEHR 2019). The development plan for the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine and the *Bein-al-Haramain* complex has elicited varied impacts within the community. While some have reaped benefits, others have suffered adverse consequences. The physical landscape has transitioned from a cohesive, fine-grained collection to a coarse-grained plan, resulting in the loss of historical continuity and accessibility to the shrine. Furthermore, despite commercial aspirations, critics argue that the Bein-al-Haramain project has not met its objectives (IRNA 2022b; ShabanSarvestani 2022).

Even though the development plan for the historic context of Shiraz was presented as the expansion of the pilgrimage complex, the implementation process has resulted in the marginalisation of several religious monuments, disrupting the integration of the context. For example, the Jami Mosque and the *Nuo* Mosque have become desolate monuments, while before the destruction, the life of these mosques was intertwined with the lives of the community. Some experts believe that the detachment of the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine from the community and its subsequent isolation is not inconceivable either (ILNA 2021c). The purported linkage between religious practices, pilgrimage traditions, and the demolition of historic sites has raised concerns among religious scholars, with some deeming it contrary to Islamic principles (Akbarzadeh 2023; Nili 2022; Rezaei 2022; SHARGH 2022b). Using religious justifications for development amplifies the influence of destroyers while decreasing the possibility of resistance to the demolition, as it positions opponents against religion. The development plan's agents and developers tactically exploited the community's religious sentiments, leading to the voluntary relinquishment of properties for the Bein-al-Haramain project under the guise of religious devotion to Ahmad-ibn Musa Shah-e Cheragh. Subsequently, upon realising the commercial nature of the project, the property owners felt deceived and betrayed (Maghsoudi 2023). The dichotomy between the religious complex and popular cultural heritage in people's perceptions will lead to social consequences, unlike in the past when they were seamlessly intertwined. The actions of the authorities, as discussed in the following section, exacerbate this division. Furthermore, numerous inhabitants of the historic context were compelled to vacate their homes, resulting in not only the loss of physical dwellings but also a segment of their memories and social identity. These circumstances confirm the concept that some experts refer to as "domicide" (see Zhang 2018). Therefore, the victims of the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine development plan are the historic context, its connected community, the shrine itself, and the institution of religion.

hands of the Supreme Council of Architecture and Urban Planning, were delegated to the Vice-deputy of Development in Fars Provincial Government (FARARU 2023).

[19] According to certain laws in Iran, such as the Islamic Penal Code of Iran and the law of the Preservation of National Heritage, the destruction or alteration of any national cultural heritage is prohibited and subject to prosecution, with the MCTH being the primary guardian of such heritage.

Identification of the Various Aspects of Destruction Reports

Implications and Consequences of Reporting: Reactions to the News of Destruction

The reactions to the destruction of Shiraz's historic context come from three groups: supporters, opponents, and those who are indifferent to the matter. Supporters are those who endorsed or participated in the progress of the plan, sometimes including governmental officials. Opponents are those who have actively resisted the plan's implementation, including experts, university professors, and cultural heritage enthusiasts. While opposition actions sometimes went unanswered, there was a dynamic interaction between these two groups during the demolition process. As the opposition's protests intensified and gained media attention, the supporters of the development plan also responded through media platforms, refuting the accusations. Consequently, the media facilitated a direct and indirect confrontation between the two groups and sometimes became its platform.

The increase in media responses compelled the plan's supporters to justify their stance sometimes in antithetical ways. Some cited the current situation of the historic context as a justification for its demolition and redevelopment. For instance, the Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Shrine and a parliament member,[20] characterised the historic context as deteriorated and unsafe. He regarded dilapidated or ruined historic houses as worthless and believed that the fear tourists experienced when passing through the historic context necessitated its development. He asserted that the destruction of the historic context and the enhancement of the shrine would bolster religious tourism, and foster a perception of 'pilgrimage culture', and besides, the widening of streets and alleys would encourage residents to return (ILNA 2014). Another parliament member from Shiraz, a former mayor, advocated for the preservation of valuable buildings while proposing the demolition of dilapidated historic houses (SNN 2021). Furthermore, justifying the destruction of valuable houses to improve the overall health of the context was also put forth (see FARS 2023). Some supporters exploited the attention garnered by the shrine as a pretext for its destruction, inciting religious sentiment. Naming a project unrelated to the Shah-e Cheragh Shrine '*Bein-al-Haramain*' exemplifies this approach. The head of the Shiraz city council rationalised the construction of numerous streets and even subway lines around the shrine under the guise of 'breaking the shrine's isolation' and 'enhancing shrine access'. Additionally, the necessity of widening the street and constructing a multi-story car park was emphasised (Shorashiraz 2016).

In addition to justifying the demolitions, some supporters sought to discredit opponents of the plan. Ahmadreza Dastgheib dismissed reports of the destruction, alleging that 'individuals in the capital were pursuing their agendas at the expense of Shiraz's regression, characterising it as a political manoeuvre' (ILNA 2014). Critiquing media coverage and the rapid dissemination of the destruction news, he accused plan opponents of engaging in blackmail, propagandistic tactics, fuelling political controversy, and providing fodder for Western media exploitation. Dastgheib even issued a warning to relevant ministers, indicating potential parliamentary prosecution for failure to quell the spread of news that he called falsehoods (ISNA 2014b).

The opposition to the development plan and the destruction of the historic context has encompassed a variety of motives. These include concerns over the loss of coherence and continuity within the urban context, the loss of houses as the best manifestation of Shiraz traditional arts, the jeopardising of cultural heritage, the replacement of historic context with a parking facility, the adverse impact on historical tourism, the disruption of social and religious rituals in Shiraz, the transformation of living spaces into commercial zones, the concern of replicating unsuccessful commercial complexes of Mashhad and Shiraz, the incongruity of hotels and commercial establishments with the ethos of pilgrimage, the distortion of historic context through passage expansion and construction, uncontrolled real estate speculation, unjust property acquisition and resale, denial of residents' rights, obliteration of valuable heritage, and the erosion of ritual-religious symbolism linked to the historic context (ETEMAD 2021a; Hemmati 2022; ILNA 2021b; IRNA 2022b; Nili 2022).

The reaction to the widespread news of destruction has been met with silence from certain professional groups and individuals, including the National Committee of ICOMOS Iran. University professor Kambiz Mushtaq Gohari has criticised the silence of ICOMOS Iran and some influential figures. He attributes this lack of response to a preference for private negotiations, suggesting that the public, as the primary stakeholder of heritage, should be kept informed (Nili 2022). Surprisingly, official protection institutions such as the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and the head of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism have sometimes defended rather than opposed the destruction of historic sites (see Asadian 2022; Nili 2022). The Zarghami's statement labelling the context around two shrines in Shiraz as deteriorated sparked protests

[20] Ahmadreza Dastgheib

from the public and the media (ETEMAD 2021b, 2021a; Nili 2022). In contrast, the presence of experts within the ministries and governmental organisations led to a decrease in the destruction of the historic context of Shiraz (ILNA 2021c). Hence, appointing officials who value cultural heritage and are committed to its preservation is crucial in mitigating its destruction.[21]

Reporting Methods: The Ways of Representation in the Media

Various groups, including journalists, researchers, and academics, as well as official and unofficial websites, have reported on the destruction of the historic context of Shiraz. The investigation conducted for this study revealed limited coverage of related news in 2012 and 2013, while in some reports, the historic context has been called 'obsolete' (e.g. Fathi 2012; ISNA 2013). However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in both the volume and accuracy of these reports. They take various forms, such as field reports, meeting and enactment reports, narrative and precise reports, and analytical reports. The thoroughness and accuracy of the reports significantly impact their citation and interpretation.[22] Additionally, the choice of report titles plays a crucial role in attracting attention and raising awareness. For instance, titles such as 'Nightly Destruction of the Historic Fabric of Shiraz by Beating' (HAMSHAHRI 2014b), 'Historical Disaster' (ISNA 2014a), and 'Night Attack' (IRNA 2018) effectively capture the audience's attention.

The role of journalists has significantly contributed to the understanding of the issue. One documentary filmmaker highlighted the disparity between reality and official responses by hosting a live programme featuring both perspectives.[23] The demand for registration of the historic context of Shiraz on the national heritage list was raised again during this programme. However, some media faced challenges in their follow-up efforts. For example, ISNA's attempts to inquire about a comprehensive plan for conserving Shiraz's historic context, led by Jukka Jokilehto, went unanswered by officials (ISNA 2023a). Or a reporter couldn't interview the shrine officials regarding the destruction (IRNA 2018). Furthermore, the type and quality of reports were influenced by the media's independence or dependence. Official media occasionally endorsed the officials' claims, while independent media and heritage activists substantiated their assertions through the release of documents, such as the destruction film.

Recognising the influential role of the media, experts assumed a key role in reporting. Dr Memarian, for instance, emphasised a shift in expressing opposition since 2021, noting increased public awareness efforts, including interviews with news agencies, extensive meetings, and scientific gatherings to investigate the dimensions and impact of the destruction (PAYAMEMA 2022). These efforts involved in-person meetings and virtual discussions. Letters to authorities with titles such as 'Stop the Development in the Saudi Way in Shiraz,' 'Don't Destroy the History and Identity of Shiraz,' and 'Decision of a Few Officials for the History of Shiraz, Which Belongs to All People', were also published in the media.[24] Such letters aimed to prompt officials to respond, raise societal awareness, and halt the destruction (SHARGH 2022a). This concurrent pursuit of media reports and administrative actions underscores the evolving outlook of engaging on the matter.

Another form of reporting involved media coverage outside of Iran. While some of these reports or commentaries have echoed narratives from Iranian media precisely (e.g. FINANCIALTRIBUNE 2018; Kayhan_Life_Staff 2021) or attempted unbiased interpretations (see Kiafar no date), some have exploited the situation of destruction for a religious or political vendetta, as seen in cases such as Radio Zamaneh (no date) and Safa (2023).[25] Such reports not only enable the authorities to distort reality but also pose risks to the local community and reporters. Consequently, they severely erode trust in foreign media, making their representation of truth untenable. When asked about his decision not to engage with foreign media, Memarian explained: 'We aimed to prevent the narrative of destruction from becoming politicized. Foreign media lack empathy and, due to their adversarial stance towards the current regime, resort to any means necessary to incriminate it. Following the events in Gaza and its media coverage, this conviction has strengthened for me' (Memarian 2023).

Results of the Reporting

The escalation in reporting methods and volume has led to engagement from diverse groups and increased

[21] During certain periods, city council members supported the historic context protection and opposed its destruction (MEHR 2018b; TASNIM 2018). For instance, the then-head of the city council declared that he would even sleep in front of bulldozers, if required, to prevent the historic structures' destruction (SHIRAZ1400 2018).

[22] For instance, the Shiraz City Council's media has released a report on the meeting about granting access to the Shah-e Cheragh shrine. The report includes the attendance numbers and opinions of the participants on the matter.

[23] The Soraya programme reviewed the development plan of the shrine by inviting representatives of supporters and opponents for about two hours (see Maghsoudi 2023).

[24] Like reflecting the letters of experts and academics to officials such as the president (IMNA 2018).

[25] These reports attempt to assign the destruction to a particular period and associate it with religious motives, specifically Shiism. Radio Zamaneh's report, in particular, aims to settle political scores, resulting in the neglect of the preservation of this historical monument and its significance. Furthermore, these statements have put reporters, in Iran, at risk by citing their words and drawing unfounded conclusions.

monitoring of reports. Notably, a campaign urging the Minister of MCTH to halt the demolition of historic houses in the shrine development plan garnered over 28,000 signatures, reflecting widespread concern (Jamali 2021). Various media with distinct political inclinations also covered this issue, exemplified by the Ofogh channel inviting critics of the development plan to share their perspectives (AYAR 2021). So, the extensive reporting on the destruction primarily fostered unity among disparate groups in their effort to preserve the historic context. This coalition ultimately led to the registration of Shiraz's historic context on the Iran National Heritage List.

Conversely, the reporting had adverse effects on opponents of the development plan. They faced various forms of harassment, including being labelled as liars (TASNIM 2023), accused of being brokers and profiteers (MRUD 2023), and subjected to media restrictions, with outlets pressured not to interview them (Memarian 2023). Additionally, derogatory labels such as 'inconsiderate' and 'dependent on enemy networks' were attributed to them (PAYAMEMA 2022). Beyond verbal attacks, opponents were prohibited from entering the historic context (Maghsoudi 2023), faced criminal complaints, and endured professional boycotts (Memarian 2023). In one case, an opponent developed eye problems due to the severe stress caused by the demolition (Memarian 2023).

Conclusion

Numerous cities worldwide have lost their historical significance due to urban development and the expansion of tourism. Likewise, Iranian cities like Mashhad and Qom have suffered a similar fate due to religious tourism development. These experiences motivated opposition to prevent the recurrence of such events in Shiraz by a news dissemination campaign. The unified and coherent reporting process heightened public awareness, elicited responses from supporters of the development plan, and garnered attention. The active involvement of experts and the academic community in the reporting stages enhanced the news' credibility, making it difficult for authorities to refute and thus drawing public interest. Leveraging the media facilitated open and direct activism, temporarily slowing the pace of destruction and causing disruptions. Consequently, the historic context of Shiraz emerged as a collective asset, prompting diverse groups to unite for its preservation. This unified effort created a formidable flow against the clandestine forces that had been eradicating the city's context for years. Despite the destruction witnessed over the past eighty years, the most significant outcome of the intensified and continuous reporting over the last three years is the registration of Shiraz's historic context on Iran's National Heritage List. According to the law, the destruction of this national cultural heritage is now a criminal act.

By analysing this case study, I have not only elucidated various aspects of the process of Shiraz's historic context destruction but also examined the media's capacities and requirements to support cultural heritage preservation. These capacities include informing the public as the principal guardians of cultural heritage, holding officials accountable, identifying the key factors driving destruction, clarifying its trajectory and pace, minimising its extent and pace, enabling continuous monitoring of cultural heritage, and providing a scientific basis for reports.

Furthermore, I have concluded that optimising these capacities and streamlining the path of cultural heritage preservation requires compliance with reporting requirements. Additionally, the destruction report can act as a scholarly document that makes it citable, affirming the importance of training reporters on heritage destruction and engaging with the scientific community. As these reports expand in critical, interpretive, and scientific dimensions and forms, they become more valuable across various sectors and enhance the chances of success.

While independent media enjoys greater freedom and integrity in exposing the truth about the destruction, governments must agree to separate heritage reporting from political controversies. The media must establish the framework and requirements for this agreement. Other necessary measures include providing comprehensive legal support for journalists and reporters; ensuring accurate citation, loyalty, and detailed storytelling; avoiding biases; maintaining a structured and continuous reporting approach; aligning reporting with administrative and legal actions; establishing direct communication between reporters and the context; fostering an honest and trustworthy relationship between the media or reporters and local communities; and refraining from using destruction reports for retaliation or political revenge. Reporters should also avoid negative language when describing cultural heritage and recognise the significant role of news headlines in shaping responses in public and institutional responses.

The present research challenges the dominant assumption that commercial or religious factors are the sole drivers of historical context destruction in cities with religious complexes. In Shiraz, a clandestine and influential force has emerged, seeking destruction for motives beyond financial gain. This force has victimised not only the institution of religion, but also the historic context and its connected community. Consequently,

future research should aim to identify this force and its motivations by analysing similar trends in other religious cities and addressing these uncertainties.

This study specifically focuses on the partially successful experience of *Shiraz*. Subsequent researchers could explore media involvement in unsuccessful cases, investigating how media coverage may contribute to failure or exacerbate cultural heritage destruction. It is also vital to examine reporting on heritage destruction in countries entangled in political conflicts with foreign nations or experiencing domestic political opposition.

The registration of the historic context of Shiraz on Iran's National Heritage List marks only the first step toward its preservation. This raises a critical question: What role will the media play in subsequent stages of cultural heritage protection, particularly after conflicts have been resolved?

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Chapter 12.

From the Frontlines to the Headlines or Headlines to the Frontlines? Some Observations on the Implications of Media Reporting of the Destruction of Cultural Heritage in War

Timothy Clack

Introduction

The 2022 brutal invasion of Ukraine by Russia provoked international condemnation and media attention. As the war slashed its frontline across ideals and identity, cultural heritage became the target of attacks and was mobilised as a weapon. The Russian invasion has precipitated humanitarian challenges not seen in Europe since the Second World War. It has also seen the deliberate damage of many hundreds of places of worship, museums, historic buildings, and memorials (UNESCO 2025). This targeting trend has persisted throughout the conflict and has been reported in the media (e.g. Shevchenko 2024) and via academic and other platforms (e.g. Shydlovskyi *et al.* 2023). That noted, as the war has gone on, global media coverage of it has reduced and become more episodic and reporting on attacks against cultural heritage ever less present. Key word analysis of media reporting on the war has shown, for example, that themes such as lethal aid, sanctions, humanitarian crises and supply chain disruptions get considerably more media coverage (Statista 2025).

Cultural heritage has also been destroyed and weaponised at scale in recent conflicts in Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mali, Myanmar, Nagorno-Karabakh, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Again, media reporting has been uneven, with some conflicts receiving much more attention than others. This has led some to assert a 'double standard' or 'inherent racism' in (particularly Western) media reporting of conflicts and their impacts (Al Jazeera Staff 2022; Bachman and Ruiz 2023). Recognising the reporting imbalance, others suggest that this results from issues such as geographical proximity (an audience is more sensitive to events which are closer), complexity (an invasion is easier to make sense of than civil wars based on tribal and sectarian drivers), longevity (media interest wanes the longer a conflict goes on) and agenda setting (certain media have their own identity and editorial lines) (Sleypen *et al.* 2022). Either way, it is important to register that culture is a choreographing force in decisions around what is reported, how and when.

In recognising the shaping effects of media reporting of heritage destruction in its assorted forms, this chapter makes some observations on certain resultant implications. The chapter also outlines why heritage is targeted in warfare, some of the (history of) protections which are in place, and describes the relevance and impacts–both positive and negative–of the changing media ecosystem.

Heritage Destruction

There are many drivers which result in damage to cultural heritage. As well as armed conflict, these include agriculture, development, climate change, tourism, and looting. Given that heritage and identities are so closely entwined, we might ask justifiably why destruction from any these activities sees little by way of media reporting. The answer is that, despite being uneven, heritage destruction is most likely to be reported when it happens as part of a conflict and rarely when not associated with one. Heritage destruction resulting from any of these drivers can, of course, be a form of cultural violence. In the case of armed conflict, it certainly is and that is what concerns this contribution and the wider volume and, based on an appreciation of ethics and contexts, why the 'Oxford Recommendations' have been formulated to assist journalists and others navigating these concerns alongside their own priorities and responsibilities.

The deliberate and neglectful destruction of cultural heritage linked to forms of conflict has a long history. There are many examples that pre-date the Romans, but they, for example, engaged in the practice of *damnatio memoriae* (condemnation of memory), which involved the removal of names and defacement of representations on, for instance, coins, statues, monuments, paintings and documents, linked to dishonoured public figures,

with deposed late emperors being perhaps the most obvious examples (Clack *et al.* 2022: 152-3). The removal of 'non-people' from Stalin-era Soviet photographs is a similar and more recent example of a comparable process (Furst *et al.* 2008; Jones 2013). The motives behind doing so varied considerably in each case but often involved the demonstration of power by a new regime and the rewriting – with heritage a form of text – of history. The destruction of cultural heritage has been a form of propaganda and indoctrination for millennia.

The systematic destruction of heritage often forms part of strategic acts of 'culturecide'. The obliteration and theft of cultural heritage from Jewish and Roma peoples throughout Nazi-occupied Europe during the Second World War was such an offensive, compounding the drive to dehumanise and delegitimise entire ethnicities. More recently, a campaign of malicious cultural 'unfixing', accompanied by extreme physical and sexual violence, was prosecuted by *Daesh* (Islamic State) against the Yazidi and other communities in Iraq and Syria. Women, specifically, were brutalised and left bereft of gender-specific cultural norms.

There are many reasons why conflict actors – from the forces of large states to lone wolf terrorists – train their sights on cultural heritage. Attacks on both tangible (buildings, monuments, and artefacts) and intangible (practices, customs, and knowledges) heritage are not only forms of propaganda by deed, but serve to deny people their very identities – their sense of self. Various additional motivations, which tend to contain propagandist and identity elements – can be identified. Efforts to destroy cultural heritage are often intended to impact self-identity and denude the will to fight (for instance in 'The Blitz', 1940-1), or they can be the means to punish an adversary (for instance, the 'carpet bombing' of Hamburg, 1943). This is not to contend that the primary targets of such bombing campaigns were cultural heritage but that cultural heritage was, nonetheless, often being consciously destroyed as part of the broader targeting of urban locations and industrial and political centres. Other motivators of cultural heritage destruction include: iconoclasm, the removal of symbols of legitimacy and authority (e.g. the targeting of the Four Old Things during the Cultural Revolution in China, 1966-7); generation of publicity in order to provoke support, outrage, or other response (such as the Taliban's ruination of the Bamiyan Buddhas, 2001); wanting to gain access to spoils (e.g. sacking of the City of Benin, 1897); and opportunistic and organised looting (including thefts from the Iraq National Museum, 2003). It should also be noted that during war, there is often also considerable collateral, inadvertent, and neglectful damage caused by armed forces and other actors.

Irregular warfare actors and terrorist organisations are often equally destructive of cultural heritage. Militant Islamist terrorist attacks on the West, for example, are primarily focused on 'soft targets' that will attract considerable media attention and are deemed justifiable – if only to the perpetrators and facilitators – on the basis of being stages of decadence, degeneracy, and impurity (Raine 2023). The result is a terrorist attack profile that includes music concerts, nightclubs, sporting events, economic hubs, and magazine offices. These often go unrecognised as heritage, officially, and in popular consciousness, but they are, individually and collectively, emblematic of Western liberal democracies.

Cultural heritage is also used as a stage to amplify propaganda. During its hold on the World Heritage Site of Palmyra, for instance, *Daesh* routinely used the ancient architecture publicly to execute prisoners and otherwise terrorise locals. The site was also extensively damaged by the group to yield media coverage with little by way of strategic sophistication. Indeed, at Palmyra, the destruction has been interpreted as the projection of a highly idealised modern jihadi identity which optimised opportunities for influence and attention (Campion 2017). With time being a dimension of power, Palmyra was mobilised to intimidate and as a symbol of *Daesh*'s (self-perception of) legitimacy. Later, the prospects of facilitating strategic messaging and population engagement were also recognised by Russian forces. To enhance awareness of the fact that Palmyra had been liberated from *Daesh* by Russian forces supporting the Assad regime, in 2015, Russia's Mariinsky Theatre Symphony Orchestra gave a broadcasted performance in the Roman Theatre of Palmyra (Hardy 2019: 623–4; see also Richard, this volume).

Since the Assad regime lost Palmyra and then the country to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army in late 2024 (New Arab Staff 2024), the heritage site has been reopened to the public (AFP 2025). It would not be surprising if the new regime decided to commemorate their taking over with a mediatised political event of some kind at the site. Separately, on the conflict, heritage and public engagement relationship, it is relevant that both Russia and Iran established military bases near Palmyra which prevented public access to the heritage site during the conflict. In February 2025, it was reported that the new regime in Damascus has made a deal with Türkiye to build a base in the area (Al-Khalidi *et al.* 2025). This may also, in time, impact access to the site.

Heritage is also impacted negatively by climate change both directly (Martens 2017; Sesana *et al.* 2021) and indirectly (Marsh *et al.* 2023; von Schorlemer and Maus 2014). It is noteworthy here that military forces are

increasingly involved in the humanitarian response to climate-linked natural disasters around the world (Center for Climate and Security 2025). As climate change takes its toll – through extreme temperature, weather events, rising sea-level, flooding and wildfires, as well as in driving displacement and conflict – the need to protect heritage will escalate. Various studies have also shown that climate change shapes and amplifies episodes of conflict as well as making conflict resolution more challenging (Clack *et al.* 2023; Ko *et al.* 2024; Nordås and Gleditsch 2007; Gleick 2024; cf Jan Selby *et al.* 2017). As armed conflict often results in the targeting of cultural heritage, greater climate change will result, almost inevitably, in more cultural heritage damage. There is also the point that damage from armed conflict will make the cultural heritage more fragile and vulnerable to the effects of climate change. There are media reporting dimensions relevant here, including of the conception of risk (Painter 2013), levels of public concern (Lampard *et al.* 2024), political division (Ophir *et al.* 2024), sector response (Mahmoudian *et al.* 2025) and psychological health with links between reporting and eco-anxiety trends (Shao and Yu 2023). The fact that warfare increases greenhouse gas emissions and has other environmental impacts adds further stress and complications but often goes underreported (Bun *et al.* 2024; Depledge 2023; Vuong *et al.* 2024).

Cultural heritage is at risk from a variety of conflict agencies and factors. Some of these have a deep history while others are more recent in character. Many of these risks are compound and interplay which results in greater risk. The media's response to these and how reporting might in assorted ways configure the risk and response requires attention.

Media Ecosystem

Samuel Morse captured famously a sense of the revolution to come when, in 1844, he demonstrated the first commercial telegraph line by transmitting the words, 'what hath God wrought'. The effects on the US, and then the world, were immense. The First World War was also responsible for many technological transformations linked to media, including the shift from the static to moving image. Other technological advances have followed apace, such as post-war radio, then television, and now the digital age. With each advance, the scale and speed of information has amplified. This is why the philosopher Paul Virilio (1989; 2000) refers to the present as the 'age of the accelerator'. Media has the ability to compress time and space. The result has seen, in certain contexts at least, a pivot from geo-politics to chrono-politics where those that control the tools of information, communication and destruction are dominant (Virilio 1986).

Media realises three main communicative functions: relay, economic, and semiotic. The relay function sees the transfer of information over geographical, temporal and cultural distance. The economic function relates to scale and the production of enormous output at comparatively low unit cost (Havens and Lotz 2011). The semiotic function sees the deployment of encoding devices to shape perception and cognition. Due to technological, social, legal, economic and other factors, the media ecosystem is dynamic. Thus, it is fair to note that despite cultural heritage destruction being a problem with a deep history the ways that it is mediated are new, and this configures the form of the destruction.

The role of media coverage in shaping public sentiment is significant. The more coverage, the greater the perception of importance, emotional resonance and level of understanding. Each of these and related factors shape individual and state response. The media's effects on society, interaction and agenda-setting have been long-recognised (McLuhan 1975; Wanless 2025). More recently, the ways that social media play important roles in enabling and constraining decision-making have become increasing apparent (Gilardi *et al.* 2021; Hoewe and Peacock 2020) as has their role in political polarisation and subthreshold warfare (Clack and Selisny 2021; Kubin and von Sikorski 2021). Consequently, concepts such as 'democratization of perception' and 'attention control' (Ford and Hoskins 2022), 'information warfare' (Clack and Johnson 2021), 'warbot' (Payne 2021) and 'like war' (Singer and Brooking 2018) have become increasingly common in research and military doctrine.

Various researchers have demonstrated that digital media is particularly susceptible to weaponisation. This is because it can circulate information and images at an overwhelming speed and scale and, in doing so, undermine deliberation space (Clack and Selisny 2022: 261-2; see also Patrikarakos 2017; Pomerantsev 2019). As well as transforming scale and reach, social media has disrupted the way in which information and images are generated, circulated and interpreted. There is now ever-increasing dependency on certain technologies for information and these media have weaved themselves into the fabric of everyday life. This is important because media is not a mirror held up to society. As McLuhan (1964: 9) once noted, 'the medium is the message'. The media therefore are not simply passive repositories of information but active and constructive social participants. They can be actors in not only the reporting of events but also the legitimisation of views and values. Social media comes with its own risks, of course, including echo chambers, click bait, and algorithmic 'recommender systems' feeding consumption (Clack and Selisny 2021).

Moreover, as Heitmayer (2022) reminds us, smartphones do not distract us, we distract ourselves because we repeatedly check them. Despite most interactions with smartphones and other digital technologies being unconscious and automatic (Heitmayer 2021), the effects of the content that we are exposed to shape both explicit and implicit concern.

Veracity should characterise reporting – and, depending on context and platform, it often does – but virtuality and virality are increasingly present. Given issues of dependency, reach, and credibility, media reporting has significant perceptual and behavioural influence. If media attention is the aim of an actor in destroying heritage, for example, then it stands that with more media attention, more of such action will take place. As noted above, attacks on heritage are often forms of 'propaganda by deed'. Heritage destruction can provide the 'cut through' particularly when in the form of a so-called 'spectacular attack'. Linked to attention and engagement, it is relevant to note here that terrorist propaganda outputs have evolved in recent decades to be shorter, with focus on grievance narratives and 'emotional truths', and incorporate evermore intense violence (Clack and Selisny 2021:261; see also Almohammad and Winter 2019; Fallon and Clack 2021). Although it is important to note that the media is incredibly diverse, including everything from media conglomerates and state broadcasters to social media platforms and citizen journalists, some parallels exist whereby content is increasing online, short-form has replaced long-form reporting, and engagement levels drive coverage. It might be observed that conflict propagandists are pushing the boundaries of developments in the wider media ecosystem. It might also be pointed out that if images and information are already 'out there' via, for example, social media posts, and attracting high levels of engagement, the pressure for mainstream media to also report events can be intense if not irresistible.

Implications and Protections

Newsflash: Lessons from Counter-Terrorism

This is all relevant because the media can 'do good' by being a source of accurate information which amplifies timely awareness and galvanises mitigative action but it can also, arguably, 'do harm' by promoting and platforming negative actions. Such promotion can serve as a rallying flag around harmful ideologies or causes and can inspire others to commit similar acts. The informational and attentional economy can also see actors behave in ever more extreme ways as they look to enhance cut through and reach. This begs the question, when heritage destruction is in frame, how does the media make sense of the opportunities and risks of reporting it at the same time as assessing newsworthiness?

There are important parallels with the experience of the media's reporting of terrorism. Glazzard and Reed (2021) outline five challenges for journalists in this context. First, there is the ethical issue that media reporting usually adds to the impact of an attack by giving it more attention for longer. Second, political actors may instrumentalise an attack and the media reporting on it. Third, reporting on terrorism and responses to it can expose journalists to official pressure and possibly even criminality. Fourth, reporting on terrorism can complicate efforts to balance the public interests of the need to know and public safety. Fifth, there is the issue in lots of contexts of primacy being given to Western framings over national and local realities. Each of these journalistic challenges is frequently relevant for the media's reporting of the destruction of heritage in war by conflict actors, particularly by those looking to manifest propaganda outcomes.

There is often a regional dimension to coverage of terrorist attacks. In Kenya, for example, media reporting in Nairobi has been shown to receive almost immediate engagement across a diversity of audiences whereas local media tends to be delayed in its coverage and often reliant on official government statements (Muindi 2020). This can drive confusion in the local situations, particularly if government media accounts issue conflicting information as was seen after the Westgate (2013) and, to a lesser extent, the DusitD2 (2019) attacks by al-Shabaab, and enhance the propaganda dividends for terrorist groups. Another factor, again seen in Kenya but also in lots of other parts of the world, is that reporting on terrorism often has a prominent patriotic dimension (Al-Bayaa 2021; Fitzgerald 2020; Muindi 2020). This can resonate well with certain audiences, and, as such, is often encouraged by governments, but antagonise others and may foster negative sympathies.

There is also the risk that a considered mainstream media and government response gets overtaken by other forms of communicative campaign which build their own momentum. In 2014, for example, the '#BringBackOurGirls campaign', which responded to the abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria, not only gained traction but also changed Nigeria's media ecosystem while invigorating demands for government action inside and outside of the country. Adebiyi (2020) notes that, in the aftermath of the campaign, Nigerian television content has improved by significantly deemphasising terrorist propaganda. The reverse can be true also, however, and social media campaigns or images may have such virality that they put pressure on the media to report on something when not doing so may have been more appropriate.

Glazzard and Reed (2021) make two recommendations linked to reporting terrorist incidents relevant to cultural heritage destruction. The first is that governments and media should produce guidelines, protocols and policies on such reporting, especially in high-threat countries. As the current proceedings make clear, co-production makes for stronger frameworks. The second is that those international donors working in counter-terrorism in fragile states should strive to build capacity of journalists and government communications officers so as to better prepare them for the demands of the modern information environment. For the present purposes, the case could be made for heritage organisations to take similar steps where resources and access permit.

The final point to note from counter-terrorism is that in the immediate aftermath of an attack public sense-making and meaning generation begins. Depending on the specifics of the attack, these processes of meaning-making often go on for many months or even years (Glazzard and Reed 2021: 9-11). Public appetite for information is highest, though, immediately after an attack. Competition to provide information in the post-incident communication space can be intense. Control and censorship are often seen as responses in authoritarian states and parts of the Global South, for example, through social media shutdowns. As well as an infringement of rights, these have been noted to be rather 'blunt tools' (2021: 9) which fuel speculation and mute all voices not just negative ones. The alternative is for what has been termed, 'message discipline'. Deemed compatible with a free press, such discipline requires the media to report beyond what is made available via official channels but in a coordinated, ethical and self-regulated way. In the aftermath of an attack, this could see reports released in such a way as to, 'not weaken the security response, provide a tactical advantage to the terrorists, or do their work for them by increasing levels of anxiety and alarm' (Glazzard and Reed 2021: 11; see also Parker *et al.* 2019).

Finding Home: Protecting Cultural Heritage

When it comes to heritage destruction, the legal context is clear as others in this volume have outlined. International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), to which 133 state parties – including Russia – are currently signatories, require states to ensure heritage is not damaged or misappropriated in war. The exception to such protection is military necessity. Thus, forces are permitted to damage heritage, if an adversary is utilising it to present a threat. It is legitimate, for example, for a military force to use proportionate means to neutralise a sniper in a church spire.

Life should, of course, be prioritised over cultural heritage. That noted, cultural heritage is inextricably linked to identities. The loss of cultural heritage can be particularly egregious as it is often central to a person's sense of belonging and attachment to place. It anchors, orientates, and locates a person, a people, in time and space. In short, cultural heritage destruction disrupts and dislocates, often leaving victims psychologically adrift and emotionally hopeless (see also Wagner, this volume, on the connection between cultural heritage destruction and genocide).

Protecting heritage can, therefore, play a prominent role in safeguarding human security and the return to 'normality' in the aftermath of conflict. Heritage can help people find home again. Comprehending the character of the cultural heritage and conflict relationship better equips states to deliver peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction missions, mitigate threats, generate soft power advantage, as well as protect cultural heritage directly. In practice, this requires understanding, early warning and the ability to act. Each of these can be enhanced through media reporting. The reach of media can help secure funds and shape the attitudinal position and response of decision-makers and publics.

It is hard to protect in the absence of knowledge. This applies as much to inadvertent as deliberate harm to cultural heritage. The inadvertent damage caused by coalition forces (the US and Polish principally) at Babylon during the Second Gulf War is an obvious recent example. As Curtis (2011) describes, the establishment of Camp Alpha saw defensive trenches cut through archaeological horizons, surface deposits crushed or removed, with some being used to construct embankments and fill sandbags, and armoured vehicles damaging the processional thoroughfare and Ishtar Gate. To heritage professionals, the idea of locating a camp on a World Heritage Site at any time would seem inappropriate but, of course, people in conflict theatres have other priorities shaping their decisions. In war, different imperatives exist, power is differently manifest, and local and state level heritage custodians are often absent. The hierarchy of needs makes certain decisions attractive, particularly in conflict settings (Maslow 1943; cf Rojas *et al.* 2023). The roads and infrastructure that once facilitated access to tourists at Babylon, for example, as well as the 'defendability' of the site undoubtedly looked appealing to commanders wanting to move troops and vehicles around. As many of the troops at the location had a minimal understanding of cultural heritage, they did not realise they were inflicting damage through their activities. This is an issue of education and understanding, and the media could have played a pivotal role in amplifying the visibility of the cultural heritage and its social role leading to an earlier corrective on the inadvertent

damage being caused by coalition activities. The point here is that it is not only spectacular attacks against heritage where media reporting can inform better response.

The media has a role in the construction of public belief and social change (Harper and Philo 2013; Prescott-Couch 2021) and, as such, is positioned to, and does, play an important role in the protection of rights. The media can expose violations and be an arena for a diversity of voices. The freedom of the press is itself sometimes considered a human right (Cruft 2022). This is not to suggest that the media is not sometimes misused. The media are frequent charged with acting as 'propaganda megaphones' for exploitative elites, abusing the privacy of citizens, and causing damage through inaccurate coverage and sensationalism (Arbaoui *et al.* 2020; Gauthier 2002; Horton 2020; Khawar and Boukes 2024). The flip side is also true, with the media informing, debunking, and exposing in ways that make positive contributions.

As discussed elsewhere in this volume, cultural heritage is also a human rights issue, insofar as it relates to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, and religion. Protecting cultural heritage can, thereby, play a prominent role in safeguarding human security and the return to 'normality' in the aftermath of conflict. Heritage can help people find (and make) home again. Various military forces around the world are increasingly conscious of these issues and are acting to build relevant capabilities. Examples include the US Army's Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command's 38G/6V Heritage and Preservation Officer Program and the British Army's Cultural Property Protection Unit. These modern day 'monuments men and women' not only protect heritage in conflict theatres, but support operational readiness through related planning, training, and intelligence work. The prospect exists for their work to include liaison with the media to support community engagement and stakeholder understanding activities. Through responsible and disciplined reporting, the media can help people find home again as well as inform and enable the protection work of military forces.

Russia-Ukraine War

The destruction of heritage in conflict and other settings is of public interest and media concern. Attacks on heritage are a feature of modern conflicts for the reasons outlined above. Just as the destruction and reporting of cultural heritage can drive conflict, its protection and restoration can serve as a vector of resolution and post-war recovery. Public resilience and wellbeing require an understanding of what, where, when, how and why attacks are taking place. Conflict resolution, with implications for the preservation of life, as well as military preparedness require an understanding of the role of cultural heritage in warfare.

Reflecting changes in modern warfare – from conventional wars of attrition and exhaustion to hybrid and subthreshold hostilities – state and non-state actors continue to deploy or destroy cultural heritage for political ends. Indeed, the current trajectory indicates an escalation in heritage targeting and weaponisation as part of strategies to either reinforce or erode people's identities in and around conflict zones. Destruction in such contexts is often a matter of domination, and protection of resistance. Media reporting can amplify such weaponisation but, depending on how it is undertaken, also 'disarm' in the sense of informing and encouraging protection.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is a case in point. President Putin has made clear that he believes that Ukraine is an inalienable part of Russian history and culture. Despite these assertions, the targeting of Ukrainian cultural sites indicates an internal recognition of the robust and distinct character of Ukrainian identity (Dunkley and Clack 2022). As the destruction goes on, however, the cultural affinity that remains between Russia and Ukraine is under threat as both become increasingly defined in opposition to one another. The Orthodox Church in Ukraine, for example, became autocephalous in 2019, meaning it split from the Moscow Patriarchate Church (Metreveli 2019). The differences in Russian and Ukrainian media reporting of heritage destruction in the current war have been discussed elsewhere (see Richard, this volume; Dunkley and Clack 2022). While attacks on heritage continue to take place, the reporting of it at home and abroad is uneven. Efforts to protect and mobilise heritage to bolster morale have been undertaken by both sides (Bunch 2022; Malysh *et al.* 2021; McGlynn 2023).

The display of burnt-out Russian armoured vehicles in cities across Ukraine, including Kyiv and Lviv, adds a modern twist to the conflict and heritage nexus in this theatre of conflict. This material debris of combat is being transported from the battlefield and effectively converted into heritage for public consumption in almost real time. Together with viral memes on social media, most recognisably perhaps of Ukrainian farmers towing Russian tanks with their tractors, this heritage embodies an emotional truth for Ukrainians. These are made all the most resonant given the symbolic importance of soil and agriculture in Ukraine – the 'bread basket of Europe' – its flag celebrating proudly blue skies over golden fields. This physical and digital debris resonates with, and further informs, cultural narratives of independence and warrior ancestry.

Ukrainians at once immortalise and are immortalised by Volodymyr the Great, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Taras Shevchenko, and the Zaporizhian Cossacks riding horseback with sabres blazing through Gogol's legends of Taras Bulba. Here then is an example of different media interplaying to produce representations of the past in the present which configure identities in response to attacks on cultural heritage.

Conclusion

This chapter has described how and why cultural heritage is attacked by different conflict actors. It has also discussed the challenges the media face in reporting such destruction as they manage the balance between public interest, public safety, and ethical considerations. The relevance of the shifting information environment has also been explained, particularly in reference to the way cultural heritage is used as a stage to amplify propaganda. There are a number of lessons to be learned from the media's reporting of terrorist attacks which can inform reporting on heritage destruction. These include the production of guidelines and policies, discipline in media reporting and efforts to build capacity across journalists and government communications specialists in locations at high risk of attacks.

The importance of protecting cultural heritage is enshrined in IHL. The media also has a role in sharing knowledge and keeping publics and stakeholders informed about the value of cultural heritage and attacks against it. The protection of cultural heritage extends to the reporting of acts of destruction. With a biographical perspective, it might be argued that cultural heritage should be afforded respect in episodes of destruction, particularly when actors are looking for propaganda dividends, in the same way that people's bodies are treated with dignity after their death. This respect should take the form of a considered media treatment in the reporting of acts of cultural destruction. The respect afforded to the cultural heritage gives dignity to those whose heritage has been destroyed. It also undermines the propagandists' agenda. Ultimately, cultural heritage cannot be separated from people – it is people. When we protect one, we protect the other.

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SECTION III.
MEDIA REPORTING AND HERITAGE DESTRUCTION

Chapter 13.
Cultural Destruction as a Weapon of War

Sebastian Usher

Armies throughout history have ransacked other cultures and civilisations - not only as the spoils of war and conquest but also in an attempt to erase the history and even the memory of the people they have attacked. This obliteration of a culture has often been done intentionally, but it has also happened more or less accidentally as a side result of conflict - collateral damage. In recent decades, there has been no let-up, with countless conflicts in countries from Bosnia to Sudan resulting in the devastation of irreplaceable cultural heritage.

The archaeologist Hermann Parzinger has defined some of the motivations behind such destruction:

> 'The history of the intentional destruction of cultural heritage is long and diverse, with motivations similarly varied. Ideologically or politically motivated iconoclasm seeks to destroy symbols and representational signs that characterise a past that has been vanquished, or a deposed system to purge its memory. Religious iconoclasm is fed by the hatred of images of another religion, as well as by the fight against idolatry and false gods in the service of the true faith. Economically motivated cultural destruction is characterised by the pillage and plunder of culturally significant sites or monuments for financial gain, which at times may give rise to shadow economies.' (Parzinger 2022: 59)

Tangible and Intangible Cultural Destruction in Ukraine and Gaza

The two wars that have most recently seized the world's attention - in Ukraine and in the Middle East - have each posed a major threat to culture, both tangible and intangible.

The conflict between Israel and Hamas has seen buildings - some of deep historical, religious and cultural significance - destroyed across Gaza, while the attack by Hamas on Israel hit several kibbutzim and an open-air dance party. The choice of such targets does not appear to have been principally aimed at destroying culture - but it could be framed as having done so, nevertheless. Some of the media coverage of the Hamas massacres in Israel on October the Seventh, 2023, highlighted the cultural resonance of young men and women dancing together in the desert, being gunned down by an Islamist group ostensibly opposed to such events.

In the conservative-leaning British newspaper, the Daily Telegraph, the commentator Alison Pearson defined it in just this way as she excoriated pro-Palestinian protesters in London, in an article written three days after the attack:

> 'Civilisation stands at a historic crossroads; in one direction there are deluded progressives cheering on nihilistic mass murderers, in the other is everything we hold dear: decency, innocence, family, the right of beautiful young people to dance' (Pearson 2023).

In The Scotsman, the columnist Euan McColm criticised local politicians for what he saw as the lack of moral clarity in their response:

> 'What "context" exists to minimise the depravity of the killing of hundreds of young people, enjoying themselves at a music festival? What "complexity" might allow us to see the kidnap, torture and execution of generations of Jewish families as somehow part of a legitimate struggle? How could anyone witness footage of the bloodied bodies of women – raped and murdered by their attackers – being paraded as trophies and not feel overwhelming revulsion at such a manifestation of evil?' (McColm 2023).

This is how the Israeli government has portrayed the conflict from the outset - as a binary confrontation between good and evil. The Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly described his country's war with Hamas as 'the battle of Western civilisation'.

In meeting after meeting with foreign leaders in the wake of October the Seventh, he repeated this mantra - for example with the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni two weeks after the attack: 'We have to defeat this barbarism. This is a battle between the forces of civilisation and really, monstrous barbarians who murdered, mutilated, raped, beheaded, burned innocent people, babies, grandmothers.'

Netanyahu's comments suggest that he believes the intangible cultural qualities that Israel represents are under threat, not just its people. The kibbutz is one of the most powerful expressions of that culture - it has defined the country's sense of identity. The ideal of communal, pioneer living that it represented may have long faded as a primary political and cultural force within Israel, but it remains a symbol of its original aspirations. The Israeli journalist and novelist Amos Kenan made a passionate defence of the centrality of kibbutz culture more than forty years ago when it was coming under political attack within Israel:

> 'You obliterate the kibbutzim, you obliterate Israeli identity...The kibbutz does not belong only to the kibbutz, only to the Labor movement, but is an asset to all Israel, to the Jewish people as a whole, and one of the wonderful expressions of Jewish genius' (Shapira 2010).

Beyond the horror of the killings, the choice of Hamas targets - the kibbutzim and the Supernova dance party - has added to the trauma of the Israeli people and reinforced much of the Western solidarity with them, on a cultural as well as an emotional and political level.

One of the main justifications that Hamas has given for its savage attack on Israel has been given little prominence in much of the media. This is its professed defence of Al Aqsa compound in Jerusalem in response to what Palestinians see as a growing encroachment on their rights - and that of Muslims, in general - at one of the most sacred sites in the world. That, too, is very much about culture. Hamas even dubbed its assault on Israel 'Operation Al Aqsa Flood'.

The tensions around the site - which has immense religious significance not only for Muslims but also for Jews, who know it as the Temple Mount - helped spark the confrontation between Israel and Hamas in 2021, as well as the Second Intifada from 2000 to 2005.

In an 18-page document published on January 21st, 2024, and entitled 'Our Narrative: Al-Aqsa Flood', Hamas presented the perceived threat to Al-Aqsa at the head of its reasons for carrying out the attack on Israel: 'The Israeli Judaisation plans to the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, its temporal and spatial division attempts, as well as the intensification of the Israeli settlers' incursions into the holy mosque'.

In Gaza itself, important cultural heritage sites have been damaged or destroyed during the Israeli offensive. A report by UNESCO in November 2024 verified damage to 75 sites – 10 religious sites, 48 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 3 depositories of movable cultural property, 6 monuments, 1 museum and 7 archaeological sites (UNESCO 2024).

They include one of the oldest churches in the world, Saint Porphyrius. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem blamed Israel and condemned the attack. Israel denied that the church had been targeted. However, the incident demonstrated once again the fragility of cultural heritage in a war zone. And in bringing the presence of a church in Gaza into the news, it conveyed a sense of the cultural richness and complexity of the Palestinian people and their heritage, beyond the twin poles of 'Hamas terrorism' and 'civilian victimhood'.

This was almost certainly a revelation to many of those following the news, who were only now seeing such sites after they had been destroyed.

UNESCO has moved to provide what it calls 'enhanced provisional protection' to another site of great significance in the development of Christianity - the Saint Hilarion monastery complex. The UN cultural agency says: 'The ruins of Saint Hilarion are one of the oldest monasteries in the Middle East and bear a unique exceptional testimony to the emergence of Christianity in the region.'

The Great Omari Mosque in Gaza has also been badly damaged. The seventh century mosque was a paramount symbol of Gaza's long history and culture. Wissam Nassar, a Gaza-born photojournalist, has described its significance:

> 'This mosque holds a special place for every Palestinian in Gaza, as it was a gathering point during Ramadan and a place for worship and Quranic readings... Unfortunately, Israel destroyed everything beautiful in Gaza. Israel aimed to destroy not only people but also stones, infrastructure and historical buildings, wanting to eradicate human life and cultural heritage' (Ahmed 2024).

The Palestinian general director of excavations and museums, Jehad Yasin, has been quoted making the same point:

> 'This mosque was a symbol for the people of Gaza, and many had a connection to it... I think people feel that the occupation [Israel] plans to destroy our heritage. What is a symbol of identity for us, they want to demolish' (Geranpayeh 2023).

Many media outlets have covered this aspect of the war in Gaza. The two quotations above come from The Observer and the Art Newspaper respectively. The issue has also been covered by the BBC, Al Jazeera, the Irish Times and the Washington Post - among others.

In the US monthly magazine, The Nation, in an article entitled 'Israel's Cultural Genocide Is Destroying

Gaza's Very Memory', Ahmed Ibsais, a first-generation Palestinian American wrote:

> 'All these vital windows into Gaza's storied history and culture have been smashed under Israeli bombs. It's cultural genocide with no attempt to hide it. I am left wondering how these actions are undertaken so brazenly. Culture provides the narratives, symbols, and social bonds through which people make sense of themselves and the world. Cultural heritage offers clues to the past while anchoring group identity and purpose in the present. That's why consolidating control over a people, colonizing their land, or erasing their national aspirations starts by confiscating their art, artefacts, books, and buildings. Destroying cultural heritage is an attempt to destroy our hope' (Ibsais 2024).

National Public Radio in the US has published before and after photos of the destruction of Gaza's heritage in a radio and online piece, 'A requiem for Gaza's iconic sites, destroyed in the war'. The accompanying text ruminates on the loss:

> 'So much has been lost in Gaza, beyond the catastrophic death toll. More than half of Gaza's buildings are estimated to have been destroyed. But these landmarks showed another face of Gaza, different from the den of misery the world has come to know. For Palestinians, these sites were part of the tangle of threads linking their daily lives to their heritage stretching back thousands of years — an intangible connection to the past that cannot be replaced' (Estrin and Bashir 2024).

Nearly four months into the conflict, a self-taught Palestinian archaeologist speaking from Gaza, Fadel al-Otol, told New Lines Magazine:

> 'Gaza's archaeology is a testament to religious tolerance and human shared culture. I didn't cry over the destruction of my home as much as the complete destruction of the Old City of Gaza' (Snaije 2024).

Such coverage has provided a counter balance to one of the main narratives presented by Israel and its supporters that Gaza is essentially just a security problem that must be dealt with, reduced to Hamas and a population that once voted for the group that carried out the massacres on October the Seventh. It also deepens understanding of what Gaza represents to its population beyond the image of 'the world's largest open-air prison' that many pro-Palestinian voices have used to define the territory.

This aspect of the war was anatomised by The Guardian columnist Nesrine Malik: 'Remembering matters, and it's easy to forget, among the scenes of death and destruction since October, that the Gaza Strip is a real place that, even though it existed behind a fence and under severe restrictions, was not only just an 'open-air prison'. It has Mediterranean cities of treelined boulevards and bougainvillaea, and a coastline that provided respite from heat and blackouts. Much of that is now destroyed or bulldozed' (Malik 2023). By focusing on the inanimate - ancient stones now reduced to rubble - pieces like those above actually humanise Gaza and its people in a way that goes beyond the daily death toll. But beyond those who are following the story assiduously, awareness not only of the destruction but of the very existence of such a rich cultural heritage is most probably still lacking. The question then is whether news organisations are giving the issue sufficient prominence in editorial decision-making.

Cultural Destruction in War and Editorial Choices

News editors have to ask themselves how much of the destruction and devastation of buildings should be reflected in coverage when the immediacy of the desperate human cost of what is happening is so overwhelming.

In Ukraine, the narrative is on one level more straightforward, with apparent clarity that cultural sites are intentionally being hit by Russia as well as being destroyed as part of its air campaign against the Ukrainian people. Many significant cultural sites have been hit. In an updated report from January 2025, UNESCO stated that it had 'verified damage to 476 sites since 24 February 2022 – 149 religious sites, 241 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 32 museums, 33 monuments, 18 libraries, one archive, and two archaeological sites' (UNESCO 2025). The level of destruction is high, though reminiscent of the devastation wrought in other major conflicts - especially when war is conducted primarily by air. The UN Human Rights Commission issued a statement in 2023 on Ukraine that encompasses concerns that apply to all conflicts that involve such intense, prolonged bombardment of a territory. 'We are concerned by the severe targeting of Ukrainian cultural symbols. Cultural resources – such as repositories of Ukrainian literature, museums, and historical archives – are being destroyed, and there is a widespread narrative of demonisation and denigration of Ukrainian culture and identity promoted by Russian officials, along with calls for ideological repression and strict censorship in the political, cultural and educational spheres. Let us be clear: the Ukrainian people have a right to their identity. Nobody can violate this right...We are deeply concerned that this destruction is preventing and will further hinder the exercise of the human right to enjoy and have access to cultural heritage, including places of worship, by the people of Ukraine, thereby restricting

their freedom of religion or belief, as well as their right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and to express their cultural identity' (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commission 2024).

Many Ukrainians believe that Russia's intention is to destroy physical traces of their culture as part of a concerted effort to show that it never existed in the first place. Kateryna Iakovlenko, a Ukrainian art historian, told the New York Times:

> 'They have their own idea that Ukraine does not exist as a culture... That's why they want to destroy everything: to show that here there is nothing. This is, very clearly, a colonial way of thinking. This is how empires always work' (Farago *et al*. 2022).

The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have dominated news coverage to an extraordinary extent, raising a host of ethical and humanitarian issues. They have been intensely divisive in public opinion, with supporters on all sides accusing opponents of moral relativism at best and outright lies and racism at worst. Mainstream news media that sees its core value in giving as accurate and objective an account of events as possible has been subject to an onslaught of criticism. In Gaza, it's reached a point that unless a news outlet is saying exactly what one side demands, it is accused of bias and worse - antisemitism on one side and Islamophobia and dehumanisation on the other.

Into this cauldron of ferociously competing narratives, the issue of cultural destruction might seem somewhat less inflammatory and controversial. What is there to dispute about a destroyed or damaged building? The devastation of inanimate stones would, on the surface, appear to be less viscerally opposed to every human instinct than the killing of a child in an Israeli bombardment in Gaza or the massacre of unarmed partygoers by Palestinian gunmen in Israel.

But of course, it is more complicated than that, with extreme lack of accountability by the forces responsible, leaving news outlets with little recourse but to report bland denials of intentionality. This, for instance, was the response by an Israeli military spokesperson to the damage done to the Great Omari Mosque in Gaza, saying that the 'target of the attack was terrorist infrastructure which included a tunnel shaft, a tunnel and Hamas terrorists' (Emek Shaveh 2024).

As for the war in Ukraine, the Russian news agency Tass has quoted the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, rejecting claims that Russia is intentionally destroying the cultural heritage of Ukraine as baseless:

> 'Attempts to disparage Russia for the so-called destruction of Ukraine's cultural heritage are along the same lines. Even though nobody can present any evidence toward this end; it simply does not exist' (Tass 2023).

The difficulty of getting timely independent information out of Gaza and Ukraine has meant that in the immediate news cycle, some of the worst attacks on both people and buildings cannot be confirmed to the extent that is necessary to put the blame squarely on one side or the other. That allows the space for official denials and justifications to have perhaps more credibility than they deserve. In the fevered partisanship that has characterised the two conflicts, this can be seen by the side that is under attack as partisan or cowardly reporting.

In the case that South Africa brought against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague, the destruction of cultural heritage was cited as evidence that Israel was committing acts of genocide in Gaza. The case asked the ICJ to act urgently 'to protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights, including the heritage of the Palestinian people under the genocide convention'.

The use of the word 'genocide' in relation to Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza has quickly become normalised among the strongest pro-Palestinian voices, who see no other explanation for Israeli tactics in the territory. But it has now been extended to refer to Gaza's culture as well as its people. The Communications Director of the Turkish Presidency, Fahrettin Altun, has used the term: 'Israel is adding to its war crimes by pursuing cultural genocide by erasing Palestinian heritage from Gaza. Archives, libraries, museums and mosques are some of the most innocent and valuable artefacts of national memory for any people. Destroying them is nothing short of barbarism' (Altun 2024).

Israel and its supporters have of course vehemently denied any such intention, either towards the people or the culture of Gaza. The Israeli President Isaac Herzog denounced South Africa's decision to take the case to the ICJ:

> 'The very fact that the hearing at the court in The Hague was held on the eve of International Holocaust Memorial Day, to judge whether the democratic, moral and responsible State of Israel, which rose from the ashes of the Holocaust with the overwhelming support of the family of nations, and its institutions were guilty of committing genocide, is a blood libel that undermines the very values on which this court was established' (Times of Israel 2024).

Genocide is, as President Herzog made clear in his remarks, a term that is intensely loaded with historical

and cultural significance. It is not an exaggeration to say that much of Israel's very identity is built on the genocide that was perpetrated against the Jewish people by the Nazis. This has been articulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance: 'The Holocaust and its legacy are a formative dimension of Israel's national memory and identity as a Jewish and democratic state'. And it was in response to the Holocaust that the United Nations adopted the Genocide Convention in 1948. So, using 'genocide' in the context of Gaza - however well-meant or impassioned its proponents may be - has inevitably created another cultural clash between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as their advocates.

On one side, an editorial column in The Economist argued that 'South Africa's claim that Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians... cheapens the term. It risks weakening the taboo and body of law aimed at preventing it. It obscures the real worry that Israel's destructive campaign is breaking the laws of war; and the fact that permanent occupation is wrong' (The Economist 2024).

On the other side, the left-wing political columnist Owen Jones wrote this in The Guardian:

> 'Here is one of the great crimes of our age, unfolding before our eyes, described to me by the Palestinian activist Omar Barghouti as "the world's first livestreamed genocide". Rarely has a crime so grave been so honestly spelled out to the world by its architects. Yet many of those who rightly and passionately condemned the atrocities of Hamas have little or nothing to say about Israel's actions, despite the direct involvement of our own rulers. This is obscene – and occasional handwringing will not scrub away the shame. Tacit acquiescence allows the horror to continue. Words can be dangerous, but so too can their absence' (Jones 2024).

The message is clear for mainstream news organisations from such fiercely pro-Palestinian voices - if you are not defining what Israel has been doing in Gaza as genocide, then you are complicit in Israel's killing of civilians in its war on Hamas. On the pro-Israeli side, the line is drawn equally clearly - prioritising concern at the killing of Palestinians over that of Israelis and other nationals killed on October the Seventh is tantamount to support of Hamas and its massacre of civilians. This is a culture war, rather than a war on culture, but it has had an inhibiting effect on news outlets and how they frame what has been happening.

In the Western mainstream media, at least, the delineation of the combatants in Ukraine has been relatively clear, with Russian and Putin the aggressors and Zelensky and the Ukrainians seeking to defend their country, their lives and their culture against invasion. In reality, it is, of course, less clear-cut. But when it comes to ascribing intention in the destruction not only of human life but of cultural artefacts, there has been little reluctance to put Putin and his military in the dock. Israel and Gaza has been another matter. The Israeli government and its military have been permitted far more credibility - perhaps even the benefit of the doubt - in giving attention to their claims that any such destruction is an unfortunate, even tragic consequence of the necessity of defending the people and the state of Israel by eradicating the threat of Hamas. The fact that Western journalists have not been able to report in any meaningful sense from inside Gaza has obstructed the core elements of verification that mainstream news relies on.

With this being the case, the difference between widespread reporting that Russia has intentionally targeted the cultural landmarks of Ukraine is compared unfavourably by critics of what some now choose to call 'heritage journalism' with the more ambiguous and uncertain stance taken towards the undeniable destruction of important cultural sites in Gaza by Israel. Such critics say that it follows a pattern in which indigenous voices from places like Gaza are afforded less respect than those from Western countries. In the immediacy demanded by a thirst for news now dominated by social media, not covering a specific story or adopting a stance of uncertainty can be portrayed as wilful omission, even censorship.

Verification units are now working pretty much twenty-four hours a day at a number of mainstream news organisations, from The New York Times to the BBC, trying to ensure the accuracy of reports that rely on videos posted by a huge variety of sources caught up in conflict from doctors in Gaza to commuters in Kyiv.

Newsrooms and the Changing Face of Newsgathering from War Zones

In covering Twenty-First Century conflicts, newsrooms and reporters have grown used to picking their way through mobile phone footage in regions where it can be too dangerous to venture as a foreign journalist. The war in Syria provided the steepest learning curve, with the vast majority of newsworthy footage coming from local sources.

But uncovering the truth to the degree that it is acceptable to a news organisation, whose reputation depends on the reliability of its reporting, can be a gradual process. Verification units need time to sort through all the data, as Ross Burley - the co-founder and executive director of the Centre for Information Resilience wrote in an op-ed for Politico:

> 'The truth demands patience, and single events can take weeks, if not months, to verify. Most of the time, it's simply not possible to discern an accurate picture of what, where and how an event happened — and, crucially, who was responsible — in the time frames audiences demand, particularly on social media. And when we cannot discern the 'who,' objective truth remains tantalisingly out of reach' (Burley 2023).

Such forensic investigations allow news organisations to uncover, in some cases at least, what is most likely to have happened and who is responsible in some of the most contentious and inflammatory events in conflict zones, which their own journalists have been unable to reach.

Intentionality often still remains hard to prove - even though it is vital to do so in order to impose some kind of sanction.

There is a legal distinction between the devastation of cultural heritage sites that is carried out on purpose and the destruction that is a byproduct of war. International Humanitarian Law, including The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict requires countries to make sure that heritage is not damaged or misappropriated in war. Adopted in 1954 in response to the mass destruction of World War Two, the Convention made it a war crime to destroy 'cultural property'. But there's an exception for military necessity if an adversary is using it to pose a threat. That is the argument that Israel uses in justification of the destruction in Gaza. But the instant documentation of such incidents by people on the scene with mobile phone cameras - just as was seen on a major scale for the first time in Syria - means that the incidents themselves cannot be ignored, even if the responsibility for them is not always clear.

Newsrooms have benefited hugely from the material that is provided by people on the ground. But it has also created new challenges over authenticity and propaganda.

The combatants themselves provide huge quantities of material. In Gaza, the Israeli army has provided daily video footage of its offensive, at times revealing what it says is damning proof not just of Hamas using civilian sites for military purposes but of the alleged complicity of international agencies working in Gaza, such as UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees.

Hamas-affiliated news sites and social media channels provide footage of the terrible human cost of the war on Palestinians in Gaza.

Both sides have been accused of using such material for propaganda, which again makes the task of journalists working outside the conflict zone yet more complicated. The fear of potential manipulation by the combatants is a constant in editorial decision-making.

Most notoriously in the past decade, ISIS produced professional quality film of their atrocities - for their own dark propaganda. The destruction of cultural heritage played almost as prominent a part in their campaign as the beheading or burning to death of their captives. They filmed themselves hacking apart ancient statues and blowing up temples. Ostensibly, it was an iconoclastic rampage against what ISIS condemned as heresy. But the jihadists were essentially staging a theatre of the utmost cruelty, designed to terrorise local populations, catch the horrified attention of the wider world and show what they believed to be their power and impunity.

The flow of ISIS videos raised fresh concerns over possible media complicity in helping the group spread its brutalising message through reporting and broadcasting the images.

The videos showing off frenzied attacks on ancient sites, such as Hatra in Iraq, also caused journalists to ask themselves whether they were prioritising violence against objects over violence directed against people.

In particular, the destruction at Palmyra in Syria moved some seasoned journalists in a way that they found uncomfortable - wondering why they felt its loss so keenly, with more immediacy perhaps than that of the countless victims of the war.

An op-ed in Time magazine by Amr al-Azm, a professor of history and anthropology, tried to provide an answer:

> 'Why should we care about the destruction of cultural heritage monuments in Syria? Once the current violence ends, the people of Syria will need to find ways to reconnect with symbols that once united them across religious and political lines. The country's ancient past, represented in its rich cultural heritage, is key to this. Protecting and preserving Syria's history and heritage is thus also about safeguarding its future' (Al-Azm 2015).

This predated the wars in Ukraine and Gaza by several years, but it's the same message that has been heard from those conflicts - and it's a perspective that clearly applies to them as well. It may help journalists to recognise the significance of culture in conflict, not as an adjunct to the other horrors of war but as a major factor in what is at stake.

In the case of ISIS, the dilemma for the mainstream media was extreme, as it was dependent on the very perpetrators of the destruction for information and material, as well as local citizen journalists - essentially unprotected and vulnerable sources of information. Did reporting on their atrocities encourage them to commit more? Was the wall-to-wall coverage of their assault on Palmyra free publicity for their ideology and the savagely restrictive culture it wanted to impose?

ISIS was going down a well-trodden path, marked out more recently by the Taliban - with their infamous blowing up of the monumental Buddha statues in Bamiyan in 2001 - but also followed by countless other extremist ideologies throughout history.

Such groups also put more intangible cultural treasures at risk. The ancient culture of the Yazidis in northern Iraq faced the threat of obliteration, while even Islamic religious practices seen as heretical by the jihadists could mark their practitioner for death. The group, on at least one occasion, held up truck drivers to question them on religious practices - to discover whether they were Sunni or Shia Muslims. If they showed the wrong religious and cultural response, it was a death sentence.

In the city of Mosul in Iraq, ISIS is also reported to have looted ancient manuscripts from libraries and universities, as well as caused terrible damage to its ancient buildings in the Old City, both when the group was in power there and in the pitched battle that was fought by the US-led coalition and Iraqi forces to remove it. Ali al-Baroodi is a resident of Mosul who has been documenting efforts to restore the city; he told me how rebuilding still feels empty if the people who once lived there have not returned: 'I know that heritage by itself is a value and nobody can deny that, but it's still tormenting to feel that the people are not back there. The beautiful thing about that is you can now hear the ringing bells of the church intermingle with the call for a prayer. The war ended six years ago. The aftermath of that war is not easy to erase. Even if we rebuild all the monuments, all the buildings, the scars, the memory, the people that we lost are still tormenting'.

Amongst the many international institutions to denounce the attempted annihilation of Iraq's ancient culture was the Louvre:

> 'This destruction marks a new stage in the violence and horror, because all of humanity's memory is being targeted in this region that was the cradle of civilisation, the written word and history' (Chulov 2015).

The then UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova said in 2015 that the true intent of the ISIS attack on Palmyra was to 'deprive the Syrian people of its knowledge, its identity and history'.

Her statement was issued just days after the killing by ISIS of Dr Khaled al-Asaad, the Syrian archaeologist who had looked after the ruins of Palmyra for four decades. His murder gave some rare agency in the international media to the Syrian people themselves - other than the government and the various rebel factions- in the midst of the civil war that tore their lives apart. Irina Bokova concluded her statement with a declaration of the resounding significance of Palmyra, which can also be applied to what has happened since in Ukraine and Gaza: 'The art and architecture of Palmyra, standing at the crossroads of several civilisations, is a symbol of the complexity and wealth of the Syrian identity and history. Extremists seek to destroy this diversity and richness, and I call on the international community to stand united against this persistent cultural cleansing. Daesh [ISIS] is killing people and destroying sites, but cannot silence history and will ultimately fail to erase this great culture from the memory of the world. Despite the obstacles and fanaticism, human creativity will prevail, buildings and sites will be rehabilitated, and some will be rebuilt. Such acts are war crimes and their perpetrators must be accountable for their actions'.

This is cultural genocide - or 'culturecide', as it is also known. But it's not always as visceral and blatantly intentional as in what ISIS attempted to do. In some ways- despite the inherent horror - it was a relatively straightforward story to report, with ISIS publicising its own villainy, while the group's victims, such as the Yazidis, were clear. The group's attack on priceless ancient artefacts even re-sensitised the media to the practice of destroying cultural heritage as a weapon of war. But in practice, it's normally not that clear-cut. That leaves journalists with difficult decisions to make over how much to focus on the destruction of cultural heritage in reporting a conflict, especially in its bloodiest and most intense phases. And then how much to invest in on-the-ground reporting in the aftermath of war when public interest has waned, but full forensic investigations can be carried out. By then, it is often too late in any case to make much impression on the news narrative, even if for future historians, it is invaluable.

Balancing News Values, Cultural Values and Human Values

As the examples given above have demonstrated, the trauma caused to a population by war is reflected in and intensified by the destruction of both their physical and intangible cultural heritage. But these are long and involved stories to tell. The voices of those most directly affected are also not always given the respect they deserve.

Without giving due weight to them in the media, though, the sources of renewed conflicts are lost and ignored, as has arguably been the case with the war in Gaza.

There is a constant demand for context - a thirst for explanation in the mainstream media at such moments. What that reveals is perhaps how little of the significance of a people's culture has featured in the way such stories are told up to that point. There is a tendency to boil the complexities of conflict down to its bare essentials. At the very least, it would be helpful for a people's culture to be featured in that most elementary depiction of war.

Part of that process should be to pay more attention in the news media to the significance of cultural heritage not just in the way war plays out, but in the motivations that lie behind conflict.

Beyond politics, beyond territory, clashes in culture still play a significant role in what foments and sustains wars. This appears only to have become more prevalent in recent conflicts, especially in the Middle East and Africa.

The more this is studied and analysed, the more likely it is that the media will devote attention to it as a significant narrative strand when reporting on conflict.

Broadcasters are always hungry for experts and analysts who can elucidate in a clear way some of the more complex issues that are raised in warfare. Media outlets also need to learn to give more credence and more space to the voices of the people whose culture is endangered - only they can reveal the nuances and deeper significance of their culture and environment. In a way, this can also humanise peoples and cultures to an audience that has grown used to seeing them as victims, whose value lies principally in how many have died or been wounded on a given day. The near mystical identification with landmarks that have stood for generations is shared across cultures and races.

A passage by a Croatian journalist, Slavenka Drakulic, has been much quoted in this context and is worth repeating here. She was wondering why the destruction of the famous bridge at Mostar during the Bosnian war in 1993 had shaken her so deeply, even more than the people who had been so savagely killed in the conflict. She wrote that she felt 'more pain looking at the image of ... the destroyed bridge than the image of a murdered woman.... We expect people to die. We count on our own lives to end. The destruction of the monument of civilisation is something else. The bridge, in all its beauty and grace, was built to outlive us; it was an attempt to grasp eternity. Because it was the product of both individual creativity and collective experience, it transcended our individual destiny. A dead woman is one of us – but the bridge is all of us forever.'(Drakulic 1993).

Bringing the Trauma of Cultural Destruction Home

Let me finish with an example that is far from war and the regions where it takes place. Just before the news cycle was taken up with the horrors in Israel and Gaza, a story stole the headlines for days in Britain. It concerned a landmark sycamore tree that was cut down next to Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland in September 2023. Newspapers and airwaves were choked with eulogies and laments and existential questions over why the chopping down of a single tree was causing such an outpouring of grief and anger. I heard a number of broadcasters frame this as a debating point - pondering why such an apparently trivial event had moved them so much and whether should they feel guilty for focusing on it when a child - fifteen-year-old Elianne Andam - was knifed to death on the streets of London on the very same day? Were they being callous or superficial in appearing to care more about a tree than a human life?

A columnist in the Daily Mail, Janet Street-Porter, brought the two events together in an article in which she saw them as equally indicative of a coarsening of life in Britain:

> 'Earlier the same day that the sycamore met its demise, a far worse act of mindless violence occurred. It was just another autumn morning in the rush hour and 15-year-old Elianne Andam was standing by a bus stop in South London, on her way to a private school her parents had scrimped and saved for her to attend. Minutes later, she was dead, apparently cut down with a large knife as she tried to protect a friend. A 17-year-old boy has been arrested and charged.... The death of a lovely young girl in South London is shocking. A human life has been snatched for literally no reason. Like the felling of the tree at Sycamore Gap, the death of Elianne Andam must mark a turning point for those in power. Mindless violence can't be the headline that sums up life in Britain in 2023' (Street-Porter 2023).

Such laments over a current society's descent into lawlessness and loss of values have resounded throughout history, of course. But I think something else was happening, too - for a brief moment, people in Britain were having a small taste of the intensity of loss that people all over the world have faced as their cherished cultural landmarks have been destroyed in war. People rang into radio stations to talk about how key moments in their lives or that of their parents, grandparents or beyond had been associated with the

tree and now felt irrevocably lost with its destruction. These were everyday voices, surprised at their own passion in remembering something that had seemed mundane - a part of their lives. Not some great temple or monolith but still precious to them in an almost spiritual way, allowing them the comfort of feeling some continuity with the past.

Several of these voices were featured in an article in The Guardian – like Beatrice, a retired teacher: 'I feel that this tree has kept company with me my entire adult life, from a 19-year-old student to being an old age pensioner. Seeing it felled is like saying goodbye to a friend for the last time.' James - a man who grew up near the tree - recalled:

> 'One of my last memories of my father is walking that stretch of Hadrian's Wall. He had advanced cancer then, and I remember us resting for a while sat on the wall underneath it. I told my family that the tree had been cut down; my brother told me he felt like a piece of his soul had been cut down with it. I think I feel the same way' (Hill 2023).

That is the kind of emotional significance that journalists need to connect with and try to convey when reporting on the destruction of culture - through the responses of those most deeply affected, if possible. This should not only occur when there are spectacularly horrific examples of cultural rampage, such as ISIS carried out in Iraq and Syria. The inherent risk in focusing on such grotesquely choreographed acts is that they can amplify the attempted messaging of such groups. As with the worst atrocities against people, they can also be presented as so beyond the pale of any normal human behaviour that they can only be defined as evil without any necessary context or nuance beyond that. That can end up obscuring not only essential elements of the culture under threat, but also the motivations behind such an attack. Understanding of these in the mainstream media should be underscored by in-depth knowledge, acquired both by foreign correspondents and reliable local media sources. With cuts in budgeting, the role of permanent foreign correspondent has diminished in many areas. A growth in conflicts in which journalists are seen as combatants or useful pawns with a price on their heads have curtailed the scope for independent reporting. These factors have diminished the deeper understanding necessary to report on the destruction of cultural heritage in its full complexity.

Despite the examples quoted above, the issue still needs to be addressed as one of central importance in terms not only of how war plays out, how it is experienced by those involved but also in how some form of post-conflict resolution might be achieved.

At the end of a piece quoted earlier, The Guardian columnist Nesrine Malik attempted to summon up the intangible, as well as tangible, loss that the destruction of culture in war, whether intentional or not, creates. In the article, she is contemplating such loss in Gaza, but her words apply far beyond that conflict:

> 'This is what it would look like, to erase a people. In short, to void the architecture of belonging that we all take so much for granted so that, no matter how many Gazans survive, there is, over time, less and less to bind them together into a valid whole. This is what it would look like, when you deprive them of telling their story, of producing their art, of sharing in music, song and poetry, and of a foundational history that lives in their landmarks, mosques, churches, and even in their graves' (Malik 2023).

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Chapter 14.
Sowing Salt and Cultivating Fear: Examining Patterns in Reporting Cultural Heritage Destruction from Ancient Times to the Digital Age

Bijan Rouhani

Introduction

Destruction of cultural, religious, and historical heritage has occurred throughout wars, socio-political changes, and revolutions from ancient times to the present, driven by multiple reasons. These destructions have been reported and narrated in various forms and media. In addition to accounts by societies and groups whose cultural heritage has been targeted, the perpetrators of these acts have also presented their own narratives of cultural heritage destruction of other communities. These narratives reveal intentions, uses, or misuses of cultural heritage. Reporting the destruction of cultural heritage can involve complex layers of meaning that go beyond recording and documenting the events of destruction. While these narratives provide insight into what has been destroyed and how, the analysis of these narratives, the media employed, and their intended audiences also play a crucial role in understanding the interaction and weaponisation of cultural heritage. Furthermore, it enhances our comprehension of the role of cultural heritage in broader narratives of power dynamics, justification of warfare, and propaganda. Were they tailored for specific audiences, or were they always intended for a general audience? Have the patterns, forms, and structures of these narratives evolved with changes in the media? With changes in media and narrative patterns, have the messages and meaning also changed?

In the digital age, where media, social platforms, and new technologies, including artificial intelligence, rapidly reshape contemporary societies and cultural productions and alter how news is produced and disseminated (Jin 2021), reporting heritage destruction is undergoing profound changes. In particular, social media and digital technologies, while playing an effective role in disseminating news and raising public awareness during crises and disasters, and being increasingly used by both the public and professional organisations for documenting heritage destruction during conflicts (Munawar 2022), can equally amplify propaganda, misinformation, and fake news. In this context, the past can serve as fuel for such actions due to its capacity to draw out potential divisions, including cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, and gender sensitivities. While various scholars have examined the socially and digitally mediated destruction of cultural heritage by extremist groups like ISIS and how these images have captured the attention of heritage specialists, academics, politicians and the general public (Azzouz 2022; González Zarandona *et al.* 2018; Isakhan 2018; Smith *et al.* 2016; Stein 2022), a more thorough exploration of narrative patterns in the modern and digital age requires understanding these processes and their evolution. This is crucial for identifying persistent patterns and highlighting their transformations over time.

This chapter aims to provide a brief overview of the narratives of destruction, the media used to express them, their audiences, and their underlying messages, both in their initial use and as they have changed in meaning over time. The purpose is not to investigate what has been destroyed throughout history and in different civilisations, nor the methods employed. The abundance and diversity of these narratives, both temporally and geographically, do not allow for a detailed historical account or examination within the confines of this chapter. Instead, by focusing on some prominent examples from different historical periods, it examines some of the most significant narrative patterns, changes in media, audiences, and meaning.

Mesopotamia, where armed warfare was first formalised, has left numerous narratives of how the cultural heritage of neighbouring civilisations was destroyed, depicted in the form of reliefs and inscriptions. Examining these first examples of such propaganda and comparing them with the media and forms employed in subsequent millennia, especially through the monuments and memorials of ancient Rome, reveals significant differences. Differences can also be observed in the messaging of the eastern rivals

of the Roman Empire, such as the Sasanian Empire. The narratives of heritage destruction pertain not only to times of war but also to the turmoil of revolutions and social and political changes, where the destruction and alteration of historical heritage serve to propagate the revolution's message in a new language. In the more recent past, the French Revolution and the associated extensive destruction of historical and religious heritage stands as a particularly interesting case, as it illustrates the adoption of new languages, media, and the emergence of new concepts amidst societal changes. With the advent of the modern era and the codification of international laws of war, international attention and reporting on the destruction of cultural heritage within these new legal frameworks increased. To explore how heritage destruction narratives influenced philosophical and legal ideologies, we need to examine the perspectives of some protagonists of the 'just war' argument and their reflections on the destruction of cultural heritage. During the world wars, the warring parties even established commissions to report on the destruction and protection of cultural heritage. From this modern perspective, the safeguarding of cultural heritage gradually evolved into a tactical and strategic objective for warring parties to ensure military deliverables (Kila and Herndon 2014: 118). When these objectives were prioritised, there was more reporting on heritage destruction. Conversely, when such strategic objectives were not prioritised, significant instances of cultural heritage destruction were sometimes overlooked. In subsequent wars, modern media, especially television reporting, such as in the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, gained prominence. One of the most significant examples of staged propaganda destruction of cultural heritage publicised using modern communication tools was the Taliban's destruction of Buddha statues in Afghanistan (2001), which successfully garnered global attention. Following that, with the advent of social media, ISIS deployed digital tools in new and more sophisticated ways in the context of the destruction of cultural heritage in the Middle East. These new tools have turned the production of narrative and its dissemination into a public matter, contributing to democratisation as well as speeding and extending the spread of news and the messages. Such digital tools are highly suited to the production of misinformation and fake news and, helped by artificial intelligence algorithms, result in 'echo chambers'.

In the digital age, while the means of producing narratives about cultural heritage destruction are rapidly transforming, their purposes and impacts on societies remain complex. This chapter explores some of these transformations and continuities in narratives of cultural heritage destruction, examining historical examples and their evolution over time.

Ancient Time

Even 2600 years after the destruction of the ancient city of Susa in 647 BCE by the Assyrians, the account of Ashurbanipal, the powerful Assyrian king, of the city's conquest by his soldiers, the destruction of its temples and ziggurat, the looting of its treasures, and the uncovering of its tombs continues to evoke horror. His report vividly demonstrates how the heritage of an ancient city, now in modern Iran, was transformed into a desolate, plundered wasteland, sown with salt (Luckenbill 1927: 309). The account of the devastation of Elam's temples and cities, their looting, and the scattering of their gods and goddesses to the wind by the Assyrians is not solely gleaned from the cuneiform tablets and cylinders unearthed in Nineveh. Monumental reliefs, such as those at the British Museum, also vividly portray the destruction of temples and the ruin of gardens and palaces.

While the message conveyed by these written and visual reports may be readily apparent, it is equally crucial to consider their medium. Ashurbanipal's reports represent an extraordinary endeavour to craft royal documents that not only serve as a symbol of Assyrian kingship's might but also to sow the seeds of fear among enemies, vividly portray their humiliation, and symbolise the obliteration of their cultural icons and identities. Furthermore, they illuminate how the resources and capabilities of the royal court were harnessed to create enduring records for posterity, despite the limited capacity to make copies for dissemination. We are confronted with a power akin to that of a deity, one that has undertaken its actions with the intent of immortalising fear and humiliation in the enemy through a magnificent royal statement. A statement that, even after 2600 years, sends chills down one's spine when hearing of the events that unfolded in Elam. In this context, the enduring nature of the message and its preservation over time carries more importance than its distribution. It was a message safeguarded within the royal palace, visible to all who came to seek audience with the king.

Here, the narrative materials themselves become noteworthy artefacts, serving as symbolic links to power. The documentation of these events transcends mere narrative purposes and imparts value to an object intimately tied to authority. Another example is the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin. The stele, now in the Louvre Museum, dates to approximately 2254-2218 BCE and commemorates the victory of the Akkadians over the mountain people of Lullubi[1]. However, the stele was discovered in the city of Susa, modern-day Iran. In the 12th century BCE, the Elamite king, Shutruk-Nahhunte, brought this stele to Susa along with considerable

[1] https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010123450

booty collected during his victorious campaign in Babylon. He offered it to Inshushinak, his deity. A span of approximately a thousand years had not only failed to diminish the importance of this stele to the Elamite king but had, in fact, invested it with a transcendent quality. This inspired him to relocate it from Sippar, in modern Iraq, to his capital, where he added a few lines about himself and the manner in which he looted and brought the stele, treating it with profound reverence. It appears that the account and narrative of victory were infused with enduring power, capable of traversing from one realm of kingship to another even after a millennium. Here, we may be encountering ancient patterns of narrative and storytelling, where will, action, and power intersect. Hence, the stele is not merely a physical, historical document; it becomes a medium of power or sanctity itself, preserving its transcendent aura even after a thousand years, even if it was kept within the fortified royal palaces and castles, likely intended for a select audience rather than the general public.

Lamentations recounting city and temple devastation in ancient Sumer, especially during the Third Ur Dynasty's decline in 2004 BCE, have a notable position in Sumerian literature. Vividly detailing destruction and pleading for restoration, these works chronicle the toppling of cultural pillars alongside physical ruins as temples and cities fell. The composition of such lamentations after a kingdom's downfall, now under new rulers, can also be viewed as part of a royal endeavour – legitimising successor powers by linking them to once-proud ancients (Samet 2021: 6–7).

This style also appears in biblical literature, especially regarding the destruction of the First Temple of Jerusalem. The 70 CE destruction of the Second Temple also significantly shaped cultural heritage destruction reporting, famously depicted on Rome's Arch of Titus. This over 15-meter high arch displays Roman soldiers plundering the Temple artefacts like the Menorah. Built by Emperor Domitian honouring his late brother Emperor Titus, the arch stands prominently in the Roman Forum's southeast, enabling passing citizens and visitors alike to appreciate its inscriptions and sculptures. Unlike exalted Assyrian palace reliefs, public accessibility deliberately expanded the arch's spatial context - a critical shift scholars like Alois Riegl link to the evolution of late antiquity art (Holloway 1987: 186).

In Rome, monuments such as triumphal arches and columns conveyed propaganda messages beyond simple commemoration of Roman victories. As Thill (2010) notes, the Column of Trajan in Rome, constructed between 107 and 113 CE, depicts Dacian architecture as primitive, using style and materials to cast Rome's enemies as barbaric. The destruction of Dacian buildings appears self-inflicted, implying their downfall was inevitable (Thill 2010: 38–41). Towering 38 meters with its pedestal, the Column of Trajan recounts the Dacian Wars through a spiral frieze, using prominent reliefs to laud Trajan's life, victories, and death in a dynamic and provocative spiral narrative to deploy the memorial column as propaganda (Davies 1997: 65). The Arch of Septimius Severus (203 CE) in the Roman Forum illustrates conflicts with Parthians and the siege of the ancient city of Ctesiphon. On Severus' arch, Ctesiphon and other Parthian cities appear prosperous and notably urbanised, perhaps emphasising their worthiness for Roman acquisition (Thill 2010: 41). Although formatting and style vary across these Roman arches and columns, the ideological messaging remains consistent.

The ancient city of Ctesiphon, located in present-day Iraq, was the capital of the Iranian Empire during the Parthian and later the Sasanian periods. During the Sasanian era, Ctesiphon served as the coronation site for several Sasanian kings until its conquest by the Arabs. The Arch of Ctesiphon, also known as Taq-e-Kasra, stands as the sole visible remnant of the imperial palace from the 3rd to the 6th century CE. Recognised as a historical architectural landmark, the archway holds significance as one of the largest single-span vaults of unreinforced brickwork. Ctesiphon witnessed numerous attacks, sieges, and destruction by the Romans and other invaders. The conquest of Ctesiphon by Muslim Arabs in March 637 CE marked the nadir of the Sasanian Empire's decline. This significant event is documented in various sources, notably in the works of Al-Tabari, a Persian historian and scholar of the 9th-10th centuries. Tabari and other historians recount the fall of Ctesiphon (known as Mada'en or al-Mada'in in Arabic), the arrival of the Muslims, the capture of the White Palace, its conversion into a mosque, and even the plundering of the renowned Baharestan (Spring Garden) or of the Bahar-e Khosrow (Spring of Kosrow) carpet by the Arabs. This grand and opulent carpet, decorated with gold and jewels, adorned the main floor of the imperial palace. According to Tabari, the Arabs seized this magnificent carpet as spoils of war and sent it to Medina. The chronicle notes that Caliph Omar then cut up the grand carpet and divided it among the Muslim army. Ali ibn Abi Talib, who later became the fourth Caliph, sold just one segment of it for 20,000 dirhams (Morony 1988). The ruins of Ctesiphon not only appeared in historical and geographical texts but also inspired literary and poetic works in subsequent periods, especially during the Abbasid era. They became a symbol of the endurance and greatness of past civilisations for many Arab poets (Johnson 2017). The Iwan of Mada'in (Taq-e-Kasra) also held a significant place in Persian poetry, and its ruins have always been

remembered with sorrow and lament or considered as lessons to be learned. Perhaps the most famous ode on this is the work of Khaqani Shervani, a poet from the 12th century, who, after seeing the ruins of Ctesiphon, composed a lengthy ode describing it and considered it a lesson for the instability of royal dynasties (Beelaert 2010). During the modern era, Ctesiphon (Madain) and the accounts of its fall and destruction played a significant and pivotal role in the formation of Iranian nationalism. Mirzadeh Eshqi (1894-1924), a prominent cultural and literary figure during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution period, invokes the kings of the Persian Empire in his renowned opera titled 'The Resurrection of Iranian Kings,' set amidst the Sasanian ruins of Mada'in (Seyed-Gohrab 2015: 394). In this opera, they all bemoan the destruction of Taq-e Kasra. It encompasses several key elements observed in the works of other nationalist writers of this era, such as nostalgia tinged with sorrow and complaint, attributing the decline of Iran's glory to Islam as a foreign religion associated with 'others,' and depicting Iran's contemporary degradation with a sense of dissatisfaction (Zia-Ebrahimi 2016: 181). In the works of these writers and subsequent authors like Abdulhossein Zarrinkoub (1923-1999), the narrative of the fall of Ctesiphon at the hands of the Arab Muslims becomes a pivotal scene illustrating the loss of Iran's glory and the commencement of a period of subjugation and silence for Iranians, marked by the disdain and destruction of their culture and civilisation by 'others'. In his renowned work, 'Two Centuries of Silence', Zarrinkoub views the fall of Ctesiphon and the subsequent collapse of the Sasanian Empire as the genesis of two hundred years of complete silence for Iranians, accompanied by the erosion of Iranian identity (Zarrinkoub 1957). The accounts of the destruction and decline of Ctesiphon over several centuries, from the early Islamic period to modern times, have held an important place in Iranian history and literature. These narratives have not only been used to reconstruct a nostalgic image of past glory and express regret over its loss, but they have also played a significant role in rethinking Iran's place in the modern world and in shaping Iranian nationalism, sometimes with a plea for a return to a golden past.

Revolutionary Messages

Revolutions and social changes possess distinct languages to convey their messages, and cultural heritage, along with the narrative of its destruction and alteration, plays a crucial role in shaping and disseminating the ideology of change.

The 18th-century French Revolution unveiled another chapter in the narrative of the destruction of cultural heritage and the complex relationship revolutionaries had with it. For the French revolutionaries, pre-revolution monuments and artworks were seen as having an instructive role and functioning as a tool for social control. Often, they were perceived in contrast to what was deemed the 'truth.' Denis Diderot, in a letter to his friend in 1765, conveyed the idea that 'if one values truth more than the fine arts, they should pray for some iconoclasts' (Idzerda 1954: 13). Diderot (1713-1784) was a prominent figure of the Enlightenment era and served as the editor of the Encyclopédie, which played a crucial role in shaping ideas that ultimately contributed to the French Revolution.

For the revolutionaries, historical and artistic heritage acted to convey educational messages employed by the *Ancien Régime* for social and religious control. The initial revolutionary response involved physically dismantling and destroying this heritage. Yet, it wasn't just an act of destruction; the documentation, narration of the destruction, and dissemination of the narrative had the potential to embody a fresh educational message for the revolutionary masses.

A notable example of message dissemination centred around the destruction of the Bastille fortress and prison. The Bastille, symbolising royal absolutism and oppressive power, was dismantled following the storming on July 14, 1789. Ownership of the Bastille was then granted to a private entrepreneur named Pierre-François Palloy, self-styled 'Citoyen Palloy' or 'Patriot Palloy.' Employing nearly 1000 Parisian labourers, Palloy used stones from the fallen building to craft relics and small replicas of the demolished Bastille, as well as medals and other souvenirs (Taws 2013; Lucas 1991). This entrepreneurial venture was echoed about two centuries later by souvenir shops in Berlin creating relics from the fallen Berlin Wall. Palloy sent fragments of the Bastille to different departments, all 544 French districts, political clubs, and renowned individuals, saying, 'It was not enough for me to have been there and contributed to the destruction of this fortress's walls; I had the desire to immortalise the memory of its terror' (Lüsebrink *et al*. 1997: 118).

In the case of the Bastille and the later example of the Berlin Wall, we are not only confronted with immortalising the memory of horror but also with the multiplication and dissemination of narratives surrounding their destruction. The small replicas crafted from the stones of the demolished Bastille or the fragments of the Berlin Wall were not merely reminders of those dreadful structures; each of them, individually, constituted a narrative report of the destruction, constructed from the material of the 'dark heritage'. The fragmentation of the grand narrative into smaller pieces, capable of finding a place in the hands of the citizens of the 'new world', effectively disseminated the message that the revolutionaries sought.

Camille Mathieu (2021), in her analysis of paintings and prints depicting architectural iconoclasm during the French Revolution, focuses on Bastille representations. She notes that most depictions, including Hubert Robert's, emphasise the Bastille's monumentality, denying its romantic ruin status. The glorified images of its storming exemplify the conquering citizens' unity while conveying the monumental challenge of destroying the structure. Its architectural iconicity, represented through wholeness, signifies its ties to a decaying monarchy and affirms its inability to be repurposed. Commemorative images after the demolition reinforced ideals of unity and political transformation. The Bastille became a universal emblem of solidarity during the Revolution, depicted as unconquerable yet symbolising civic solidarity. These visual commemorations portrayed it as a monument to the ideal of revolutionary change (Mathieu 2021: 271–73).

During the French Revolution, amid the widespread destruction of artistic, religious, and historical monuments, another figure emerged who, by his word formation and reports, contributed significantly to the preservation of some of France's historical artefacts. Henri Grégoire (1750-1831), known as Abbé Grégoire, a French Catholic priest and revolutionary leader, detailed in his Mémoires the widespread destruction unleashed by an enraged mob upon every book, painting, and monument bearing the marks of religion, feudalism, or royalty. He estimated the damage inflicted on objects of religion, science, and literature to be incalculable (Grégoire 1837: 345). Grégoire coined the term 'vandalism' to encapsulate and combat this phenomenon, stating, 'Je présentasse à la Convention un rapport contre le vandalism. Je créai le mot pour tuer la chose' (I presented a report to the Convention against vandalism. I created the word to kill the phenomenon) (Grégoire 1837: 346). Grégoire was a member of the Comité d'instruction publique. He presented several reports against vandalism, 'Rapport Sur le Vandalisme,' to the National Convention of France. In these reports, in addition to raising awareness about the extensive destruction of French art and architecture, he put forward proposals for safeguarding monuments, libraries, manuscripts, titles, charters, medals, and antiquities. Concluding his initial report, 'Rapport sur les destructions opérées par le Vandalisme, et sur les moyens de le réprimer,' published in 1793, he issued a decree outlining protective measures. He urged citizens to report any acts of vandalism or dilapidation to the authorities. The punishment for those who destroyed or degraded monuments was two years of detention (Grégoire 1794: 27–28).

There was also a distinct form of 'narrative' primarily undertaken to safeguard endangered or destroyed artefacts. It took the shape of a museum founded by Alexandre Lenoir, an archaeologist dedicated to the collection and preservation of sculptures and monuments rescued from revolutionary iconoclasts. In 1795, the Musée des Monuments français (Museum of French Monuments) was established. This institution not only presented a unique narrative of historical monuments but also traced the course of unfolding revolutionary actions by decontextualising the monuments, collecting their fragments, and organising them chronologically. Lenoir did so without placing significant emphasis on their artistic values, all in service of his didactic narrative. This approach, labelled as 'the end of art' by Quatremere De Quincy, an archaeologist and architectural theorist, marked a point where the fragments of history became lifeless objects (Jokilehto 2002: 72–73).

The Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) are closely linked to the widespread and systematic looting and confiscation of historical and cultural artefacts, followed by their transportation to France. There exist numerous reports and studies on this era. The reports that describe or depict these operations are significant, shedding light on another aspect of the damage inflicted upon historical and cultural artefacts. The depiction of the arrival of Italian masterpieces in Paris and their incorporation into the Louvre is vividly captured on a porcelain vase crafted by Antoine Beranger as Napoleonic propaganda. The artwork illustrates the journey of renowned ancient sculptures from the Vatican to join the Napoleon collection, escorted by soldiers and admired by Parisians[2]. The bust of Homer, followed by the Apollo of the Belvedere, the Laocoon, and the Medici Venus, are seen entering the palace. The French Empire consciously embraced a role as successor to the Romans, who once paraded their spoils through the streets – perhaps most evidently in the symbolism of imperial eagles. In an engraving by Jean Duplessi-Bertaux, the dismantling of the four imposing bronze horses and the quadriga from St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice is depicted as they were removed from the cathedral portico in the presence of both Venetian crowds and the triumphant French army on 13 December 1797. The engraving does not portray a robust reaction against this seizure. Subsequently, in Paris, the horses were initially stored at Les Invalides before being positioned on four pillars surrounding the courtyard of the Tuileries. Ultimately, these horses were repurposed in the construction of the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel in Paris, a project commissioned by Napoleon, inspired by the Arch of Constantine in Rome. Joseph-Louis-Hippolyte Bellange's painting captures the Arc de Triomphe with the horses and

[2] L'entrée à Paris des œuvres destinées au Musée Napoléon. https://www.sevresciteceramique.fr/galerieshowroom/les-univers-de-sevres/product/vase-etrusque-a-rouleaux.html

quadriga atop it at the entrance to the Tuileries Palace courtyard. The horses, which were originally looted from Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204, remained there until 1815, when they were returned to Venice.

The use of spoliation, plunder, and the confiscation of artistic works found support among numerous French intellectuals and the press, including La Décade Philosophique journal (Chatelain 1973: 169). The transfer of European masterpieces to Paris was viewed as a bold affirmation of the city's status as a haven for freedom and the capital of art. Vivant Denon, the director of the Louvre, actively encouraged Napoleon to continue the transfer of artworks from other European nations to Paris, envisioning the development of the Museum (Ibid). However, dissenting voices, such as that of Quatremere de Quincy, opposed the requisition of artworks. He firmly believed that such cultural treasures, considered common property, should remain in their original locations, advocating against any appropriation. For Quatremere de Quincy, the essence of art lies in its preservation within its authentic context (Jokilehto 2002: 72).

The destruction and plundering of cultural heritage during the French Revolution and, subsequently, the Napoleonic Wars deployed diverse storytelling approaches. These included employing various narrative forms in newspapers and journals, introducing new terminologies, utilising a range of artistic expressions (including painting and decorative arts), and presenting narratives in recently founded museums like the Museum of French Monuments (housing fragments of destroyed monuments) and the Louvre Museum (displaying looted artworks).

Just War

Considering the right and wrong of wars, how they should be initiated and conducted, whether wars should follow certain laws, and whether they can be just has a long history. Thucydides, the Athenian historian (c. 460 – c. 400 BCE), addressed this topic from a realist perspective through a debate between the Athenian generals and the magistrates of the island of Melos (Walzer 2015: 4). In many discussions about how wars should be fought, the destruction of temples, tombs, and religious and cultural sites has also been seriously considered. Euripides, in 'The Trojan Women,' references the destruction of sanctuaries and burial places (Walzer 2015: 7).

Cicero, a Roman statesman (106 BCE-43 BCE), further developed the question of a just war by arguing that a valid cause, the authority that declares war, and the conduct of the war itself should all be just (Bellamy 2006: 18-20). Although Cicero didn't directly address the destruction of monuments and cultural assets, he recognised forums, temples, colonnades, and streets as common values for fellow citizens of the same city-state. These shared spaces created a more intimate bond among them and allowed them to proceed beyond the universal bond of our common humanity (Cicero 1913: [53] 17).

In late antiquity and the early centuries of Christianity, particularly within the Roman Empire borders, following contemplation and reassessment, the destruction of sacred temples and cultural artefacts acquired distinct philosophical and religious significance.

Marcos (2015) proposes that the integration of the destruction of temples and idols into hagiography occurred in the late fourth century. The destruction, presented as virtues or miracles of saints, served various roles in hagiographic narratives — acting as a form of sanctification, an ascetic exercise, a means of courting martyrdom, and a display of divine will and omnipotence. The demolition of sacred sites and temples became a virtuous act, symbolising the triumph of true religion over polytheistic beliefs. The depicted violence was justified as necessary, addressing the resistance of pagan gods and framing the conflict as a battle between God and the devil. Hagiography was accessible to diverse audiences, including the illiterate who heard it in church on saints' anniversaries, and significantly influenced various cultural traditions, playing a pivotal role in shaping early Christian identity by offering models for emulation (Marcos 2015: 190–191).

Augustine of Hippo (St Augustine) (354-430 CE) is considered the originator of the just war theory (Regan 2013: 14). In his magnum opus, The City of God (De Civitate Dei), Augustine explored the matter of temple destruction amid the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 CE. This historical event prompted Romans to lay blame for the calamity on the nascent Christian faith and the end of pagan worship. In his response, Augustine distinguished between temporal and eternal cities, with the City of God as a representation of the heavenly and eternal, separate from the City of Man, which signifies the earthly and temporal realms. In The City of God, he revisits the principles of just war and the Roman philosophy of warfare. He advocates for the preservation of temples, citing instances from Roman wars as examples. He admired Fabius, the conqueror of the city of Tarentum, because he abstained from making booty of the images (Augustine 1884: 9). Augustine wrote that one of Fabius' secretaries asked him what he wished to be done with the statues of gods, which had been taken in large numbers and some of them were armed. The Roman commander answered:

'Let us leave Tarentines their angry gods' (Augustine 1884: 9). Augustine wrote that he veiled his moderation under a joke. These and other instances supported his discourse on the ethics of warfare. Augustine's key perspectives on the ethics of war can be condensed into two primary concepts. Firstly, war should be conducted with the correct intentions, and secondly, war must be declared by appropriate authorities. The fundamental distinction between a just and unjust war was that a just war sought not only to reinstate peace but also to address and rectify an inflicted injury (Bellamy 2006: 27).

The concept of a just war, or how war could be legitimised and conducted, continued in the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a priest of the Dominican order and philosopher and theologian in the scholastic tradition who was influenced by St. Augustine's approach to just war. However, it wasn't until the 17th century, with the contributions of the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius and his book 'De Jure Belli ac Pacis' (1625; On the Law of War and Peace), that thoughtful contemplations on the destruction of historical monuments, religious monuments, and artistic works were placed within theoretical and legal frameworks regarding war. Completing his book amid the turmoil of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), Grotius observed that nearly every page of history is filled with instances of entire cities being razed, walls brought to the ground, and entire countries laid waste by fire and sword (Grotius 2007: 332). In his work, he endeavoured to establish guidelines for the legitimate destruction of enemy property and commodities.

He analysed various accounts of destruction and concluded that, according to the law of nations, sacred things don't receive special protection when a place is captured by an enemy. However, he argued that considering something sacred doesn't make it completely off-limits for all human purposes. Instead, sacred items are seen as a form of public property dedicated to essential general purposes. He explored historical and legal perspectives, noting that sacred things like temples and statues can be repurposed for secular uses in times of war under specific conditions. His argument, based on ancient Greek and Roman examples, is that under certain circumstances like a wartime need, the practical use of sacred items can be justified. This includes sepulchral structures but respect should be maintained to avoid disrespectful actions towards the deceased (Grotius 2007: 332–333). He initiated a crucial discussion on the preservation of the cultural property and monuments of the enemy, trying to categorise the places and assets that should be safeguarded from destruction. He argued that certain elements did not contribute to war, nor did they bolster or prolong it, so reason itself dictated that these elements should be spared even in the midst of the heat of war. He turned to Polybius, who denounced the destruction of things that neither diminished the enemy's strength nor enhanced that of the destroyer, labelling it as brutal rage and madness. Examples of such items included porticos, temples, statues, and all other refined works and monuments of art. Additionally, he cited Cicero, who had praised Marcellus for sparing the public and private structures of Syracuse, portraying the act as if Marcellus had arrived with his army to protect them rather than to conquer the city by force (Grotius 2007: 366–367).

Emerich de Vattel, the 18th-century Swiss philosopher and jurist, reflected further on the destruction of cultural and religious buildings in the context of the legal frameworks regarding the conduct of war. In his Le *Droit des gens* (The Law of Nations, 1785), he argued that it is a duty of every nation to labour for the preservation of other nations and for securing them from ruin and destruction (Vattel 2011: 135). In Chapter IX 'The Right Of War, with regard to Things Belonging to the Enemy', he wrote that wanton destruction of public monuments, temples, tombs, statues, paintings, etc., is absolutely condemned as never being conducive to the lawful object of war (Vattel 2011: 370).

Although the theoretical discussions of 17th and 18th-century thinkers on just war and their references to the protection and destruction of cultural and historical heritage had no impact on the fate of cultural heritage during the Napoleonic wars, these reflections laid strong foundations for the development of philosophical, religious, and legal thoughts. This culminated in the late 19th century and continued into the 20th century with international laws concerning the protection of cultural properties during times of war. Arguably, of course, the concept of a just war is another dimension of propaganda.

From World Wars to the Digital Age

By the close of the 19th and dawn of the 20th centuries, a set of international norms and established ethics had emerged concerning the safeguarding of cultural, religious, and artistic sites and objects during armed conflicts. Key documents contributing to these standards included the Lieber Code (1863), the Declaration of Brussels (1874), the Oxford Manual (1880), the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, and the Roerich Pact (1935). In this context, it is unsurprising that the protection of heritage became a component of war propaganda, with opposing parties in the conflict accusing each other of committing barbaric actions against historic monuments and landmarks. During the devastation of Reims Cathedral in the First World War, the French characterised it as 'Joan of Arc in

the midst of Germans, standing there lonely as their prisoner' (Landrieux 1920: 21). The Germans, in turn, asserted that it was an accidental targeting error, a claim deemed unacceptable by the French, who likened the Cathedral's significance to the emergence of the Pyramids from the desert (Ibid: 18). On the other side, the Germans announced that they had a programme for safeguarding historic monuments and art. Paul Clemen, the German art and architectural historian, was appointed to oversee the protection of art on both the Western and Eastern fronts, and he subsequently published two reports on the protection of art and the Belgian monuments during the war (Clemen 1919; Clemen 1923). The destruction of historical buildings and cathedrals in France and Belgium was also reflected in the new medium of British propaganda posters, which compared the Germans to and identified them as the Huns (Buxton 2019; Schuhmacher 2019). Conflicting narratives about the destruction and protection of cultural heritage had entered into wartime propaganda.

During the Second World War, the United States implemented a protection plan for cultural and artistic heritage in war-torn areas of Europe. On August 20, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, commonly known as the Roberts Commission. This commission was tasked with developing protection strategies both during the war and in the post-conflict period (Roberts Commission 1946).

The consequence of the extensive destruction of cultural heritage during World War II is found in its most refined form within the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict[3]. This convention places a strong emphasis on safeguarding both movable and immovable 'cultural property' as well as the locations that serve as its repositories and refuges. Moreover, it transcends these boundaries, elevating cultural heritage to a matter of global concern and value. In its preamble, the convention explicitly states that damage to the cultural property of any people is equivalent to damage inflicted upon the cultural property of all 'mankind'—an exceptionally liberal and global conceptualisation of the values inherent in cultural heritage. This might be considered the paramount message conveyed in the post-World War II era, predating even the establishment of the 1972 World Heritage Convention and its articulation of 'universal values'. The pivotal observation is that the globalisation of cultural heritage was one of the results of World War II, transforming heritage into a universally esteemed value. Hence, it is unsurprising that safeguarding cultural heritage, along with reporting on its destruction, has evolved into a strategic priority amid conflicts. President Roosevelt's initiatives during WWII foreshadow this, highlighting that the attention or neglect of cultural heritage has become a strategic consideration for major powers engaged in conflicts. Therefore, Cultural Property Protection (CPP) has been gradually integrated into tactical, operational, and strategic military frameworks to aid in the achievement of military objectives (Berends 2020: 6). In fact, it is this newly gained strategic importance in furthering military objectives that provides a fresh perspective on reporting and even overlooking and ignoring the destruction of cultural heritage. As Rouhani and Finlayson discuss in this book, one of the reasons that extensive damage to cultural heritage and historical cities during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) did not receive international attention and media coverage was that Western military powers, due to their lack of direct involvement, did not find strategic values in protecting or focusing on cultural heritage in that conflict, which should be considered together with the lack of digital communication and monitoring technologies as well as the absence of independent and robust civil societies (Rouhani and Finlayson 2025).

Due to the widespread availability of mass communication tools and media, particularly television, reports on the destruction of cultural heritage reached people's homes. In contrast to the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s, which seemed remote and involved combatants without Western favour, the Balkans conflict, situated at Europe's heart, received extensive attention. The conflict drew focus not only from NATO and the global community, but also public opinion, media outlets, and television broadcasting, which meticulously documented details, including deliberate cultural heritage destruction and cleansing. The destruction of the historic Stari Most bridge (the Old Bridge) in Mostar played a pivotal role in the destruction of cultural heritage during the Balkans War in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was captured by a freelance Scottish cameraman, and its images were repeatedly featured in various reports (Walasek and Carlton 2016: 51). The collapse of the stones of this historic Ottoman bridge into the river was likened to the shattering of hopes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Simultaneously, within the public discourse, questions arose about whether the media's focus on the destruction of historical structures translated to neglecting the suffering people and giving precedence to the preservation of stones over human lives (Williams 1993). Cultural cleansing and widespread destruction of cultural heritage in the Balkan wars were also examined by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, leading to several convictions. However, state-controlled media on the other side, namely in Serbia and Croatia, played a significant role in spreading nationalist and

[3] https://en.unesco.org/protecting-heritage/convention-and-protocols/1954-convention

ethnic propaganda, disseminating disinformation, and contributing to cultural cleansing (Thompson 1999).

As we stepped into the 21st century, the media began to portray the destruction of cultural heritage in more complex and detailed ways. The demolition of Buddha statues by the Taliban in 2001, captured on television cameras, during a period when social media had not yet become widespread, vividly showcased the immense influence and global reach of images depicting the destruction of symbols, disseminating them to every corner of the world. From the time Mullah Omar issued the fatwa for the destruction of the statues in February 2001 until their practical demolition in March, the Taliban exploited a unique opportunity to attract worldwide attention to both themselves and the situation in Afghanistan. They were approached by various parties, countries, and heritage organisations, urging them to prevent the destruction of the statues, even offering financial incentives in exchange for their preservation. The Taliban seized this moment to criticise the international community, claiming that it had forsaken the Afghan people and overlooked their long-term suffering while showing readiness to save the statues. With the passage of time and following their destruction, the Bamiyan Buddhas have, through journalistic accounts, transformed into an emblem representing contemporary cultural terrorism. As Klein (2018) has analysed, in 70 percent of media reports, the original historical context of the site has been supplanted by the focus on its destruction, ultimately altering the place's historical importance. The Taliban's intentional decision to record and share the demolition of the Buddhas globally played a key role in this transformation (Klein 2018).

The replacement of narratives emphasising cultural significance with narratives focused on destruction, especially in the context of deliberate actions by ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), became more prominent. This shift was largely attributed to the widespread use of social media and ISIS's deployment of advanced propaganda techniques in the public domain. In this process, the discourse surrounding the destruction of cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq took precedence over historical and cultural narratives regarding the affected objects and local communities. Notably, mainstream media also transformed ISIS's cultural destruction into a symbol of 'terrorism'. They faced limitations in showing images of human rights violations and war crimes, such as beheading due to editorial rules and guidelines, but readily disseminated images of the destruction and explosions at cultural sites to illustrate the extent of ISIS's violence. Cartoons equated the destruction of ancient statues by ISIS to killing and beheading people.

The destruction of cultural heritage by ISIS in Syria and Iraq, as well as the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban, has been characterised by its highly performative nature. These acts make extensive use of new media tools and technologies to disseminate complex messages within the framework of the modern world. In the case of ISIS, it's clear that the group employed high-quality, meticulously staged imagery, which was then repeatedly distributed by social media users and mainstream media. Essentially, ISIS's primary arena for this propaganda was the realm of media and visual productions utilising cultural heritage, rather than the cultural heritage itself or its content.

A paradoxical aspect is that while one of the goals of both the Taliban and ISIS was to portray themselves as religious iconoclasts revolting against idols and shattering them, they achieved this through image production and reliance on the performative aspects of their actions. By leveraging new media technologies and networked social media, ISIS pursued multiple objectives. These included bolstering their power, cultivating an aura of invincibility, propagating a fundamentalist ideology and recruiting new members (Smith *et al*. 2016), diminishing the local populations, advocating scorched-earth policies, and opposing liberal and humanistic global values. However, the focus of most cultural heritage experts and archaeologists has primarily been on analysing the content of media productions and what has been destroyed, rather than delving into the how and why of these productions. They have not fully recognised ISIS as a group that employs modern tools to produce hyperreality for the dissemination and multiplication of violence (Harmanşah 2015). Also, in the case of the Taliban's actions, rather than interpreting them as a 'medieval' and iconoclastic approach, it is crucial to explain them within the context of global modernity and the use of media tools (Flood 2002).

Comparison with the intentional destruction of Sufi heritage by some Salafist branches in Libya and Tunisia during the same period is intriguing. While reports of Sufi heritage destruction did find their way into the media and some international heritage organisations (ICOMOS 2012; ICOMOS 2013; United Nations News 2014), the attention given to these acts remained predominantly within the realm of local media and social media platforms utilised by the local population. It never garnered the same level of widespread attention as the international mainstream media coverage of the highly performative acts of heritage destruction carried out by ISIS in Syria and Iraq. One undeniable reason for this discrepancy was the comparatively less performative and staged nature of the destruction in Libya and Tunisia when compared to the operations carried out by ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

The emergence of new social media, characterised by its digital nature, interactivity, global connectivity, and rapid dissemination of viral information, has transformed it into an effective propaganda tool. This transformation extends beyond non-state actors, as even state actors have harnessed new media to utilise cultural heritage as part of their propaganda campaigns. A noteworthy example is President Trump's January 2020 tweet, in which he issued a threat, indicating that the US had identified fifty-two Iranian cultural sites, some of which were described by him as 'at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture.' The message conveyed that the US would swiftly and forcefully strike these targets if Tehran were to attack Americans or US assets in response to the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), by the USA in Iraq (BBC 2020).

Nonetheless, the use of social media and digital technologies extends beyond governmental and non-governmental actors; the wider audience extensively employs them for storytelling, dissemination, and expressing views and emotions during crises, including the destruction of cultural heritage. The widespread accessibility of social media and the extensive capability to generate user content while contributing to the democratisation of narratives pose challenges. These platforms, influenced by algorithms developed by major corporations, have the potential to widely spread misinformation and fake news, polarising the world and accentuating disparities between the global North and South. They can also deepen cultural, social, political, economic, religious, racial, and gender divides. A recent example was the fire at the iconic medieval Notre-Dame Catholic Cathedral in Paris in 2019, which was proven not to be intentional. During the incident, users shared images and videos of the Cathedral on various social networks. Subsequently, millions of user reactions were recorded across different platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (later X), YouTube, and others. However, in the initial hours and days, these platforms also became sources of fake news about the cause of the fire, attributing it to Muslims, diminishing Christian and ethical beliefs in Europe, and mentioning certain political motivations, among other reasons (Kosowski and Luzar 2020; Арбатская and Борисова 2022). However, it also exposed a profound imbalance in coverage between the Notre-Dame fire, which received extensive attention and echoed widely on social media, and other incidents of heritage fires, destruction, bombings, and violence occurring concurrently worldwide. These events often involved issues of extremism, terrorism, or the impact on the lives of underprivileged and ordinary individuals and citizens (Pruden 2019).

Conclusion

Examining different examples from ancient times to the digital age, this chapter discusses how the narrative of cultural heritage destruction, using various storytelling tools in each era, has evolved into a significant element in propaganda and the presentation of power relations and violence.

In ancient Mesopotamia, the documentation of heritage destruction found expression in monuments housed within royal palaces and archives, a direct symbol of power. These monuments held substantial significance for other civilisations. They were often seized during later wars, even centuries apart, and redeployed to project authority.

Ancient Rome expanded the propaganda audience, situating memorials portraying the pillaging of foreign cultures in public spaces for imperial citizens' consumption. The impact of such narratives was not limited to ancient times and persisted into the modern era to be used in nationalist narratives. A notable example of this is the destruction of Ctesiphon during the Arab Muslim conquest and its reflection in the formation of the modern Iranian nationalist movement.

During the French Revolution, the destruction of cultural and historical heritage was reported not only in works of art and paintings, but also in newspapers, journals, and emerging forms of media, such as the creation of small-scale replicas using the same materials of the destroyed buildings, in the case of Bastille, for instance. It was as if the destroyed structure was transformed into a medium for the replication and dissemination of its own destruction narrative. A similar occurrence transpired centuries later in the sale of souvenirs made from pieces of the Berlin Wall. Writers and intellectuals had diverse reactions, spanning from praise to condemnation with new terms like 'vandalism' emerging. In the Napoleonic Wars, not only did some French intellectuals, writers, and artists attempt to present a narrative that portrayed France as the cultural and artistic centre of Europe and even the world, but new institutions like the Louvre Museum also served this narrative – a role that would grow in the national museums of the 19th century.

The destruction of cultural heritage, besides being employed for the expansion of ideology, power propaganda, and the emergence of nationalist movements, laid the foundations for philosophical and legal reflections on the laws of war and its limitations. From Late Roman writers to modern thinkers, profound reflections on the destruction of historical, cultural, and artistic works took place, eventually echoed in international legal documents. From

the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the protection of cultural heritage gradually became a relatively accepted global value, reflected in international policies. Since then, the protection of cultural heritage has also evolved into a strategic objective, with some warring parties in conflicts considering protective measures for cultural property as part of their military strategies, and so also reflected in propaganda materials.

The advancement of communication technologies, initially television, introduced a new dimension to the narrative of the destruction of cultural heritage, bringing it from the public sphere even closer into the homes of citizens. This shift enabled such narratives to have a deeper impact and play a more strategic role in weaponising cultural heritage. Extremist groups like the Taliban, and especially ISIS were well aware of the power and characteristics of new media, particularly social media. They effectively utilised these platforms to expand and disseminate their performative and staged propaganda. New media, characterised by its interactivity, global connectivity, and the rapid and viral spread of information, elevated cultural heritage from a historical artefact to an object for consumption in propaganda, amplifying the narrative of violence and power.

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Chapter 15.
State vs. Non-State Led Media: A Comparative Study of Reporting Cultural Heritage Destruction in Egypt

Mohamed W. Fareed

Introduction

The current condition of Cairo cannot be accurately depicted without acknowledging the ongoing cycle of construction and demolition. Since July 2020, significant demolitions have taken place, particularly in areas like the Northern and Southern Cemeteries, both integral parts of UNESCO-listed Historic Cairo. These demolitions are making way for a 17.5 km elevated highway, a project that threatens the integrity of this historically significant site. Despite assurances from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities that only non-registered monuments would be affected, the reality is much more complex. The official count of registered Islamic monuments in Egypt, currently at 774, severely underrepresents the nation's true cultural wealth. This discrepancy highlights a broader issue of neglect and inadequate policy, as countless potential heritage sites remain unprotected and vulnerable to destruction (Elshahed 2023).

This trend extends beyond Cairo, resonating throughout Egypt. The failure to safeguard twentieth-century heritage raises questions about the recognition and preservation of modern architectural achievements in Muslim societies. Is the reluctance of the Egyptian state to protect these structures indicative of a broader disregard for Egypt's place in modern history? Does it suggest that unless tied to tourism, the remnants of modernity are deemed unworthy of preservation? This chapter provides an overview of the coverage of cultural heritage destruction in Egypt over the past decade by state-led and non-state-led media, with a focus on recent examples. By examining these instances, the chapter aims to trace a spectrum of approaches to reporting on heritage-related issues. State-led media outlets often align their narratives with government agendas, potentially downplaying or rationalising instances of destruction, particularly if tied to state projects. Conversely, non-state media, including independent journalists and advocacy groups, tend to adopt a more critical stance, highlighting overlooked sites and documenting negligence or intentional damage.

Gentrification, Commercialisation and Cultural Erosion: How much can you lose In a decade?

The Egyptian government's modernisation plan involves the demolition of historic tombs, cultural centres, and residential neighbourhoods in Cairo, sparking concerns about the loss of the city's rich history and the displacement of long-standing residents due to the construction of highways and high-rise buildings. The plan includes the establishment of the new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, which necessitated the demolition of working-class neighbourhoods near Darb, as well as the creation of a $59 billion new capital city, accessible by high-speed trains and surrounded by a network of immaculate roads. The construction of roads, bridges, and major projects such as the new capital, is typically overseen by Egypt's powerful military. The proliferation of military-led projects has given rise to a sarcastic phrase, 'the generals' taste,' implying a drab boxiness, a monotony occasionally spritzed with glitz (Yee 2023).

Close to downtown Cairo, there exists a district known as the Maspero Triangle, extending about a kilometre from the banks of the Nile into one of the city's historically significant thoroughfares. Until recently, it housed approximately 18,000 residents. However, in 2023, the government initiated forceful evictions, cutting off essential services like water and electricity, and subsequently demolishing buildings. The district's origins trace back to the 1400s, with landmarks like the Sultan Abu al-'Ila Mosque, and its major structures were erected in the 19th century, evolving through generations. Informal construction by residents, often without formal deeds, gradually became part of Cairo's architectural and cultural heritage. These buildings featured intricate facades, marble staircases, and palatial apartments. Today, the Maspero Triangle resembles a scene of devastation, with only a few buildings remaining amidst rubble and dust, reminiscent of post-war photographs. The population explosion in Cairo during the 1960s led to housing shortage, resulting in rapid urbanisation and the growth of informal settlements. The Maspero

Triangle embodies this history and the sociocultural richness born from adapting to economic challenges. Originally owned by a wealthy Ottoman nobleman, the district passed through various hands until it was sold to Kuwaiti and Saudi investors. However, deals overlooked residents who sold shares in plots as well as rent-control laws protecting inhabitants from eviction and rent hikes. Subsequent presidents implemented measures leading to neglect and, eventually, plans for redevelopment, including the ambitious 'Cairo 2050' project, which envisioned a Cairo resembling Dubai. In 2016, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi announced the elimination of unsafe settlements within two years, with the Maspero Triangle as a primary target. While some argue that parts of the district were indeed unsafe, its organic development holds cultural significance. Traditional practices - such as the musaharati - the person who wakes people for pre-dawn meals during Ramadan in Islamic cultures – and intergenerational skill transmission thrived in its alleys. Despite relocation offers, many residents remain sceptical about the promise of returning to a rebuilt Maspero. The government's emphasis on uniformity overlooks the value of Cairo's randomness, which is reminiscent of discovering ancient ruins in Rome (El Rashidi 2018).

For decades, successive Egyptian rulers have attempted to relocate houseboats on the Nile, but owners have negotiated with the authorities. However, over the past five years, the government has increased fees, changed regulations, and ceased renewing or issuing houseboat licenses. Residents claim that authorities have been pushing to replace houseboats with floating cafes and restaurants, and a letter sent to residents last year indicated that new licenses would only be issued for commercial boats. Officials are now using the lack of licenses to justify demolitions despite residents claiming they were denied the opportunity to renew those licenses. The heritage represented by these houseboats, which has historical and cultural significance, is not necessarily in line with the government's desired image. The government has hinted that the houseboats were used for 'immoral' purposes, and the demolition of these houseboats is part of a broader trend of heritage destruction in Egypt, which has raised concerns and drawn condemnation from various organisations and individuals (Yee *et al*. 2022).

'Mamsha Ahl Misr: Egypt's First Modern Walkway Overlooking the Nile', also known as the Walkway of Egypt's People, is a new two-level promenade along the Nile Corniche, spanning 54 kilometres from Cairo to Giza. It is designed to offer a unique experience for both locals and tourists, featuring a variety of amenities such as restaurants, cafes, retail shops, and entertainment areas. The project, launched in 2019 under the supervision of Egypt's Ministry of Housing's New Urban Communities Authority, aims to enhance the touristic appeal of the Cairo Downtown area and promote urban development (Makary 2022).

In another instance, the restoration of several historic mosques in Cairo, including the Sayyida Nafisa and Al Aqmar mosques, has sparked controversy among architectural experts who criticise the alterations for eroding cultural heritage. Issues raised include the removal of significant elements such as a silver door and chandeliers, the removal of historical plaques, and the addition of new decorative inscriptions that do not align with the mosques' original styles. Critics argue that these changes distort the heritage of these centuries-old sites, likening them more to redevelopment than restoration. Furthermore, concerns have been raised over the removal of green spaces surrounding the mosques, as well as the involvement of funding from Baha'is and also Shia Muslims in the restoration efforts, which can be seen as controversial in a predominantly Sunni country like Egypt. Despite assertions by officials that the renovations were carried out with careful planning to preserve heritage, the controversy underscores broader debates about preserving Egypt's architectural identity amidst modernisation efforts and foreign funding sources (Kamal 2023).

For decades, difficult heritage, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the expulsion of Egyptian Jews, has been largely overlooked by authorities. The Egyptian Jewish population has dwindled from around 100,000 in the 1930s to fewer than a hundred today due to various factors, including political tensions. What will happen to the remaining Jewish heritage, including tangible and intangible assets, such as the more than 13 synagogues still standing in Cairo alone? Who will care for them in the near future, and if restored, how will they be utilised?

The Egyptian government is giving conflicting signals regarding the Jewish community. President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi voices support for a revival of local Jewry, inviting back Jews who were expelled after Israel's 1956 invasion. Efforts have been made to preserve Jewish heritage sites, such as restoring the Eliyahu HaNavi synagogue in Alexandria. However, recent events highlight the ambiguity surrounding the government's stance. On February 14th, 2020, around 180 Jews of Alexandrian origin returned to rededicate the synagogue. Despite the festive occasion, security measures were stringent, reflecting concerns about potential threats from extremists. While the restoration of the synagogue shows a commitment to preserving Jewish heritage, the authorities appeared reluctant to fully embrace the celebration. Restrictions were imposed on attendees, and even the American ambassador, who is Jewish, was barred from attending

the Torah reading. Despite significant investments in restoring Jewish sites, such as the Religious Jewish School of Moses Maimonides, which remains closed to the public, there is a lingering ambivalence towards Jews and their heritage in Egypt. Synagogues and Jewish cemeteries are often locked, and there is a lack of signage directing people to these sites. Many Egyptians with Jewish ancestry still hesitate to openly acknowledge their heritage (The Economist 2020).

In another vein, The Egyptian Gazette's 2023 report highlights a grassroots initiative in Alexandria where a residence in the Labban district has been opened to the public to preserve historical memory and educate the community about the notorious crimes of Rayya and Sakina. This initiative serves as a tangible reminder of a dark chapter in Alexandria's history and marks a significant legal milestone, as Rayya and Sakina were the first women in modern Egypt to face the death penalty. By engaging the community with their heritage, the project fosters a sense of identity and continuity, promotes cultural tourism, and transforms the narrative of the site from one of horror to one of education and remembrance. This approach is similar to international examples, such as London's Jack the Ripper tours, where sites of historical crimes are preserved and interpreted to educate the public and stimulate dialogue about heritage preservation (The Egyptian Gazette 2023).

The Asphalt Fever of Cairo: What can you lose for a few centimetres?

Cairo's historic City of the Dead, dating back to the 7th century and encompassing significant cultural and architectural treasures, is facing imminent destruction due to aggressive government road construction projects. This vast necropolis, spread across approximately 8 square kilometres, holds tombs and mausoleums of prominent figures from Egypt's past, including royalty, politicians, scholars, and writers. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, the City of the Dead is now under threat as bulldozers continue to demolish sections of this historic site without public debate or transparency regarding the criteria for demolition. Concerned citizens, architects, and historians have opposed the destruction, highlighting the loss of a 1,400-year-old heritage and urging the preservation of these irreplaceable monuments. Despite efforts to propose alternative plans and legal action, including an administrative complaint filed against responsible authorities, the relentless demolition persists. In response to mounting criticism on social media, President Sisi has proposed the construction of a new cemetery to relocate the remains of historical figures. However, details regarding its location and criteria remain uncertain, leaving the fate of Cairo's cultural legacy hanging in the balance (Español 2022).

Noshokaty (2022) reported a seminar and photo exhibition titled 'Contemporary Cemetery Architecture in Egypt: Value and Challenges', organised by the group 'Safeguard of Cairo's Historic Cemeteries' in opposition to the government's plan to relocate some of Cairo's cemeteries for road development. While the opposition emphasised the profound significance of these cemeteries as integral parts of Egypt's tangible and intangible heritage, historian Hossam Ismail traced the evolution of Cairo's cemeteries, highlighting their role in the establishment of modern Egypt. Architect and photographer Alia Nassar underscored the cultural continuity of Cairo's cemeteries, drawing parallels between ancient Egyptian burial practices and contemporary customs. However, tensions arose during the event when Hany al Fekki, a figure involved in government development projects, outlined plans to demolish non-historic cemeteries, sparking concerns among attendees about the potential impact on Cairo's cultural heritage. This aligns with the current narrative of the government, which emphasises that the demolished cemeteries are not considered as listed heritage, ignoring their importance within its urban fabric.

Saint Catherine: Even Natural Heritage is not safe

The Sinai Peninsula, situated at the crossroads of Africa and Asia, boasts a rich tapestry of cultural and natural heritage that spans millennia. Its rugged landscapes, ancient ruins, and sacred sites have captivated travellers and historians alike for centuries. From the iconic Mount Sinai, believed to be the site where Moses received the Ten Commandments, to the vibrant Bedouin traditions passed down through generations, Sinai's heritage holds profound significance for both local communities and global admirers. Amidst this wealth of cultural and natural treasures, recent developments, such as the Great Transfiguration project, raise questions about the preservation of Sinai's unique identity and ecological integrity. According to the Egyptian Gazette: 'The Great Transfiguration project, situated in St. Catherine's Monastery on the Sinai Peninsula, stands as a beacon of world-class development aimed at transforming the region into a premier destination for spiritual, therapeutic, and environmental tourism under the directives of President Abdel Fattah El Sisi (Egyptian Gazette 2023).

This monumental endeavour, funded by the New Urban Communities Authority and meticulously executed by various governmental bodies, including the Central Agency for Urbanisation, Ministry of Housing, and Ministry of Tourism, seeks to elevate the sacred

mountain area of St. Catherine's into a globally renowned tourist hotspot. With a focus on preserving the area's natural beauty and historical significance, the project encompasses the refurbishment and construction of eco-lodges, a peace park, visitor centres, residential compounds, and spiritual sanctuaries, all adhering to international environmental standards. Additionally, the development includes infrastructure enhancements such as road networks and airport upgrades, ensuring seamless access for visitors. Through meticulous planning and collaboration, the Great Transfiguration project is set to revolutionise the Sinai Peninsula, offering an unparalleled experience that harmonises spiritual enrichment with luxurious amenities. This marks a significant milestone in the region's journey towards genuine, world-class development (Wael 2023).

Nuria Sanz, Officer in Charge of the UNESCO Office in Cairo, along with a delegation, embarked on a three-day visit starting on August 2023 to the monastery of St. Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai, joined by representatives from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The visit encompassed exploration of St. Catherine's monastery, one of the world's oldest Christian monasteries and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2002, as well as the ongoing Great Transfiguration project nearby. Sanz and her team toured various significant sites within the monastery, including the sacred valley housing the biblical Burning Bush, Moses's well, and the Church of the Transfiguration, as well as its museum and library, renowned for its collection of rare manuscripts. The delegation witnessed preservation efforts undertaken by the monks and development partners to conserve the monastery's legacy. Additionally, they examined the Great Transfiguration project, aimed at creating a religious, environmental and therapeutic tourism destination, with plans for infrastructure development and conservation of the surrounding desert land. The visit highlighted collaborative efforts involving governmental bodies, religious institutions, Bedouin tribes, and local authorities to ensure the lasting preservation of the site's heritage and spirit, with proposals from UNESCO Cairo Regional Office to enhance the project's sustainability and establish a permanent training centre specialising in interpretation and local economic development (Sanaa' 2023).

On the other hand, the international and non-state media highlighted the project as the backdrop of the COP27 Conference in the Sinai Peninsula. The Egyptian authorities, amidst their ambitious Grand Transfiguration project aimed at creating a mega-tourism hub, have faced scrutiny for their treatment of the local environment and heritage. Reports reveal disturbing incidents, including the alleged burial of stray dogs and the displacement of communities, raising concerns among locals and rights groups about the irreversible damage being inflicted upon the region's natural beauty and historical sites. Despite boasting development initiatives, such as the construction of luxury accommodations and tourist facilities, critics argue that these projects threaten the traditional way of life for Bedouin tribes and exacerbate environmental degradation. Moreover, the lack of consultation with local residents and disregard for UNESCO World Heritage status exacerbates tensions, reflecting broader issues of governance and accountability in the pursuit of economic growth at the expense of cultural and ecological preservation (Arab Digest 2023).

In her report for the Middle East Monitor (2022), Amelia Smith highlighted the harrowing story of Um Ibrahim, whose husband was arrested and tortured to death, which was followed by the disappearance of her 14-year-old son. This sheds light on the severe human rights abuses rampant in the region, overshadowed by an entrenched media blackout imposed by the Egyptian government. These atrocities, including forcible displacement, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances, are emblematic of the ruthless tactics employed in the name of counterterrorism. While the international spotlight momentarily shifted towards the UN Climate Change Summit, COP27, held in Sinai in November 2022, concerns over the region's environmental and cultural heritage persist. The government's aggressive development projects, such as the Grand Transfiguration project in Saint Catherine's Protectorate (a national park), continue to raise alarms among locals who fear irreversible damage to their traditional way of life and ecological devastation. Despite promises of economic prosperity, there remains a lack of accountability for human rights violations. The results of COP27 regarding the Sinai and its local communities' heritage and well-being require scrutiny, especially in light of the marginalised voices from Sinai at the summit. This underscores the urgent need for ongoing global attention and advocacy for the Sinai's marginalised communities to ensure their concerns are addressed and their rights protected.

Islamic, Pharaonic or Both? A game between National Identity and Nation Branding

Egyptian national identity is a complex tapestry woven from competing historical narratives, with the Pharaonic and Islamic strands often at odds. This dichotomy is evident on the nation's banknotes, where imagery of both ancient Pharaohs and Islamic symbols coexist, reflecting a centuries-old debate over which heritage holds greater significance. The tension between these two identities has been exacerbated by political manoeuvring, particularly under the current Sisi regime, which seeks to appropriate elements of

ancient Egyptian glory for its own legitimacy. Central to this dispute is the question of whether Egypt's pre-Islamic past was a period of ignorance, as Islamic teachings suggest, or a pinnacle of civilisation, as celebrated by proponents of Pharaonic heritage. Attempts to reconcile this paradox have spawned extensive apologetics, with religious scholars offering reassurances that the Pharaohs will not be condemned for their lack of Islamic faith. Yet, interpretations of scripture often portray ancient Egyptians negatively, further complicating efforts to reclaim their historical legacy. Nationalists argue that Egypt's negative portrayal in biblical and Quranic narratives was perpetuated by historical enemies and internalised by later generations, leading to a loss of appreciation for its glorious past. They advocate for a revival of Pharaonic heritage as a means of reclaiming national greatness. Meanwhile, the Arab-Islamic conquest of Egypt in the seventh century is often viewed more favourably despite historical complexities and tensions, particularly with the country's Christian minority. The official narrative presents the conquest as a liberation from Byzantine oppression, downplaying the subsequent imposition of taxes on non-Muslims and the suppression of revolts.

Since the 1950s, Egyptian identity has been closely linked with Arabism, particularly under Gamal Abdel Nasser, who championed pan-Arab unity and steered Egypt away from European influence. However, the failure of Arabism, exemplified by military defeats and internal strife, have led to a re-evaluation of national identity. President Sisi's slogan, 'Tahiya Masr' (Long Live Egypt), reflects a shift towards emphasising Egyptian nationalism over Arabism or political Islam. This shift is evident in the state's promotion of Pharaonic heritage through grand cultural events and architectural motifs. Critics view these spectacles as attempts to consolidate Sisi's power and suppress dissent, while others see them as celebrations of Egypt's rich cultural heritage and a rejection of Islamist ideologies. The role of women in these events, often in defiance of traditional Islamic norms, is particularly noteworthy (Abdelhadi 2023).

Egyptian efforts to repatriate and preserve Pharaonic artefacts have significantly shaped the value and significance attributed to these iconic yet contested objects. These endeavours are not merely about reclaiming physical items but also about asserting national identity and cultural heritage. The process involves navigating colonial and European perspectives that have historically emphasised Pharaonic heritage, often overshadowing Egypt's Islamic and more recent history. This approach can be traced back to the colonial era when European powers appropriated and highlighted Egypt's ancient past to serve their own cultural and scientific agendas. Consequently, the return of these artefacts is not only a matter of rectifying historical wrongs but also a critical component of modern Egypt's nation branding and identity. Numerous studies have examined these dynamics, highlighting the complex interplay between historical narratives, cultural identity, and international politics, underscoring the need to reference these works to fully understand the broader implications of artefact repatriation (Abou Elatta 2022; Bialostocka 2021).

The Pharaohs' Golden Parade, held on April 3, 2021, is a prime example of the Egyptian state's promotion of its ancient heritage. This grand event, commemorating the opening of the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, involved the meticulously planned transfer of 22 mummies, including Pharaohs and Queens, from Tahrir Square to the new museum, showcasing Egypt's historical grandeur. Extensive media coverage, especially by state and pro-regime outlets, framed the event as a celebration of Egypt's glorious past, aiming to instil national pride and continuity with ancient civilisation and portraying the leadership as rightful stewards of this legacy. Politically, the parade served as a powerful propaganda tool for President Sisi's regime, projecting stability, grandeur, and modernity by aligning the government with the legacy of the Pharaohs. This alignment was intended to bolster national unity and support for the regime while diverting attention from socio-political challenges. The parade also had significant promotional implications, strategically boosting Egypt's tourism industry, which had suffered due to political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. The international broadcast of the event highlighted Egypt's unique cultural attractions, signalling the country's readiness to welcome visitors and its capability to preserve and celebrate its heritage. Notably, the prominent role of women in the ceremonies, often in defiance of traditional Islamic norms, showcased a modern, progressive image of Egypt, reflecting the state's broader narrative of promoting a secular, culturally rich nation moving forward while honouring its past. However, critics argued that the parade was an elaborate distraction from pressing issues such as human rights abuses, economic hardships, and political repression. They contended that the heavy emphasis on Pharaonic imagery was a calculated move to consolidate Sisi's power by invoking nationalist sentiment and historical grandeur, thereby suppressing dissent and criticism (Setiyono 2023).

Future of Tourism in Egypt?

In recent years, Egypt's tourism sector has faced significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. This trend is anticipated to persist and potentially intensify, particularly with increasing

competition from neighbouring countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia. According to Saudi Vision 2030, the number of international tourists visiting Saudi Arabia is expected to exceed those visiting Egypt. This shift reflects the evolving national branding of Saudi Arabia, which has undergone significant changes in the past decade under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The fabricated security pretexts of President Sisi's administration are causing Egypt to forfeit its standing as a leading cultural and leisure destination, once renowned globally for its unparalleled and breath-taking scenery. A recent incident involved Will Sonbuchner, also known as Sonny Side, a prominent creator of street food content on YouTube and Facebook. Upon arrival in Egypt, his photography gear intended for filming a series of street food episodes was seized. Throughout his stay, he was continuously monitored by security forces. Will Sonbuchner, boasting over 8 million followers on YouTube and nearly 2 million on Facebook, is among the most celebrated street food content producers. Sonbuchner uploaded the first video of his Egypt trip on April 5 of 2023, titled 'EGYPT Food Tour! WORST Place to Shoot in Africa!' This series introduction has amassed nearly two million views since release. Another video, titled 'NIGHTMARE Egypt Food Tour!! POLICE Shut Us Down!!' garnered over 4.1 million views in less than a week. He mentioned that his equipment was confiscated upon arrival, prompting him to use his iPhone instead. He underwent a four-hour interrogation by police who seized his cameras, expressing concerns about his purpose in the country and repeated photography and filming. Sonbuchner noted that his walkie-talkie, typically used for communication among photographers, was confiscated, as authorities feared its potential use in case of civil unrest or internet shutdowns. Despite obtaining filming permission from the State Information Service and providing evidence of authorisation, he was barred from filming and using his equipment. His encounters with Egyptian police persisted as he filmed using his phone. Initially, the police reviewed his clips but later demanded deletion, deeming the images substandard. Sonbuchner concluded by acknowledging the kindness of Egyptians, while remaining honest about his experience and the mistreatment faced by photojournalists and photographers, equating it to criminal treatment. Sonbuchner's viral videos prompted others with negative experiences in Egypt to share their stories in the comments, exacerbating the scandal and damaging Egypt's reputation further (Middle East Monitor 2022).

This is not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern, where security measures have tarnished Egypt's tourism reputation. Previous incidents include the harassment faced by American YouTuber Alex Chacon near the archaeological pyramids in Giza. In March 2021, Chacon, with over 350,000 YouTube subscribers, recounted his ordeal in a video that received over 400,000 views. He described being interrogated for two hours by unidentified security personnel, causing him distress despite no suspicious behaviour. Additionally, Egypt missed a significant opportunity in the international film industry. Security delays in granting permits for filming the Marvel series Moon Knight, directed by Egyptian Mohamed Diab, led to the relocation of filming to Hungary. Diab lamented Egypt's loss, citing the potential billions in free advertisement and tourism boost from the Marvel series. This highlights how security concerns overshadow economic interests, resulting in missed opportunities and reputational damage for Egypt.

The destruction of cultural heritage in Egypt has attracted attention from a wide array of media outlets, both state-led and independent, each offering distinct perspectives. State-led and pro-regime newspapers such as Al Ahram, the Egyptian Gazette, and Egypt Today have prominently featured stories that align with the government's agenda. These publications often emphasise themes of nationalism, developmentalism, and modernism. The narrative focus of state media frequently portrays the central government as a robust and progressive force driving the nation's revitalisation, particularly through the tourism industry. By promoting the development of new infrastructure and modern attractions, state media seeks to present Egypt as a tourist-friendly, forward-looking nation capable of attracting significant foreign investment. This approach underscores the perceived benefits of modernisation efforts, often framing the destruction of heritage sites as a necessary sacrifice for the country's broader economic and developmental goals.

In contrast, independent activists and censored media outlets such as Al-Manassa and Mada Masr offer a divergent narrative that highlights the intrinsic value of local heritage and community engagement. These sources often criticise the central government's modernist agenda, pointing out the detrimental impacts on historical and cultural sites that form an essential part of Egypt's identity. They emphasise the importance of preserving indigenous elements and advocate for alternative values that may include Islamic principles and a deeper appreciation for the nation's historical legacy. By challenging the state's narrow nationalist perspectives and confronting internationalist narratives, these non-state media outlets aim to raise awareness about the irreversible loss of cultural heritage and its implications for the local communities.

Additionally, international media outlets such as BBC, CNN, and The Washington Post have provided coverage highlighting the global significance of Egypt's

cultural heritage. These reports often underscore the longstanding issue of looting and the black market trade of antiquities, problems that have plagued Egypt for centuries. In recent years, international media has also focused on the more immediate threats posed by the government's modernisation efforts, including the demolition of historic tombs, cultural centres, and residential neighbourhoods in Cairo. This broader international perspective brings attention to the conflicting values at play: the Egyptian government's emphasis on modernisation and economic development versus the global and local calls for the preservation of historical and cultural heritage.

Analysing the narratives presented by different media groups reveals a complex interplay of cultural values and justifications for the destruction of heritage. State media tends to justify the destruction by emphasising the economic and developmental benefits, portraying modernisation as a pathway to national progress. In contrast, independent and international media often highlight the cultural and historical values that are compromised by such actions, advocating for the preservation of heritage as a critical component of national identity and historical continuity. The official narratives prominently feature values of modernisation and economic growth, often downplaying the cultural and historical significance of the sites being destroyed. Meanwhile, independent media and activists elevate the importance of heritage conservation, community involvement, and alternative values that challenge the prevailing nationalist and modernist discourse.

In conclusion, the destruction of cultural heritage in Egypt is a multifaceted issue that is reported differently by state and non-state media. State-led media often supports the government's developmentalist agenda, while independent and international outlets emphasise the importance of preserving Egypt's rich cultural legacy. By examining these contrasting narratives, it becomes evident that the values promoted by different media groups significantly influence public perception and policy. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies that balance modernisation with heritage conservation, ensuring that Egypt's historical treasures are preserved for future generations while still pursuing economic and developmental goals.

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Chapter 16.
Cultural Heritage in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988): The Unreported Legacy of a Protracted War

Bijan Rouhani and Bill Finlayson

Introduction

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) was one of the twentieth century's longest interstate wars, with hundreds of thousands of casualties, and widespread damage to historic urban spaces, monuments, museums, and the intangible heritage of both countries. However, despite the fact that the protection of cultural properties during armed conflict has become a global concern, especially after WWII and as crystallised in the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, cultural heritage destruction received little international attention during the Iran-Iraq war.

During the conflicts of the last two decades in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), international attention became re-focused on the issue of cultural heritage destruction and how to safeguard it during war. Numerous academic studies have been conducted[1], and several international funds and projects established for documenting, protecting, and reconstructing damaged heritage[2]. This chapter questions why so little attention was paid to the issue of cultural heritage in the Iran-Iraq War, what differed between that and more recent conflicts in MENA, and what factors subsequently returned the issue of heritage protection during armed conflict into a global concern. Did something new happen in the 21st-century conflicts to raise attention and encourage all parties to weaponise cultural heritage?

The Taliban's deliberate destruction of Buddha statues in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley in 2001, amplified and perhaps even encouraged by the power of mainstream media, was one of the landmark moments that drew worldwide attention to the protection of ancient sites in the 21st century (Klein 2018; UNESCO 2021). Although the event sparked heated debates about ideological iconoclasm for propaganda purposes (Janowski 2015; Obuse 2015), it also demonstrated how cultural heritage could be utilised as a propaganda tool for attracting public attention to political and social issues. After the US and its allies overthrew the Taliban and installed a new government in 2001, foreign countries and international organisations funded several cultural heritage projects for recovering Afghanistan's historical sites, museums, archives, and intangible heritage and traditions (Stein *et al.* 2017). However, there has been criticism of spending methods, the short lifespan of many of these programmes, the short-term focus on 'fixing' culture rather than a long-term view of cultural development, and the rivalry and lack of coordination between international organisations and projects (Leslie 2017). Conversely, it could be argued that many of these programmes encourage various forms of development, both cultural and otherwise, instead of merely 'repairing' what has been damaged. This issue is part of a broader discussion about whether development interventions truly benefit local communities and their livelihoods, especially if they undermine traditional cultures.

The widespread destruction and looting that followed the US-led military invasion of Iraq in 2003, particularly the images of looting at the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad, prompted strong criticism and condemnation of the US forces' lack of planning and inability to protect Iraq's heritage (Rothfield 2009). Scholars and journalists reacted swiftly and strongly to the April 2003 looting of the National Museum, describing it as catastrophic. This response was intensified by the fact that archaeologists had warned the US military about the vulnerability of Iraqi museums to looting, based on past experiences like the 1991 Intifada (Bernhardsson 2012: 160).

[1] A Google Scholar search for cultural heritage and conflict in Syria and Iraq between 2003 and 2023 returns over 18,000 results. See also 'A Selection of News Articles on the Destruction of Cultural Heritage in the Middle East" (2001–2016), available at: http://we-aggregate.org/media/files/91526cc763a119da2191efbd7fcafc33.pdf

[2] Summary of the international responses towards a protection of the Syrian cultural heritage until December 2016 are available at: https://www.heritageforpeace.org/news/reports-towards-protection-syrian-cultural-heritage-summary-international-responses/

Other high-profile cases of damage include the US military causing significant damage to the historic site of Babylon by utilising it as a military camp (International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq 2009). Other ancient sites, like Ur, and Samarra, were also damaged due to the occupation by Coalition forces, military operations, vandalism, and looting (Hamdani 2008; UNESCO 2007). Looting and the illegal excavation of ancient sites skyrocketed, damaging many sites and creating a global antiquity market issue (Emberling *et al.* 2008; Stone 2008; Stone 2015).

With the rise of ISIS/Daesh in 2014, the destruction of cultural heritage entered a new phase. The propaganda destruction of cultural and ancient sites in Iraq and Syria, including the historic city of Mosul and its museum, the ancient sites of Nineveh, Nimrud, Hatra, Palmyra and numerous places of worship, shrines, and cemeteries of various religions and ethnic groups, made protecting cultural heritage a global concern, while this international concern regarding the destruction of cultural heritage increased its propaganda impact (Rosén 2020). Irina Bokova, the then Director General of UNESCO, called heritage protection a 'Humanitarian Imperative and Security Issue.'[3] The issue was raised at the UN Security Council, which ultimately issued two unprecedented resolutions, 2199 (2015) and 2347 (2017), on the protection of cultural heritage and combating looting and illicit trafficking.

After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and the subsequent rise of ISIS and similar Jihadist groups, many projects were initiated for remote sensing monitoring and documentation of at-risk cultural heritage, as well as digital reconstruction of destroyed sites and objects to preserve the memory of lost or endangered heritage, raise global awareness, and promote reconstruction. These were primarily established by US, UK, and EU institutions and universities, including the Cultural Heritage Initiatives (CHI) project at ASOR (the American Society of Overseas Research, funded by the U.S. Department of State and non-federal donors), and the EAMENA project (Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa, a partnership between the Universities of Oxford, Durham and Leicester) and funded by the Arcadia Fund[4] and subsequently the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund, and SHOSI (the Safeguarding the Heritage of Syria and Iraq Project at the Smithsonian Institution and the University of Pennsylvania). During this time, many non-governmental organisations, such as Heritage for Peace, the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology (APSA), and The Day After's Heritage Protection Initiative, were also founded in Europe and US in collaboration with local communities and professionals.

In 2014, the European Union funded the €2,750,000 UNESCO Emergency Safeguarding of Syrian Cultural Heritage project, with Flemish Government support, for 36 months.

In Iraq, 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul', a reconstruction campaign led by UNESCO, received US$105.5 million from 15 partners, including the UAE and the EU[5]. Sponsored by the UK government, the British Museum launched the £2.9 million Iraq Scheme programme in 2015 for the reconstruction of Iraqi heritage[6]. By December 2022, ALIPH (International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas) had 25 projects with a total budget of US$10.5 million in Iraq. Unlike the Iraq-Iran War, the recent destruction of cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq has been discussed in numerous conferences and academic papers, many of which are cited here.

The heated theoretical, ethical, and technical debates over the reconstruction of recently damaged heritage sites in the MENA revealed gaps in the international charters and the World Heritage Convention (Rouhani 2016), leading to the publication of the ICOMOS Guidance on Post Trauma Recovery and Reconstruction for World Heritage Cultural Properties (ICOMOS 2017). During the Iran-Iraq War, although the extent of these discussions was much more limited, they did contribute to legal debates that laid the groundwork for the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention, as mentioned below.

Cultural Heritage in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)

Conflict formally began on September 22, 1980, with air and land invasions by Iraq following the rise in tension between the two countries after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Much has been said about the origins of this war, which went back to Ottoman-Persian border disputes, disputes which Iraq inherited, especially after the discovery of oil by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (Abdulghani 2011). These tensions continued in the following decades and escalated with the rise of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq in 1968 and the withdrawal of Britain from the Persian Gulf in 1971. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran brought two ambitious leaders with different ideologies face to face: Saddam Hussein, a secular dictator who wanted to strengthen Iraq's role as a regional power, and Ruhollah Khomeini, who wanted

[3] https://www.europanostra.org/unescos-director-general-irina-bokova-protection-heritage-become-humanitarian-imperative-security-issue/ (accessed 18 May 2024).
[4] Arcadia – a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin.
[5] https://www.unesco.org/en/revive-mosul?hub=1067 (accessed 18 May 2024).
[6] https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/international/iraq-scheme (accessed 18 May 2024).

to expand his Islamic revolutionary ideology from Iran to other countries in the region, especially to Iraq and to overthrow Saddam's regime (Chubin 2019; Razoux 2015: 2). The Islamic revolutionaries in Iran viewed the Iraqi regime as 'atheist' and malevolent. Conversely, Saddam Hussein perceived the new Islamic Republic as a significant threat to Iraq, especially because of its support for Shiite opposition movements within the country (El-Dine 2012: 269).

The invasion took place after the 1979 revolution had destabilised Iran. Not only had many army officers been purged or even executed, but also many experts were dismissed because they were considered counter-revolutionary. This included archaeologists and cultural heritage professionals such as Firouz Bagherzadeh, the prominent archaeologist and founder and General Director of the Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research (ICAR) (Aryamanesh 2019: 20). In July 1980, two months before the war began, the National Museum of Iran hosted a symposium titled 'Archaeology in Line with the Revolution,' which opened with a statement from then-President Abolhassan Bani Sadr. A resolution presented at the end of the conference strongly criticised the ICAR and regarded its efforts before the revolution 'to serve and cement the foundations of the former regime'. It further requested that any archaeological works conducted by foreign missions in Iran be halted (Asar 1980: 246-248). In revolutionary Iran, archaeology, especially pre-Islamic heritage, was viewed with great suspicion as it was considered synonymous with the nationalistic approaches of the Pahlavi era, which integrated the 'golden past' into its political agenda much as the Ba'ath party in Iraq used ancient heritage extensively for government propaganda and the ideology of national unification (Abdi 2008).

The war had different phases in terms of strategies and tactics, as well as international reactions, each of which left different effects on the cultural and natural resources of the two countries. In the early months of the war, the Iraqi army managed to occupy some cities in the south and west of Iran. Khorramshahr, Qasr Shirin, Naft Shahr, Sumar, Mehran, Musian, Susangerd, Huweizeh and a total of about 15,000 square kilometres in the three provinces of Kermanshah, Ilam and Khuzestan. Several other cities, including Abadan, Shush (Susa), Ahvaz, Dezful, and Andimeshk, all in Khuzestan province, which has a considerable Arab population, were besieged by the Iraqi army or targeted by its artillery. Heavy battles, especially in Khorramshahr, Qasr Shirin, Naftshahr and Mehran, turned these cities into ruins. In Qasr Shirin, in addition to extensive damage to the old city and its neighbourhoods, the ancient Chartaqi, believed to be a Sasanian fire temple, was destroyed. Naftshahr has never been rebuilt after the war. The 19-month occupation of Khorramshahr in Khuzestan became a significant chapter in the war and subsequently an Iranian national symbol. The city was never completely rebuilt after the war and has never regained its status as a strategic port.

After Iranian forces reclaimed large portions of the occupied regions, both sides were constrained to their trenches for a long period. From the Zagros Mountains to the flat southern alluvial plains where the River Shat Al-Arab meets the Persian Gulf, the fighting front included practically all of the border areas from north to south. This frontier encapsulated significant prehistoric sites in the plains of Dehloran and Mehran, large areas of the ancient Mesopotamian civilisations, as well as important Seleucid, Parthian, Sasanian, and Islamic sites. To thwart the opposing forces, both sides dug huge trenches, ditches, and water canals, one of them running for 30km. The engineering units of the Iraqi army constructed earthworks, including using ancient ramparts to create defensive fortifications (Robert Killick *et al.* 2018; Shepperson 2021). A concentration of such defensive fortifications was built to protect the strategic city of Basra against Iranian assaults, which caused irreparable damage to ancient sites, such as Charax Spasinou, an ancient Parthian city.

After the Iraqi army had advanced to the western banks of the Karkhe River in the early months of the war, the city of Susa was evacuated, and the Iranian army took up a position there. The siege continued into the static second part of the war when, due to bombardment and exchange of fire over 18 months, Susa suffered extensive damage, including to part of Daniel's Tomb. The city is one of the oldest settlements and has been continuously inhabited since around the fifth millennium BCE. Other nearby ancient sites were also damaged, including the Elamite site of Haft Tepe, severely damaged due to heavy shelling and defensive earthworks, and the Sasanian city of Ivan-e Karkheh, which was the location of fierce conflict. Iraqi forces had advanced to the western fortifications, while Iranians had taken up position near the eastern wall. The entrance gate and the Royal Palace were both destroyed as a result of the firefight. More damage was caused by Iranian forces digging trenches on the site and taking shelter inside the ancient towers and defences. The area was heavily mined, which made any archaeological survey or excavation impossible for long after the war (Karimian and Koochak 2012: 152).

Even decades after the war ended, the extensive use of land mines remained a major concern in both countries, contaminating large areas, including a 5km wide minefield in Iraq that ran along the border for about 1600km (Schreuder 2008). It was also estimated that millions of land mines were left in Iran, especially in

Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam, and Khuzestan provinces (Jahunlu *et al.* 2002: 108). Even two decades after the war, any archaeological survey or protection in Iran's Mehran plain was impossible due to the explosive remnants (Javanmardzadeh *et al.* 2013: 14–15). For the same reason, for many years it was impossible to identify, research, or safeguard the archaeological areas of Chogha Ahovan and Sarpol Zahab. Mine clearance of these vast areas on both sides was done very slowly. In Iraq, these efforts were repeatedly stopped due to subsequent conflicts. Furthermore, archaeologists were concerned about potential damage to historical places contaminated with landmines because of the methods employed to clear them, which can include intentionally blowing them up. In 2006, ICAR requested that special techniques be applied for demining ancient sites. According to the director of the Iranian army's demining unit, in many cases, you must either ignore ancient sites and confidently demine the areas, or give up on gaining full confidence in demining (Behmanesh 2006). There are no statistics on how many historical sites have been damaged by demining in Iran and Iraq.

Military use of cultural properties caused damage to them as well. Because of their relative elevation, Iran mounted anti-aircraft weapons on a number of ancient sites, notably the top of the ziggurat of Tchogha Zanbil, which was founded around 1250 BCE and was included on the World Heritage List in 1979. Other historic monuments, like the Semnan Caravanserai and the Susa (Shush) Museum, were used as ammunition storage or detention centres for prisoners of war (Hodjat 1995: 220).

With the outbreak of the war, Iraq quickly closed the Baghdad Museum and evacuated most of its galleries, storing the artefacts in a safe place within the museum. Sandbags and foam were used to safeguard large items on-site, but the museum was never attacked (Amin 2019). The museums of Basra and Kirkuk were also evacuated, as well as 'the excavations and antique camps' at Hemreen district (UNESCO 1989: 20).

In Iran, several museums were seriously damaged due to shelling and bombing. Movable artefacts from the Abadan and Khorram Abad museums were sent to safe places. Abadan Museum suffered significant damage (Mūsavī 1991: 19). This museum, which opened in the 1960s, was inspired by the design of the cone-shaped dome of Daniel's Tomb in Susa. The authorities were able to evacuate an important part of the Susa Museum under artillery fire and transfer objects to the National Museum of Tehran by train but not before some objects were damaged (Hamedani 1997). The few archaeologists involved in evacuating museums had to contend not only with limited resources and security risks due to the war but also with the negative attitude toward cultural heritage at the beginning of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. They faced accusations of prioritising the preservation of artefacts from the Shah's era over saving the lives of people dying in the conflict (Hamedani 1997: 21).

The War of the Cities was another brutal episode of the conflict, employing air raids, missile assaults, and artillery shelling, which wreaked devastation on cultural heritage in addition to civilian losses. The first stage started in 1984 with the targeting of the historic Iranian city of Dezful by Scud B missiles. As a result of several attacks, more than half of the historic centre of Dezful, including about 15,000 cultural, religious, residential and commercial properties as well as historic neighbourhoods, were destroyed or severely damaged (Mūsavī 1991: 23). Other cities, including Abadan, Ahvaz, Susangerd, Ilam, Kermanshah, and Andimeshk were attacked later. In retaliation, the Iranian army bombarded the cities of Basra, Khanaqin, Al-Faw and Al-Qurna and caused considerable damage (Razoux 2015: 302–303). In the following years, 30 Iranian cities, including Tehran, Isfahan, Qom, Tabriz, and Shiraz were targeted. The attacks on Isfahan in central Iran and its historical neighbourhoods, particularly the Jame Mosque (Masjed-e Jamé, also known as the Friday Mosque), which dates back to the 9th century CE, were shocking for Iran, which accused Iraq of 'carefully planning' to target the city's historic areas (Hodjat 1995: Appendix VIII-iii), and subsequently requested UNESCO to send a mission. This was a rare instance of one side accusing the other of deliberate cultural heritage destruction at the highest international level during the war. Iran also attacked Baghdad, Basra, Mandali, Khanaqin, and Sulaymaniah in Iraq. In 1988, the War of the Cities was focused on the capitals, Tehran and Baghdad. Tikrit, the birthplace of Saddam with symbolic meaning for the Iraqi regime, was also hit. It is believed that in 1988, Iraq fired 193 missiles at Iranian cities, and Iran launched 77 missiles at Iraqi cities and villages (Razoux 2015: 436). With the exception of the situation in Isfahan, both sides appear to have largely regarded cultural heritage destruction as collateral damage occurring during the general bombardment of the cities.

Basra, Iraq's main port and one of its most strategic cities, was one of Iran's primary targets, and multiple attempts were made by Iranian forces to capture it. Located on the Shatt al-Arab River, Basra was spared from artillery bombardment until 1984, when Iran largely bombarded the city's outskirts and industrial districts, attempting to mitigate casualties among its Shia population. Iranian tactics changed after 1984, and Basra came under constant artillery and bombardment, causing major portions of the city to be damaged and some neighbourhoods to be destroyed, notably the historic regions and neighbourhoods of Al-Ashar

and Old Basra (Barakat 1993: 183–185). Iran occupied the al-Faw Peninsula (also known as Al-Fao) and its important cities for two years in 1986. When the Iraqi army recaptured al-Faw town, it was utterly destroyed because it had witnessed the most intense fighting between both sides.

Both Iran and Iraq had signed and ratified the 1954 Hague Convention at the time of the war. Iran detailed some of the damage to Abadan, Susa, Haft Tapeh, and Khoramabad in its report to UNESCO on the implementation of the Convention (UNESCO 1984: 32). In 1985, both countries warned UNESCO of each other's attacks on cultural property, particularly the Jame Mosque in Isfahan and the Imam Ali Mosque in Basra (a minor tally, given the extensive cultural heritage destruction that had taken place). Following the strikes, the Director General of UNESCO wrote separate messages to both countries, reminding them of their obligations as signatories to the 1954 Hague Convention while also requesting that Iraq and Iran respect the adversary's cultural properties. He also described the mechanism for appointing Commissioners-General under the Convention, with the duty of implementing the Convention as well as specific missions. The Director General also offered both sides technical assistance (UNESCO 1985: 16–17). Iraq did not approve the individual proposed to be appointed as Commissioner General for the implementation of the Convention, and no alternative person was proposed (Hodjat 1995: Appendix VIII-46). Personal representatives of the UNESCO Director-General visited Iran in 1985 and 1987, and Iraq in 1986 (O'Keefe 2006: 178).

Article 8 of the Convention says a limited number of refuges to shelter movable cultural properties and centres containing monuments and immovable cultural properties of 'very great importance' may be registered under the Special Protection regime, given they meet certain criteria (UNESCO 1954), but this provision was not used. According to Article 16 of the Hague Convention, 'cultural property may bear a distinctive emblem so as to facilitate its recognition'. However, Iraq expressed concern in its report on the Convention's implementation that marking cultural sites could expose them to Iranian military aircraft and artillery, which implied Iraq's concern for making cultural heritage an obvious target for the opposing side. The Iraqi authorities could not choose which of the country's more than 10,000 archaeological monuments and historic towns would be added to the list of Special Protection under the Convention since they all were equally significant (UNESCO 1989: 20).

Both a general disregard for the 1954 Hague Convention and challenges to its implementation were brought to light during the Iran-Iraq War. As one of the items on the agenda of UNESCO's general conference in 1987, Iran pressed for a discussion of UNESCO's role in the Hague Convention's implementation and the protection of the environment and human environment (O'Keefe 2006: 235–237). This debate, as well as the concerns that arose following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and then the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, eventually led to the 1999 Hague Convention's Second Protocol. In this sense, despite limited attention to cultural heritage during the war, this conflict helped sow the seeds for future protection measures.

Intangible heritage

Apart from tangible heritage, intangible heritage, including local languages and oral traditions, social practises, rituals, and traditional knowledge, suffered greatly during the war, but little research has been conducted on this. The war caused massive internal and external displacement from both countries' conflict zones. It is estimated that over 2.5 million Iranians were compelled to flee (Salimi 2015: 44). A substantial population from the border areas of Iraq was also forced to relocate. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), around 200,000 Iraqi refugees fled to Iran in a process that started in the 1970s as a result of prior hostilities (Redden 2003). Also, about 23,000 people migrated from Iran to Iraq, including ethnic Kurds and Arabs (Kessler 2002). Such large-scale migrations have profound and frequently neglected repercussions on cultural and social institutions, as well as the intangible heritage of societies. Salimi used a case study on immigrants from the border town of Sarpol Zahab (Iran), who were mostly speakers of different dialects of the Kurdish language, to demonstrate how forced migrations had substantial linguistic and cultural effects, both on those who became refugees in Iraq and for families who migrated to other cities in Iran (Salimi 2015). After the war, the Islamic Republic invested in promoting war tourism similar to Shiite pilgrimages. Many battlefields were transformed into tourist sites for state-organised tours known as 'Rahian-e Noor' (travellers of the light) to propagate the official perspective and ideology regarding the war (Sajjadi *et al.* 2021; Zandi 2020).

Discussion

In addition to horrific human losses, the eight-year Iran-Iraq War had a devastating impact on the two countries' cultural heritage. The complete destruction of some historical city centres as a result of occupation or direct conflict, damage to ancient sites as a result of shelling and landscape alteration for defensive purposes, damage to museums and their evacuation and long-term closure, and damage to a number of iconic monuments are all part of the toll of this war. Furthermore, enormous forced migration had a significant impact on the tangible and intangible

heritage of the populations living in conflict zones. For many years after the war, the contamination of ancient landscapes with landmines and unexploded ammunition continued to make protection and assessment of these locations impossible. The environment was adversely impacted by everything from widespread marine pollution to changes in water resource management.

However, compared to conflicts before and after, this war differed in that cultural heritage destruction did not arise as a prominent issue, neither between the participants, despite their opposing ideological positions, nor with the international community. Despite the Sunni versus Shia context, shrines in Iran were largely not targeted, nor *vice versa*. Even Baathist Iraq was willing to use Islamist propaganda when it was needed, as in Saddam's fascination with and comparison to Saladin, the famous medieval Muslim sultan and conqueror of Jerusalem (Sayfo 2017; Toth 1992). The conflict was a local war between two regional powers, with much-shared heritage and history. Determining the reason for this apparent lack of concern with cultural heritage is crucial, as it may explain why it has become a significant issue in other conflicts.

One issue that has been raised is that while the Iran-Iraq War was between two sovereign states, most of the other recent conflicts have been at least portrayed as something else –insurgency, interventions by the US/ world community as policemen, or regime change. This may have led to big differences in the type of moral justification felt necessary to allow war. Later conflicts, including the US-led invasion, had to stress their legality, following the law, liberating people - so regardless of actual impacts, had to be clear they held the moral high ground by claiming to protect heritage. Although Samuel Huntington's thesis on the *Clash of Civilizations* faced significant criticism, including from Edward Said (Said 2014), this perspective remained a part of political discourse and military training in the US and parts of the West during the 21st-century wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the 'War on Terror'(Dunn 2006; Kurth 2010) . The situation was different again by the time Daesh emerged. Daesh were specifically fighting a cultural war, and one where the western (esp UNESCO) response effectively encouraged the targeting of heritage, and the consequent escalation in the rhetoric of protecting heritage.

Heritage was not only weaponised by both sides of the later conflicts in the 21st century, with destruction and protection serving as two sides of a propaganda war, but where there was an effective heritage arms race. Cultural protection is weaponised as much as heritage protection, insofar as its destroyers are demonised in the propaganda war (Clack *et al*. 2023; Dunkley and Clack 2023). Arguments that the way to persuade the combatants to protect archaeology is to convince them that cultural heritage can be a force multiplier is a risky strategy as it instrumentalises heritage in the most direct way possible, although this does not negate the spirit of the 1954 Hague Convention for the protection of cultural heritage during armed conflict. One of the key differences with the subsequent wars in MENA and Afghanistan was the direct military intervention of Coalition forces or the high probability of it in the wars of the third millennium. It can be argued that therefore the issue of cultural property protection (CPP) in the Iran-Iraq War was not of 'strategic value' from the point of view of the superpowers, as CPP is considered part of a military mission success (Berends 2020).

Despite the severe damage to cultural heritage, there are various reasons why, unlike in a number of other MENA conflicts, heritage protection during the Iran-Iraq War did not become a major worldwide concern. Except for UNESCO's restricted and official reactions to remind the parties of their Hague Convention's obligations, no other substantial international reaction was made, nor has much research or publication been undertaken since. The context of this conflict, in the closing years of the Cold War, was completely different from the subsequent wars in MENA. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran quickly shifted from a close ally to one of America's main adversaries. Iraq, under Saddam Hussein's rule, never became a trusted friend of the United States not least because of his tight relationship with the Soviet Union, despite Iraq's conflict with Iran, although US policy shifted after the war began to support the Iraqi regime with intelligence, satellite images, and tactical planning (Galen Carpenter and Innocent 2007: 68; Sterner 1984: 129). It is impossible to say whether the destruction of heritage in two countries not allied with the West went unreported for this reason or not. However, having no direct engagement with either participant may have contributed to this undue disregard.

Destruction caused by the military occupation of Iraq in 2003 was explicitly attributed to the invading forces' failure, although the coalition forces promised to bring 'the light of liberation' to the lives of Iraqis.[7] As a result, it was expected that the Western academic community and cultural heritage professionals would uniformly call for the preservation of Iraq's heritage. During the Syrian conflict, the potential of military intervention through UN troops to protect heritage sites was also widely discussed (Gerstenblith 2022). Hamilakis argues that the collaboration of heritage professionals with US and UK military forces, particularly following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, resulted in a type of military-

[7] Lieutenant Colonel Tim Collins' Eve-of-Battle Speech, 19 March 2003. Available at: https://www.royal-irish.com/stories/lieutenant-colonel-tim-collins-eve-of-battle-speech (accessed 20 May 2024).

archaeology, which increasingly makes war appear consequence-free by legitimising it as heritage protection in the form of a neo-colonial project, which in turn risks naturalising the whole process of warfare (Hamilakis 2009).

The massive propagandistic destruction of heritage in recent MENA conflicts, widely covered by the Western mainstream and social media, also helped significantly to elevate the issue on a worldwide scale. Images of ISIS destruction in Palmyra, Nineveh, and other locations were broadcast at the same rate, if not more frequently, than images of civilian victims. These ancient sites were usually areas that Western audiences had some knowledge of and sympathy for, more than the locally valued heritage. Such media attention, prompted by intentional destruction, causes the allocation of resources for their protection and reconstruction (Matthes 2018). The rise of social media has been a massive change since the 1980s but was not significant in the region during the invasion of Iraq, and only really came into its own in the Arab Spring and subsequently the ISIS/Daesh issue (where it was deployed by all sides). The change in mainstream media occurs before that – both with the arrival of CNN and a much more constant frontline visual reporting, and the emergence of al-Jazeera (launched in 2006) as a Middle Eastern news source. Limited access to traditional media, along with the absence of social media, the Internet, and open-access satellite imagery during the Iran-Iraq War, which served an important function in monitoring and informing the state of cultural heritage during the recent MENA conflicts, limited coverage of heritage destruction.

Most of Iran's cultural ties with the West were lost following the Islamic Revolution, including the majority of joint archaeological activities. This was also one of the reasons why the widespread destruction of cultural heritage was not reported. Eugenio Galdieri (1925-2010), an Italian architect who worked for many years in Isfahan as the head of IsMEO (Italian Institute for the Middle and the Far East), once told Bijan Rouhani that he only learned about the bombing of Isfahan's Jame Mosque when one of his former Iranian colleagues phoned him from Isfahan, telling him his child (the mosque- by referring to his long-term research and restoration there) was killed. In Iraq, the activities of some Western institutions and missions such as the *German Archaeological Institute* (Van Ess 2010: 200) and the *British School of Archaeology in Iraq* (Shepperson 2018) continued with many restrictions and sometimes with interruptions.

Although professionals from Iran's Cultural Heritage Organisation and Iraq's State Board of Antiquities worked hard to safeguard cultural heritage within their means, the conflict seriously harmed both organisations' financial and administrative capacities. Iran, for example, inscribed around 706 monuments and sites on the national heritage list between 1972 and 1981. But, between 1981 and 1984, the number was cut to 71, then to 18 and 9 in the following years, and finally to zero at the end of the war (Pazooki and Shadmehr 2005).

They did not receive any significant international support for their emergency response. By comparison, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, several international organisations and funds had given more than US$5 million to the emergency response to Ukrainian cultural heritage by the end of 2022, in less than a year. The amounts raised by UNESCO for Iraq following Daesh's destruction have been more. The US sidelining of the UN further helped UNESCO take the moral high ground. Many of these specialised international organisations, such as ALIPH and Cultural Emergency Response, did not exist during the Iran-Iraq War and, despite the widespread destruction of cultural heritage, the conflict did not compel the establishment of such structures at that time.

In addition to external factors, save for the work of government specialist agencies, there was no significant activity by civil society and NGOs in either Iran or Iraq for the protection and promotion of cultural heritage. The severely restricted political environment in both countries rendered any activity outside of official and government boundaries nearly impossible, and no criticism of the war, or emphasis of its negative aspects, was accepted. The Iran-Iraq War was far more existential than the later conflicts, so criticism could not be tolerated. In Iran, the revolutionary leadership still viewed cultural heritage, particularly pre-Islamic periods, with mistrust, and hence heritage preservation was not a priority during the war. Only after the end of the war with and the start of the 'Reconstruction Era' (*Doran e Sazandegi)* from the mid-90s, was a new movement for the protection and recognition of cultural heritage born, which caused the formation of a wave of cultural heritage NGOs in Iran (Mozaffari 2015). In Iraq, due to subsequent wars and military interventions, the formation of NGOs and civil societies was postponed, but finally, popular movements for heritage recognition and protection emerged, although it was affected by political and sectarian purposes (Kathem *et al*. 2022).

Due to the conflicts and instability that continued in Iraq, Iraqi experts did not find the opportunity to fully research the negative effects of the Iran-Iraq War on cultural heritage. In Iran too, although there was a period of relative opening of the social and political space after the war, this issue was not taken into

account, and investigating its reasons still requires research.

Conclusion

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) was one of the longest and bloodiest conflicts of the 20th century and greatly affected cultural heritage. However, neither during this war nor after, was much attention paid to the cultural heritage destruction of these two countries. During the war, heritage protection was not a primary priority for the parties engaged. Equally, there was very limited international response to the need for protection of cultural heritage, or the destruction of historic cities and urban spaces, museums, and ancient sites. In contrast to subsequent wars in MENA, it did not make to the headlines of the international media and Western audiences.

Military occupation by Coalition forces or the possibility of direct intervention is one of the factors that distinguishes later MENA conflicts from the Iran-Iraq war. The absence of a 'strategic value' in cultural property protection for any superpower, due to their lack of direct military involvement, was a key contributory factor. There was no targeting of the global mainstream media and their audiences and so the deliberate propaganda destruction of cultural heritage was not present in this war. On the Iranian side, especially in the early period after the Islamic Revolution, cultural heritage was viewed with suspicion by the revolutionaries and some segments of the population. Its association with the monarchical past made it difficult for Iranian heritage specialists to emphasise the importance of its protection and promotion. The lack of digital communication and monitoring technologies was another factor contributing to poor reporting of cultural heritage destruction during the Iran-Iraq War. The absence of independent and robust civil societies for the protection, promotion, and monitoring of cultural heritage in either of these two countries, left this to governmental agencies severely constrained by resources and increasingly isolated from the international community.

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Chapter 17.
Cultural Heritage Intelligence and Human Security: Exercise HORIZON STRIKE

Mark Dunkley

Introduction

In October 2023, the Islamic People's Freedom Party (IPFP) commenced a large-scale and violent insurgency in North Zahour, East Africa. Taking advantage of the dry season, the IPFP sought to radicalise villagers, gather followers and capture materiel as the insurgency progressed north along the fertile Niagu River valley. As intelligence indicated that the IPFP were intent on capturing the centre of regional governance, a battalion-sized NATO mission, equipped with mechanised infantry vehicles (MIV) but limited engineer support, was rapidly deployed to block the IPFP advance and clear the valley of insurgent forces.

This fictional, but nevertheless highly realistic, scenario devised by the author was delivered as the wargame Exercise HORIZON STRIKE in a training scenario at the NATO Civil-Military Co-Operation Centre of Excellence (CIMIC CoE - CCOE) in The Hague in autumn 2023. Attended by NATO Staff Officers and academics with roles related to Cultural Property Protection, HORIZON STRIKE sought to explore relationships between mobility, firepower and protection of Western military forces versus Insurgent capabilities but was also specifically designed to test the exploitation and protection of cultural heritage assets. As wargames provide a simulation of a military operation where the sequence of events is affected by the decisions of the players (MOD 2017), the training package delivered at the NATO CCOE was intended to help better prepare military personnel for the kinds of challenges related to cultural heritage and adversarial strategic narratives faced now - and in future conflicts, particularly given that assessments of current global instability have led some commentators to consider whether we are either on the brink of World War 3 (Dooley and Hoare 2024) or that we have actually been fighting the Third World War for some time (Glasser 2022).

The training was both timely and significant, for the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Preliminary Special Report on *Protecting Cultural Heritage in Conflict* recently recognised that 'despite enjoying protection under international law, cultural heritage finds itself increasingly under attack in conflicts across the world... [and that] malicious authoritarian States and non-state actors actively seek to weaponize it to pursue their pernicious goals' (Dzerowicz 2024).

Cultural Heritage Intelligence

The devastating effects of armed conflict on cultural heritage are well documented, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shown that culture, once again, finds itself on war's frontline (Clack and Dunkley 2023). Separately, there is a risk that Sudan's rich archaeological heritage could suffer the same fate as that of Iraq and Syria, with widespread looting and loss as a result of the current conflict there between rival factions of the military government. Meanwhile, more than 100 cultural landmarks have been seriously damaged, and as many as 60 mosques have been destroyed across Gaza since Israeli retaliatory assaults commenced on 7 Oct 2023 (NPR 2023; DAWN 2023). In addition, two important museums were recently completely destroyed by Israel Defence Forces (IDF) airstrikes; the Rafah Museum and the Al-Qarara Cultural Museum, the latter being destroyed by nearby explosions (Kendall Adams 2023). Recognising the deliberate targeting of places of worship in Gaza, the International Federation for Human Rights is calling for the International Criminal Court to intervene in what it is calling 'international crimes against Palestinians and an unfolding genocide' (ReliefWeb 2023).

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court identifies that intentional attacks against buildings dedicated to religions, education, art, science or charitable purposes and historic monuments - provided they are not used for military purposes - constitute a war crime (ICC 2021: Article 8).

In 2014, the NATO HUMINT[1] Centre of Excellence recommended the establishment of a Socio-Cultural Intelligence (SOCINT) cell be integrated into the Intelligence staff structure at a strategic level in order

[1] Human Intelligence - intelligence gathered by means of human sources and interpersonal contact.

to transform NATO capabilities to better adapt to the human aspects of a given operational environment. This cell was to direct and control intelligence collection efforts on socio-cultural and human aspects of the operational environment as well as analyse acquired data (NATO 2014a: 46–47). This theme was also developed in the United States as a principle of an intelligence function to provide situational awareness that better informs decision-makers with options of action plans (Patton 2010: 21).

A decade later, the explicit identification of Cultural Heritage Intelligence (CHINT) as an analytical specialism by the UK Ministry of Defence within *Intelligence, Counter-intelligence and Security Support to Joint Operations* (2023) now allows for an understanding of how actors can exploit cultural heritage to achieve military, information, political, economic, and diplomatic advantage. This builds on NATO's assessment of *cultural intelligence,* which is recognised as being a 'complicated pursuit in anthropology, psychology, communications, sociology, history and, above all, military doctrine' particularly as 'a lack of cultural understanding in 21st century warfare not only can have negative consequences to military operations at all levels of the operational spectrum but also (and above everything else) put in danger the lives of soldiers and civilians alike' (NATO 2014b: 48).

However, it is fair to say that neither CHINT nor SOCINT are truly new concepts; rather, cultural intelligence has been formalised into a distinct intelligence discipline in the 21st century – after all, it was Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* (Tzu 2000: Chapter 3.18) who said that 'If you know the enemy and know yourself, in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.' This concept underlies the reason for obtaining CHINT and SOCINT on adversaries and their actions.

On Monday 24th July 2023, the world awoke to news that Russian missiles had destroyed the Orthodox Transfiguration Cathedral lying in the newly inscribed Odesa World Heritage Site (Kilner 2023). Subsequent investigation by this author has shown that reporting of this particular attack – just one of the many documented assaults on Ukrainian cultural heritage since the start of the war – was factually incorrect; the Cathedral was not destroyed, it doesn't lie within the World Heritage Nominated Property nor does the building appear to have been deliberately targeted by Russian forces (Dunkley 2023). The importance of applying rigorous Evaluation and Analysis tools as part of the military Intelligence Cycle is an important tool in understanding the relationship between attacks directed against heritage sites on the one hand and accountability for those attacks on the other.

Throughout the course of the war in Ukraine, the UK's Ministry of Defence (MOD) has been publishing daily intelligence updates produced by Defence Intelligence as a means to counter Russian disinformation and challenge narratives as part of a 'prebuttal' strategy designed to call-out Russian moves through the declassification of intelligence and subsequently to tell the story of the ground war.

In Sudan, where cultural sites have been left unguarded and vulnerable to looting and vandalism, CHINT demonstrated that gains made by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – assisted by Russian Wagner forces – along the Omdurman-Nizeiza-Gureir axis in June 2023 put the Gebel Barkal and the Sites of the Napatan Region World Heritage Site at risk. By January 2024, RSF fighters had gained access to the World Heritage Site on the Island of Meroe but were repulsed by the Sudanese Air Force (World Echo News 2024): The extent of damage to the World Heritage Site by this action is not yet known although UNESCO has called upon parties not to target or use the Site for military purposes (Devdiscourse 2024).

As such, Cultural Heritage Intelligence (CHINT) has much to offer as a means of analysing the details behind sensationalist newspaper headlines concerning cultural heritage affected by conflict and provides the means to fully assess the relationship between culture and conflict, as in Ukraine. CHINT also facilitates the provision of indicators and warnings of activities concerning cultural heritage – whether that be activities across a spectrum of conflict affecting tangible remains (culturecide) on the one hand, or intangible elements (genocide, as in Sudan) on the other.[2]

Human Security

The right of access to, and enjoyment of, cultural heritage is based on various human rights norms and the protection of cultural heritage during armed conflict is a cross-cutting theme as far as Human Security is concerned. The UK Ministry of Defence publication *Human Security in Defence* (2024) recognises that the protection of cultural property in conflict can 1) preserve and enhance the UK's *reputation* locally and globally, 2) maintain the ability to *influence* those amongst whom the UK operates and 3) contribute to force *protection* and freedom of manoeuvre. For NATO, Human Security refers to the mitigation and response

[2] See *Operation Broken Silence* which assesses that there is strong evidence that a genocide is being committed by the RSF in the western Darfur region (April 2024): Sudan Crisis 2024 - What You Need To Know — Operation Broken Silence

towards risks and threats posed to populations. Taking a human security approach means embedding considerations for civilian populations into all stages and levels of Alliance operations, missions, and activities. This approach aligns with NATO's core values of individual liberty, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (NATO 2023). Significantly, the Alliance recently committed to '...strengthen [its] Human Security approach related to the protection of civilians and cultural property' at the 2024 Washington Summit (NATO 2024). The Summit also included the publication of a policy on Women, Peace and Security.

While the war in Europe has no obvious and immediate end, and as conflict in southern Israel and the Middle East intensifies, a focus on conflict in Africa linked to a succession of eight coups across three years is raising concerns about the security of a region where key allies of Western powers are seeking to contain insurgencies by groups linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State (France24 2023). Western counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel (i.e., the semiarid region of western and north-central Africa extending from Senegal eastward to Sudan) failed to degrade the Salafi-jihadi insurgency, which contributed to governance collapse and the rise of military juntas in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger that have exacerbated this regional insurgency (Critical Threats 2023). Land degradation – driven by human activities and climatic variations – is driving increased desertification in the Sahel Belt, which is seeing a growth in the Sahara Desert, mostly Southwards into the semi-arid steppes of the Sahel (Mirzabaev *et al.* 2019), driving an increasing frequency and severity of drought, flooding, social breakdown, conflict over diminishing water and grazing areas, emigration to urban slums and across borders, and economic failure. Thermal stress is a considerable threat to the region, as combinations of heat and humidity exceeding the physiological limit for humans and livestock may be exceeded periodically, posing a threat to human survival, and at the very least, causing considerable disruption to activities such as outdoor labour (Holmes *et al* 2022). The Sahel can therefore be seen as a region in crisis, part of the recognition that desertification is a root cause of instability in African countries, including Niger, Mali and Somalia, fuelling the growth of extremist organisations and leading to regional destabilisation (Sexton and Saiduddin 2014).

As climate change is no longer viewed just as an environmental issue but is now widely recognised as a major global security threat, climate insecurity can exacerbate fragile contexts, acting as a 'risk multiplier' in combination with other underlying drivers of violent extremism, such as a lack of state legitimacy, pervasive inequality, and limited public participation (UNICRI). In the growing understanding and awareness of the links between climate change and security, 'climate insecurity' is recognised as a Human Security factor by the UK Ministry of Defence as concerning the threats that environmental events and trends pose to individuals, communities, and nations (MOD 2021: 5).

The relationship between climate insecurity and cultural property protection is therefore made within Human Security – the multi-sectoral approach to security that gives primacy to people. In turn, Human Security relates to the risks and threats posed to populations within a military operational area, and the responses to mitigate those risks, in order to ultimately contribute to stabilisation and reconstruction.

Exercise HORIZON STRIKE

It was in this broad Human Security context that Exercise HORIZON STRIKE was developed by this author and delivered to NATO Staff Officers at the Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence in The Hague in October 2023, as set out in the introduction to this chapter. The wargame scenario was based on a successful radical insurgency by the fictional Islamic People's Freedom Party (IPFP) in North Zahour, driving up the fertile Niagu River valley, gathering followers – and military hardware – as they advanced. A NATO mission was tasked to block the IPFP advance, clear IPFP from their area of operations (AO) and undertake Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) missions in order to explore the relationship between mobility, firepower and protection but crucially to test exploitation and responses to both moveable and immoveable cultural heritage as a component of Human Security and Climate Insecurity (Figure 1).

Military wargaming is defined by NATO as a 'simulation of a military operation, by whatever means, using specific rules, data, methods and procedures.'[3] Wargaming in its modern form originated in Prussia in the early nineteenth century. Two officers developed a set of instructions for the representation of tactical manoeuvres under the guise of a *Kriegsspiel* (Wargame). In 1824, the *Kriegsspiel* was demonstrated to General von Muffling, the Chief of the Prussian General Staff who, in turn, introduced the concept to the Army (MOD 2017: 1). By 1905, the British Major General J. M. Grierson ran an extensive five-month long strategic wargame to simulate the outcome of war between Germany and France and enabled Grierson to presciently anticipate the Schlieffen plan and the British commitment to Belgium in 1914 (MOD 2017: 2). By the mid-twentieth century, wargaming for training and planning purposes had been generally accepted across the

[3] See: Wargaming the Future at the CD&E Conference - NATO's ACT https://www.act.nato.int/our-work/wargaming-the-future-at-the-cde-conference/#:~:text=NATO's%20Warfare%20Development%20Command%2C%20Allied,great%20uncertainty%20and%20increasing%20complexity.

Figure 1: Exercise HORIZON STRIKE, set in the fictional Niagu River valley. The Islamic People's Freedom Party insurgency began in the south and swept north; NATO's fictional mission began in the north and sought to advance to contact in the south. Credit: Mark Dunkley.

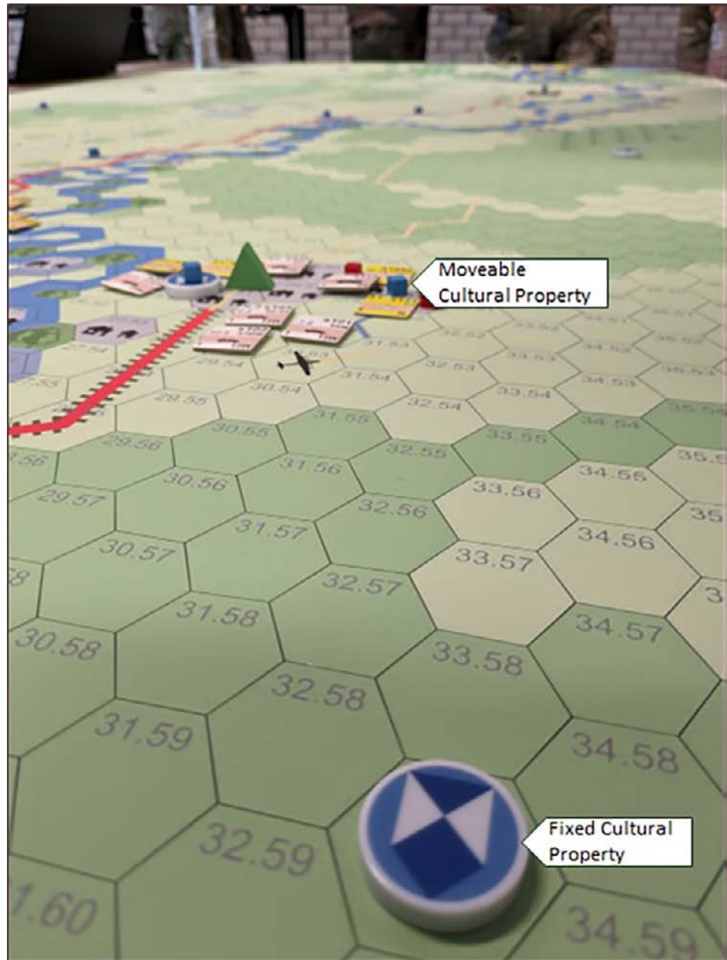

Figure 2: Special counters in Exercise HORIZON STRIKE represented both moveable and immoveable cultural property. Credit: Mark Dunkley.

military community particularly as wargames immerse participants in an environment with the required level of realism to improve their decision-making skills and the real decisions they will have to make.

The British Army is currently being equipped with a new generation of fighting vehicle that will provide the future core combat elements around the AJAX combat vehicle platform, designed to offer enhanced lethality, survivability, reliability, mobility and all-weather intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance capabilities through advanced sensor suites. As such, the UK Defence Science and Technological Laboratory (DSTL) developed a battlegroup tactical wargame called STRIKE! as a conceptual training tool for the British Army to facilitate an understanding of the AJAX performance in differing combat scenarios and across different terrain and to provide an understanding of the capabilities of UK forces against peer and sub-peer opponents. Three large, small-scale maps of different terrain types were developed, along with a scenario booklet which enabled many tactical situations to be explored (Young 2018).

Constructed around Company level rules (i.e., a Unit of some 150 soldiers), STRIKE! is based upon one-inch square counters representing a platoon of 3 or 4 vehicles, which includes details of the platoon's movement ability, firepower capability and armoured protection. Crucially, infantry can dismount from their vehicles to undertake particular actions. One of the scenarios developed by DSTL for STRIKE! was based in a fictional African river valley which immediately lent itself to address elements related to human security, climate insecurity and cultural heritage intelligence within a broader combat mission. Exercise HORIZON STRIKE, therefore, adapted DSTL's existing STRIKE! wargame by applying both cultural heritage and cultural property protection considerations into the battlespace. Within the wargame, NATO Units and IPFP insurgent teams were represented by a series of counters which

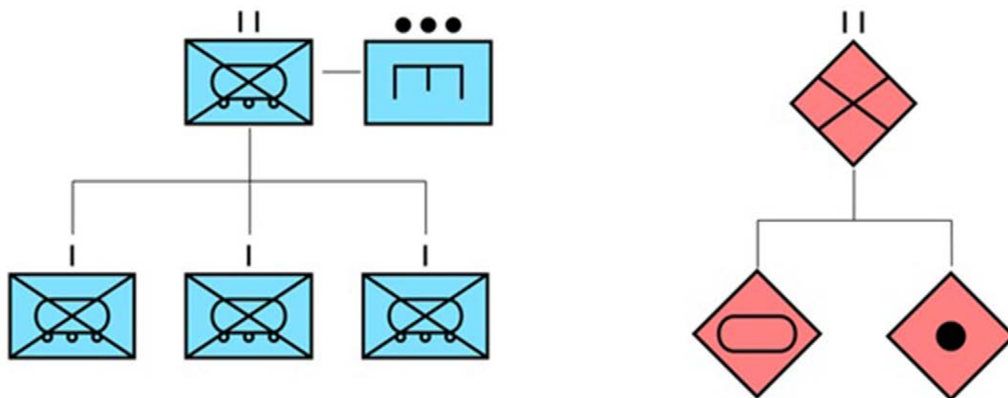

Figure 3: Exercise HORIZON STRIKE Order of Battle showing the size of forces available: Blue NATO forces comprised an armoured infantry battalion split into three companies with a platoon of engineer support, while the Red Insurgency comprised an equivalent number of infantry personnel with access to armoured vehicles and artillery. Credit: Mark Dunkley.

provided information on a Unit's firepower, protection and mobility, while fixed cultural heritage sites (such as museums, archaeological sites, galleries, etc.) were represented by white counters. Movable cultural materials (such as works of art, archaeological artefacts etc.) were represented by blue cubes. Red forces could 'loot' the blue cubes by 'packing' them into vehicles and thus remove them from the battlespace (Figure 2).

Before the Exercise HORIZON STRIKE commenced, participants were given a full briefing on the wargame scenario and a summary introduction to the rules and game complexity. Crucially, the game is played 'open' with opposing forces able to fully see the locations and progress of each other's units. This is for two reasons: 1) to ensure simplicity and transparency of lessons learned and 2) as an abstraction to represent pervasive intelligence-gathering devices common on the modern battlefield, such as reconnaissance aircraft, satellites, uncrewed aerial systems, and HUMINT sources.

The NATO wargame participants were split into two teams – the Red Team representing the IPFP Insurgency and the Blue Team representing the NATO mission. The Order of Battle (ORBAT) accompanying the wargame provided the players with an indication of the size of forces available: Blue comprised an armoured infantry Battalion (of between 500 to 1000 soldiers) split into three Companies equipped with MIVs sharing a platoon of engineer support while Red comprised an equivalent number of personnel with access to armoured vehicles and artillery (Figure 3). Importantly, NATO troops and IPFP fighters had the ability to dismount from their vehicles and engage in close quarters battle (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Exercise HORIZON STRIKE. Red forces rapidly moving north along the Niagu River valley, capturing settlements and radicalising local populations (represented by the red cubes). Dismounted fighters are shown as yellow cubes with equipment and vehicle counters clearly shown. Credit: Mark Dunkley.

Using standard NATO terminology, both teams had specific missions to accomplish with success criteria identified:

Red Mission

Red (i.e., IPFP forces) success was measured by the number of forces raised and progress northwards on the map. The team was also directed to: CAPTURE the regional government, OCCUPY urban areas and raise forces, ATTACK cultural sites at will and undertake looting and DESTROY Blue Forces.

Blue Mission

In priority order, Blue (i.e., NATO forces) success was measured by halting Red progress by BLOCKing the IPFP advance, CLEAR IPFP from the Area of Operations, SUPPORT the regional government, PROTECT Cultural Property and maintain strict adherence to the Law of Armed Conflict. A final factor was that Blue had pervasive Uncrewed Aerial Vehicle (UAV) coverage.

Wargame Results

In order to inject additional realism into the game, each turn was representative of 30 minutes of real time – thus participants could track how much real time had passed. In addition, the Red team were permitted to deploy all of their forces at the start of play, while Blue could only deploy one Company at the beginning of the wargame, with Companies two and three deploying in turns 5 and 9 respectively. This delay was representative of the difficulties of assembling a Battalion and rapidly deploying for combat operations.

Time constraints within the NATO CCoE training programme meant that the wargame was not played through to a full conclusion – a full wargame such as this could take between 4 and 6 hours to play. Instead, participants were exposed to a half-day of game time, including the briefing, allowing for a full exploration of the battlefield, Red/Blue mission intent, observation of enemy manoeuvre and response. Initially, all participants were astonished at the rapidity of Red manoeuvre, where extensive use of the road network was employed (despite the risks of being observed posed by Blue UAVs). This allowed Red forces to rapidly capture both territory and materiel, thereby providing an initial advantage. The speed of Red's movement also allowed the IPFP dismounts to rapidly attack/destroy cultural sites and loot cultural artefacts, thus demonstrating the need for early site protection mechanisms. Blue had no intelligence on the national, regional, or local significance of the cultural heritage sites within their Area of Operations (owing to an artificially imposed intelligence gap) and was therefore unable to prioritise interdiction or ensure sites were sufficiently protected. This again reinforces the need to ensure that CHINT is incorporated into the operational planning process.

The lack of rotary-wing aircraft available to Blue forces resulted in a loss of interdiction capability, meaning that Blue was subject to a slower cross-country transit southwards to engage Red. This lack of interdiction capability also meant that Blue was powerless to prevent the looting of cultural material by Red forces. In some cases, Red had greater – but limited – firepower, which meant that concentrated and sustained attacks by Blue MIVs could overwhelm Red. It was this factor that led to the conclusion that in Exercise HORIZON STRIKE, Blue is likely the victor if the wargame is fully played through. In this scenario, while Blue would have achieved its primary aims of blocking the IPFP advance and clearing Red forces from the Area of Operations, cultural property was not wholly protected. This could have been mitigated through the explicit employment of CHINT to identify relevant sites, but it does raise the question as to whether *everything* can be protected in a military conflict. However, while it is a reality that armed conflict may result in the destruction of cultural heritage (MOD 2021: 12), adequate preparation is required *before* conflict to mitigate loss. This final point lends itself directly to Article 3 of the Hague Convention, where Parties (to the Convention) are required to 'prepare in time of peace for the safeguarding of cultural property...against the foreseeable effects of an armed conflict' (UNESCO 1954).

Future adaptations of HORIZON STRIKE could include other Human Security themes such as the imposition of Humanitarian Corridors as well as the need for Blue forces to undertake Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration of Red forces. Climate Insecurity could be introduced through the introduction of flash flooding into wadi systems as well as flood damage to critical infrastructure such as bridges and seeing how Red and Blue are operationally advantaged or disadvantaged during the wargame.

Conclusion

Wargames are not predictive; rather, they illustrate possible outcomes, meaning there is a risk of false lessons being identified from a single run of a wargame. Wargames can illustrate that something is plausible but will not be able to definitively predict that it is probable. In this sense, Exercise HORIZON STRIKE provides the means to help Staff Officers understand the practical difficulties of implementing Cultural Property Protection for an armoured Battalion whose main mission was to block and clear IPFP forces from the Area of Operations. This, in turn, enables appropriate responses to be developed by security forces prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

Exercise HORIZON STRIKE is set within an established insurgency deliberately mirroring events in the Sahel. Climate Insecurity brings an added layer of complexity – and realism – as does aligning this to Human Security and the universal operational requirement for military commanders to protect civilians.[4] Wargaming then enables military personnel to experiment with complexity and consider conflict in different terms, which in turn point to a different approach to the command and control of military action. It will be an approach that does not expect or pursue certainty or precise control but is able to function despite uncertainty and disorder (Schmitt nd).

Playing Exercise HORIZON STRIKE with different scenarios, starting conditions or players will allow for more robust conclusions to be drawn. For Cultural Property Protection in particular, Exercise HORIZON STRIKE modelled both the destruction of cultural sites and the looting of cultural material, which challenged the Blue force participants to develop suitable and robust responses within the context of their broader mission. This showed the importance of CHINT to the Blue force mission set and is a key lesson of the wargame and vital application to Operational Area Evaluation, Threat Evaluation and Situational Integration. Cultural Heritage Intelligence, within the wider military intelligence enterprise, provides assurance for the principle of 'distinction' within the Law of Armed Conflict and assists Staff Officers in understanding the battlespace better, particularly given that the current operational environment is characterised by a high degree of complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity (Badiu and Tică 2023).

Furthermore, opportunities to use Cultural Property Protection as a vehicle for influence development should not be overlooked. For example, Blue forces could deploy online influence campaigns highlighting Red force destruction of cultural sites and looting in order to generate negative sentiment among local populations, while simultaneously nurturing positive sentiment around Blue force activities and cultural protection measures. This is particularly relevant as the wargame demonstrated the vulnerability of moveable cultural property to looting by radical insurgents.

Exercise HORIZON STRIKE explored the interlinked themes of cultural heritage intelligence support to Human Security and Climate Insecurity from a military perspective by assessing how culture can be weaponised and exploited within the fictional Niagu River valley. Above all, the wargame was extremely engaging for the NATO Staff Officers at the CCOE by making it safe to fail because learning happens through experimentation. Engagement, through active learning, leads to better internalisation of training lessons and greater analytical insight.[5] As such, Exercise HORIZON STRIKE has helped better prepare NATO personnel for the kinds of challenges related to cultural heritage and adversarial strategic narratives they are going to be facing not just in Europe but in the series of conflicts unfolding throughout the world. As such, cultural heritage intelligence must – as a priority –be baked-into the design of NATO's Collective Training.

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[4] The principle of 'distinction' within the framework of the Law of Armed Conflict ensures that there is a clear distinction between armed forces personnel and civilians, or between combatants and non-combatants, and between objects that might legitimately be attacked and those that are protected from attack.

[5] Readers with an interest in military wargaming are encouraged to access commercially available board game simulations such as *Memoir '44* (released 2004), *Labyrinth: The War on Terror, 2001 –?* (released 2010) and *D-Day Dice* (released 2012).

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Chapter 18.
#Hashtaggingheritage: An Exploration of South Asian Social Media Landscapes and Heritage

Afifa Khan, Mou Sarmah, Vaneshree Vidyarthi, Rebecca Roberts and Cameron A. Petrie

Introduction

Damage and destruction of cultural heritage is often a flashpoint for political and social action at an international level, but the advent of widespread internet usage from the 1990s onwards and the increasing use of social media (SM) from the early 2000s, has transformed the ways in which people interact with these issues. With a vast increase in the speed and distance across which information travels, individuals and social movements now have platforms to get their message across in ways that often operate outside of state-controlled narratives and traditional media. Outrage in various forms followed the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in 2001 (Flood 2002), which occurred before the large-scale uptake of SM platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter). However, the destruction of archaeological heritage such as Nimrud and the Temple of Bel at Palmyra in Syria by Islamic State from 2014 onwards saw SM being actively employed by different groups and individuals to both promote or condemn the acts (Harmansah 2015).

In South Asia, there are now cases where acts of purposeful destruction that occurred a generation earlier are being revisited and re-evaluated in new ways through the lens of social media. The most notable example is the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, which occurred in December 1992, and the building and grand opening of the Mega Ram Temple in the same location in January 2024. In the wake of the grand opening, a wide range of complex issues surrounding Ayodhya and its heritage have been posted on SM. Although a lot of attention has been given to issues of conflict and misinformation, SM also plays important and positive roles in various areas, providing an outlet for grassroots movements working to celebrate and protect heritage and an opportunity for heritage institutions to interact directly with their audiences to further positive community relationships and share high-quality information about heritage.

The geographical scope of this chapter is primarily India and Pakistan, but examples from the wider South Asian region are referenced. South Asia is characterised by cultural diversity, political instability, and heritage preservation challenges, and the role of SM in this context is truly a double-edged sword. Content on SM can have multiple and far-reaching consequences, and academics in the heritage sector are still grappling with the best way to deal effectively and ethically with the various SM platforms (Bonacchi *et al* 2023). This chapter presents perspectives from the Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia (MAHSA) project, which is documenting archaeological heritage in the Indus Basin and surrounding areas and has actively engaged with SM to share project-related news and raise awareness of heritage in this region with both lay and specialist audiences (Matthews 2021).

In this chapter, heritage refers to the cultural, historical, and archaeological assets of South Asia and surrounding areas. Heritage is understood to represent 'a version of the past received through objects and display, representations and engagements, spectacular locations and events, memories and commemorations and the preparation of places for cultural purposes and consumptions' (Waterton and Watson 2015). This definition encompasses the preservation and protection of tangible heritage and intangible heritage, including historic sites, artefacts, traditions, and cultural practices that are deemed worthy of protection (Harrison 2010), reflecting the collective values of a community and signifying the importance of preserving and safeguarding elements that contribute to its identity (Throsby 1997).

Social media (SM) is also a broad term, encompassing various software applications that enable users to create profiles and share information as part of Web 2.0 platforms, flourishing since the early 2000s. Emphasising user-generated content, participatory culture, and interoperability, SM often has little or no monetary cost to the user (Boyd and Ellison

Reporting Heritage Destruction (Archaeopress 2025): 187–204

2007; Vassiliadis and Belenioti 2017). SM has been roughly classified into various types based on their presentation, presence, media richness, and self-disclosure: 'Social Networking Sites' (e.g. Facebook); 'Content Communities' (e.g. YouTube, Reddit); 'Collaborative Projects' (e.g. Wikipedia); 'Blogs' (e.g. WordPress); and 'Virtual Games' and 'Virtual Worlds' (Kaplan and Heinlein 2010). Each of these platforms releases large amounts of real-time, semi-structured data that are bound together with phenomena such as 'homophily' whereby similar users are likely to connect to each other and 'friends' are likely to influence each other's decisions (Hu *et al.* 2012; Yoo *et al.* 2018). This situation can result in an echo chamber of ideologies and perspectives that contribute to polarisation (Cinelli *et al.* 2021), especially on sensitive topics such as nationalism.

While SM platforms allow groups of people to keep in contact regardless of distances and border restrictions, they also give users the choice to remain anonymous and avoid monitoring by groups or states that may be considered hostile to them. Alternative platforms for communication through SM can become an important way to navigate state-imposed internet blackouts, and major news organisations now have their own Telegram messenger accounts to keep in touch with professional and amateur journalists (Allyn 2022; Bellingcat 2022; Osuri 2019). Since the early 2000s, there has been an acceleration in the use and popularity of SM due to smartphone accessibility and the reliance on real-time information sharing during times of crisis, for example, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Arab Spring (Kemp 2021). SM platforms such as Facebook, X, and others have become as integral as traditional media in the dissemination and discussion of information (and disinformation) (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), becoming the 'new communication status quo' (Belenioti *et al.* 2014). Not only is SM used in the everyday minutiae by an unnamed 'public' but also by institutions, companies and governments as a vital part of their 'branding' and engagement (Harris 2013; Kayani and Ur Rehman 2022).

The value of traditional independent media hinges on the idea of its relative autonomy and strict codes of conduct (Swain 2018). As this autonomy becomes increasingly threatened by a number of regimes around the world, the degree of trust in these forms of media also wanes (Stromback *et al.* 2020), and in many cases, 'New Media' such as social media has filled the gap (Stromback *et al.* 2020; Verboord *et al.* 2023). SM is different to traditional media in its lack of regulation, moderation and varying levels of duty of care to its users, and it often empowers hegemony rather than being a tool of democratisation (Taylor and Gibson 2017). In Pakistan and India, SM acts as a proprietor of both news and of entertainment (Mahmood *et al.* 2021), with the lines between both becoming increasingly blurred. This positioning can have real-world consequences for heritage.

This chapter explores the dynamics of recording and utilising heritage in digital spaces within a South Asian context. Focusing on the intersection of heritage and SM, the study investigates the potential of SM in reporting threatened heritage, fostering awareness, and building trust among affected communities. With reference to the complex historical and political landscapes of this region, the chapter considers Ayodhya in India, Buddhist heritage in Pakistan, and marginalised groups in both India and Pakistan as case studies to exemplify real-life manifestations of these challenges. It underscores SM's transformative role in preserving and comprehending cultural heritage, impacting education, research, and public awareness, while also considering the ethical dilemmas associated with its use in heritage reporting.

Digital Spaces in India and Pakistan

Pakistan and India share long intertwined histories, yet their modern history is marked by contentious relationships brought on by a painful partition (Khan 2017). Between them, India and Pakistan boast two of the world's largest and fastest-growing populations, the world's largest democracies, and the world's largest numbers of active Facebook users (Dixon 2024; World Bank 2020). Nonetheless, there is a large portion of the population that, for infrastructure, social and financial reasons, does not engage in the digital space. For instance, there is a 57% gap in internet usage between men and women in India and a 43% gap in Pakistan (Galpaya *et al.* 2019; Galpaya and Zainudeen 2022). Though there are growing numbers of mobile phone users in both countries, there is also a great urban-rural divide, with a 22% gap in mobile phone ownership between urban and rural communities in India and a 5% gap in Pakistan. Furthermore, there are a greater number of 'basic' phone (call only) and 'feature' phone (a few functions beyond calls) users versus smartphone users, so even if mobile phone use is on the up, this does not mean that all those with phones have internet access (see Figure 1) (Galpaya *et al.* 2019). This could result in biases in the content generated and shared in favour of wealthier, urban and male demographics over others. Despite evidence of digital inequity, a significant portion of the population (over 30% in both countries) actively engages in the digital space (ITU 2021). While these figures mean that large portions of the population still do not engage in digital spaces, these people have still been impacted by the incredibly rapid and dynamic internet discourses in both countries. One only has to observe the situation in Ayodhya, with the rise in SM use around the opening of the Ram Temple, or the

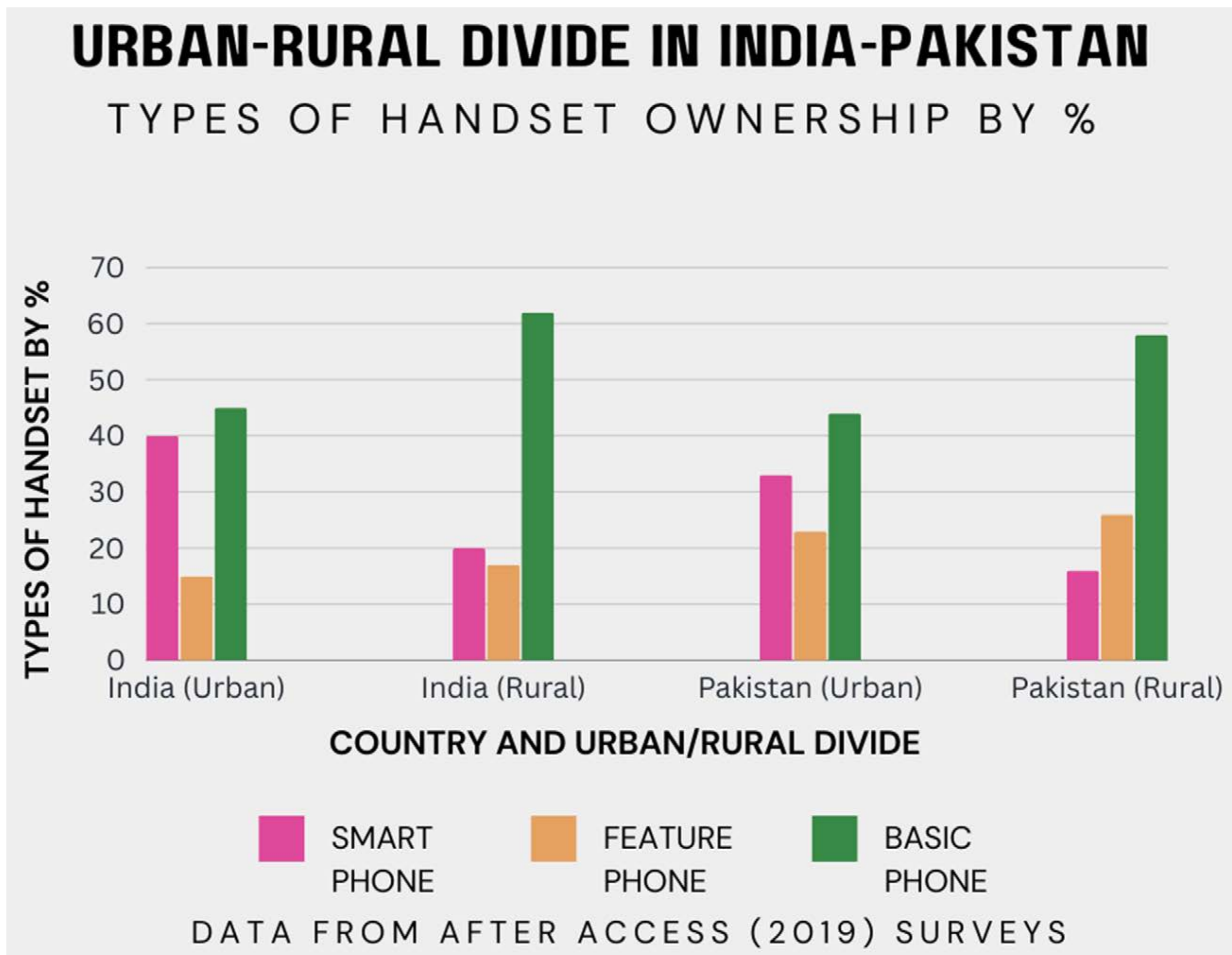

Figure 1: The urban-rural divide in terms of the kinds of mobile phones owned, with greater smart phone usage in urban locations and a large proportion still using basic phones in both Pakistan and India (Galpaya *et al*, 2019).

treatment of the Kalash communities, to see how online discourses have knock on effects on the ground. There is also an inextricable link between SM and travel, with the rise of travel bloggers on sites such as Instagram and TikTok. Often, these narratives of encouraging travel and tourism can unwittingly neglect local communities and their stories (Irfan 2021).

In India, thanks to government initiatives and development efforts there have been strides made to increase internet penetration and access to technology. The proposed Digital India Act (2023) and the 2023 campaign aim to provide internet access to all *gram panchayats* (village councils) as well as improve infrastructure, tech literacy and resources (CSC 2023). This process has been particularly successful in urban centres; however, half of the population still lacks this access. This shift in access, in combination with the popularity of Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube, has meant that the largest population in the world is now more in contact with each other– and the rest of the world–than ever before. Beyond sharing entertaining memes and videos, the internet has also been a forum for the real-time mass organisation of groups in digital spaces with little monitoring. Whether the Jan Lokpal Act, Nirbhaya, Farmers Protest, or reporting in Manipur, SM platforms have been key to raising awareness of issues and drumming up support for political movements rapidly and with relatively less censorship and monitoring. As in the Arab Spring and Iranian protests, Facebook, WhatsApp and X were vital to the shaping of these movements (Varga 2017). Polls taken by the Indian National Election Studies (NES), which has captured election data since 1996, also started recording data on SM users, having identified the significant impact these online streams of information have on the electorate (NES 2019; Sardesi 2019).

While Pakistan shows similar overall trends, it also represents a very different national and cultural space. As of January 2023, around 80% of the total population of Pakistan have cellular phone connections, and

around 30% of the population is using SM (Kemp 2023). This access is not equal, with women being significantly less likely than men to be online in Pakistan (Amber and Chichaibelu 2023). The use of digital spaces by Pakistani youth as political forums and for political activism has also generally been increasing, especially since the pandemic, when long lockdowns had forced much activism to move online (Bano *et al.* 2021). For instance, the Roshni Welfare Organisation tackled gender-based violence through documentation of statements on such violence using Facebook to encourage healthy debate (Butt 2023). The use of SM platforms such as Facebook has also had a political impact, with women in Pakistan using it to consume and disseminate political information and views from the relative safety of their homes. Consequently, this has also led to increased offline political participation by Pakistani women (Shehzad *et al.* 2021). As of February 2024, X is banned in Pakistan by the government, who cited safety and security concerns surrounding the election, resulting in the increased use of VPNs in a country that is becoming increasingly accustomed to internet outages and censors (Castro 2024; Shahzad 2024).

To gauge the digital sphere concerning heritage in Pakistan and India, a survey of popular, text-centred platforms such as X and Facebook (from the 2023-24 period) was conducted. It should be noted that South Asia is a highly linguistically diverse region, but as most of the relevant content is posted in three major languages, the survey focused on English, Urdu and Hindi posts. A sample of 51 posts was taken from five major heritage authorities in Pakistan and India: Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), with 148,000 followers; Department of Archaeology and Museums, Pakistan (DOAM) with 4300 followers; Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) with 8,469 followers; Endowment Fund Trust, Pakistan, with 4,213 followers; and DOAM Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (with 27,000 followers). The follower counts of each of the heritage authorities is a cumulative number from both X and Facebook and are true as of January 2024. These organisations are a mix of governmental, NGO, and private-sector entities, holding some influence in the reporting, recording and protection of heritage and archaeology in India and Pakistan. Though the follower counts are not large compared to other accounts, such as Brown History (2017), they are still among the most active institutions online and in reporting their news on SM. Overall, there are some broad themes in what is reported: Internal Events (visiting dignitaries, inaugurations, etc.), Public Events (‘mela’/fair, special openings at heritage sites, etc.), Organisational News (appointments, projects and actions, etc.), Professional Development (conferences, training and job postings), Books and Publications, Heritage Informational Posts. Some of these posts allow the public to learn about and engage with the activities being conducted by the organisations, such as ‘Events’ and ‘Heritage Informational posts’, while others can act as advertising boards for heritage professionals in South Asia, much in the way that the British Archaeological Jobs Resource Bajr (2008; 2024) is in the UK.

The public reporting of heritage takes two main forms: comments on posts/pages of these major heritage organisations and posts on individuals’ accounts or directly addressed to authorities.

Examples of the first were identified in the sample of posts below:

> ‘Pls protect kalish temple in ellora from the rainwater…’ (IndianHeritage.GoI 2015).

> ‘You are also making changes in original designs while restoration. The border around Pishtak is changed in restored building’ (KPDOAMOfficial 2018).

There are some recurring threads in posts by members of the public that are more regionally specific. Some general themes observed include expressions of pride/nationalism, political commentary, praise/criticism of heritage and heritage management, and reports of little known/endangered heritage. For the latter, a small sample of posts was identified through relevant hashtags (e.g. #heritage #threat) and mentions (e.g.@ ASIGoI, @KPDOAMOfficial) highlighting archaeological sites and heritage that were deteriorating, lacking recognition or in imminent danger:

> ‘I would request KP DOAM to also take steps for the preservation of District Tank Archaeological sites’ (Mehsud 2020)

> ‘I have grown up watching these antic [sic] row houses & it feels sad that most of these are getting demolished’ (Sheth 2022)

In some cases, authorities have taken note of such posts, resulting in action on the ground. For example, in the colonial era, Pana Chand Dasandash Nyandas building in Karachi, Pakistan, was reported on SM as it was being demolished without authorisation (Siddiqui 2023). Though too late to save some of the facade, the Sindh Government did file a police case against the building owner and a sealing order was issued (Siddiqui 2023). This has served as a precedent for further such posts on social media about endangered buildings in the hope that the relevant authorities will be informed and pressured to act in time (Figure 2) (Mazhar 2024).

In addition to the efforts of heritage institutions, various social media channels and initiatives have emerged to promote and celebrate cultural heritage.

Figure 2: A local architect alerted the authorities when a listed building was being illegally demolished (Mazhar, 2024; Siddiqui, 2023).

They have much higher followings and arguably have been more successful in engaging the public with the heritage of South Asia. Some of the most popular examples include Brown History with 719,000 followers; History of Pakistan with 541,000; India Lost and Found with 857,000; and Enroute Indian History with 157,000. These social media channels serve as educational resources and platforms for dialogue, debate, and community-building around shared cultural identities and experiences (Knudsen *et.al.* 2022; Sudra 2022). The combined efforts of these institutions and SM accounts show that there is an interest in learning and engaging with South Asian heritage and that it is possible to have fruitful two-way conversations on these platforms, whereby the public can learn and engage with heritage at a distance and also give their own input and even report on endangered local heritage to authorities in an accessible way.

Engagement and Documentation

Engagement and documentation efforts in South Asia are crucial for preserving the region's rich and diverse heritage. The Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia project (MAHSA) is working to document heritage data and share this knowledge with the wider community, including members of the public, heritage professionals, and those working in infrastructure and development (Matthews 2021). MAHSA is operating in Pakistan and northwest India, which are both still grappling with the legacy of colonialism by the British and other Western powers. The abundant heritage of the Indus River Basin, which spans both countries, is threatened by the rapid rise of agriculture, urbanisation and climate change during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and all these processes are exacerbated by shifting political landscapes (Conesa *et al.* 2022; Dieterich 2022; Gautam 2022). By engaging with multiple stakeholders and raising awareness of vulnerable archaeological heritage, MAHSA aims to facilitate its protection.

SM plays a vital role in enabling two-way engagement on an international stage (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Platforms such as Facebook, X, WhatsApp, and YouTube offer various benefits and challenges for the academic community (Rogers 2013). Facebook and WhatsApp, for instance, are widely used in South Asia, enabling outreach to audiences when traditional advertising routes have proved too insular or hard to navigate, and they have also been invaluable in raising awareness of heritage and archaeology (Mishra, 2019). SM spaces can work beyond borders, allowing fluid interaction between different South Asian communities to celebrate their shared heritage or highlight minority communities. Examples include the blogging websites associated with popular SM accounts 'Brown History', which has 708K followers on Instagram and 'Enroute Indian History', which has 122K followers (as of 2024). These high followership numbers make these accounts 'Macro Influencers' by most metrics and increase their ability to reach and engage with the public (Nizri 2022).

In some cases, SM has empowered local communities in remote areas of South Asia to protect their heritage (Bhargava 2023; Maharjan 2021). The public can feel confident in reporting heritage issues with relative anonymity, which is especially the cases where heritage institutions have better online and public presences: e.g. the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Department of Archaeology and Museums (DOAM), Pakistan (Siddiqui 2022). These ground-level reports often serve as the last records of heritage before its loss, but in other cases have led to last-minute intervention, as illustrated by the case of British Colonial buildings in Karachi (Mazhar 2024; Siddiqui 2023). As such, SM has the potential to be an important reporting tool for heritage bodies with stretched and limited resources to identify endangered heritage sites.

Online interactions have had direct and indirect impacts on heritage as well as its perception by members of the public (Ginzarly *et al.* 2019; Khalid and Chowdhury 2018; Lunchaprasith and Pasupa 2021; Pietrobruno 2020; Vassiliadis and Belenioti 2017). However, previous studies have focused on urbanised landscapes (e.g. Gregory 2015; Swain 2018; van der Hoeven 2019; Yoon and Chung 2018) and tourism (e.g. Kourtit *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Khalid and Chowdhury 2018), South Asia has thus far been underrepresented in such discussions, despite its large number of active users and rich cultural landscape.

Ethical Challenges and Considerations

While undertaking the documentation work of MAHSA, and in the course of writing this chapter, many ethical considerations have been navigated. In addition to periods of political volatility, there are many subjects that remain sensitive, whether due to religious or regional tensions, the legacies of colonialism or the cross-border tensions. It is important to respect this sensitivity and consider the implications of what is discussed. Though news is published on SM platforms, and more people have come to rely on these platforms as news sources, they are not legally considered publishing houses and so do not have to abide by editorial standards and codes of conduct that are standard for traditional news media (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017; NUJ 2011). This chapter argues that heritage professionals have many of the same ethical responsibilities that journalists have and should report on heritage to these standards, even on SM platforms.

In the case of the MAHSA project, SM attempts to represent both Pakistan and India in a balanced manner with the best intentions. The project is largely based in the UK, and it is important to note that most SM posts are in English. Although between them, MAHSA team members speak many South Asian languages, and most SM platforms now have a translation function, the dominance of English will exclude some people from interacting. It is acknowledged that by engaging in a global conversation, comments will be received from all voices in the discussion. This extends into specifically sensitive political narratives that could be construed from SM posts. However, it would be remiss not to mention some issues (e.g., Ayodhya, Kashmir, minority rights) in this chapter due to their relevance to the topic at hand. Efforts have been made to avoid offending affected parties, in the knowledge that harm can be created in online spaces if due consideration is not given. The suggestions given here come from both research and the MAHSA project's practical use of SM. They are examples of initial steps that can be taken for responsible and effective engagement online rather than prescriptive solutions.

Fraught Contexts in Heritage Preservation: Three Case Studies

The political, social, religious, and cultural are entwined in heritage spaces and open to interpretation by pluralistic societies, meaning heritage is inherently 'dissonant' and open to multiple interpretations (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). In the following section, we extend our examination to specific instances of the politicisation of heritage in Pakistan and India, emphasising the importance of a nuanced, responsible approach.

In contemporary India and Pakistan, heritage has emerged as a powerful political instrument. Wielded by governments and political parties to shape national narratives, foster identity, and advance political agendas, often intertwining cultural narratives with nationalistic sentiments (Ali *et al.* 2022; Assayag 2003). Elements of this process can be traced back to the European colonisation of India and especially to the process of independence and partition in 1947. In order to establish separate and distinct countries, separate, distinct and more homogenous identities had to be forged from a region of diverse and complicated identities and ethnicities (Basu and Damodaran 2015). To facilitate this process, the interpretation of heritage was also simplified by assigning it to a few religious or regional categories e.g., Islamic or Buddhist periods (Lloyd 2011; Ray 2012).

As in many countries, the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in Pakistan and India are intrinsically linked to the construction of national identity and are inseparable from politics. They are also key to their 'nation branding' and an important element of 'soft power' at an international level (Yousaf *et al.* 2014). Governments in both countries have leveraged historical sites, monuments, and traditions to reinforce a sense of belonging among their citizens. For example, the Indian government's long-held emphasis on UNESCO World Heritage Sites like the Taj Mahal or Khajuraho serves not only to attract tourism but also to highlight a nationally shared rich and ancient cultural heritage (Ali *et al*. 2022). However, even iconic monuments such as the Taj Mahal have become issues of debate in traditional media and SM (Pandey 2017; Safi 2017; Tharoor 2018). Some groups have debated the 'secularism' vs the 'religiosity' of the monument (Ahmad 2023), debating whether 'Muslim heritage' should remain a symbol of the postcolonial and majority Hindu nation of India (Dasgupta 2018). SM has further polarised these debates in recent years (Dasgupta 2018).

For some in Pakistan, the promotion of Mughal heritage sites, such as Badshahi Masjid, has emphasised the idea

of a continuous historical legacy of a powerful Muslim-ruled empire (Aga Khan 2020), giving Pakistan a distinct cultural legacy that diverges from post-independence India. The underlying and persistent recognition of the rivalry between India and Pakistan is likely a major factor in these readings of present nationhood, despite the existence of a much broader shared heritage (Khan 2017).

Engagement with heritage sites is often intertwined with communal politics, especially for places of religious significance. Controversies surrounding places like Ayodhya in India, as well as the retaliatory actions against the Jain Mandir in Pakistan, have been exploited by political actors to mobilise support by citing religious doctrine. These issues have the potential to spark tensions between different communities and even nations, further deepening political, religious and social divides (Ahmad and Falki 2023; Ali *et al.* 2022). The case studies below showcase the complexities surrounding heritage when high-tension issues are brought into the online realm through SM.

Case Study 1: Ayodhya Ram Temple

The Ayodhya dispute entwines political, historical, and socio-religious issues around a parcel of land situated in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. A mosque known as the Babri Masjid was built at this location in 1528-29, but since at least the eighteenth century, this same location has been revered as the birthplace of the deity Ram by Hindus. The Babri Masjid was demolished by a mob in 1992, and there has been a legally charged debate over whether an earlier Hindu temple was dismantled or altered to facilitate the construction of the mosque (Edge and Rajan 2020; Mehta 2015; Srivastava 1994).

The subsequent legal trajectory of the Ayodhya dispute has spanned decades, making it one of India's most intricate court cases and a focal point of its identity politics. In a landmark ruling in 2019, the Supreme Court of India decreed the transfer of the contested land to a trust tasked with overseeing the construction of a Hindu temple, the Ram Mandir. Simultaneously, a separate piece of land in Ayodhya was allocated for the construction of a mosque (Edge and Rajan 2020; Mehta 2015; Srivastava 1994). The new temple was inaugurated on 22 January 2024, and construction of the structure is ongoing.

The construction of the Ram Mandir has attracted national and global attention. Google Trends searches from the time reveal an uptick in interest in terms related to the temple and Hindu nationalist slogans and songs (Figure 3). Even before these discussions proliferated on SM, the construction of the Ram Mandir witnessed the spread of misinformation and false narratives, which contributed to unrest in many communities, local, national and international, which was then amplified through SM. For example, it has become clear that false statements and wrongly captioned or altered photos and videos were circulated on SM at the time of the inauguration and also earlier, leading to the manipulation of truth and the distortion of reality (Anand 2024; BBC 2020; Das 2024; Hindustan Times 2024; Madaan 2024; The Indian Express 2024).

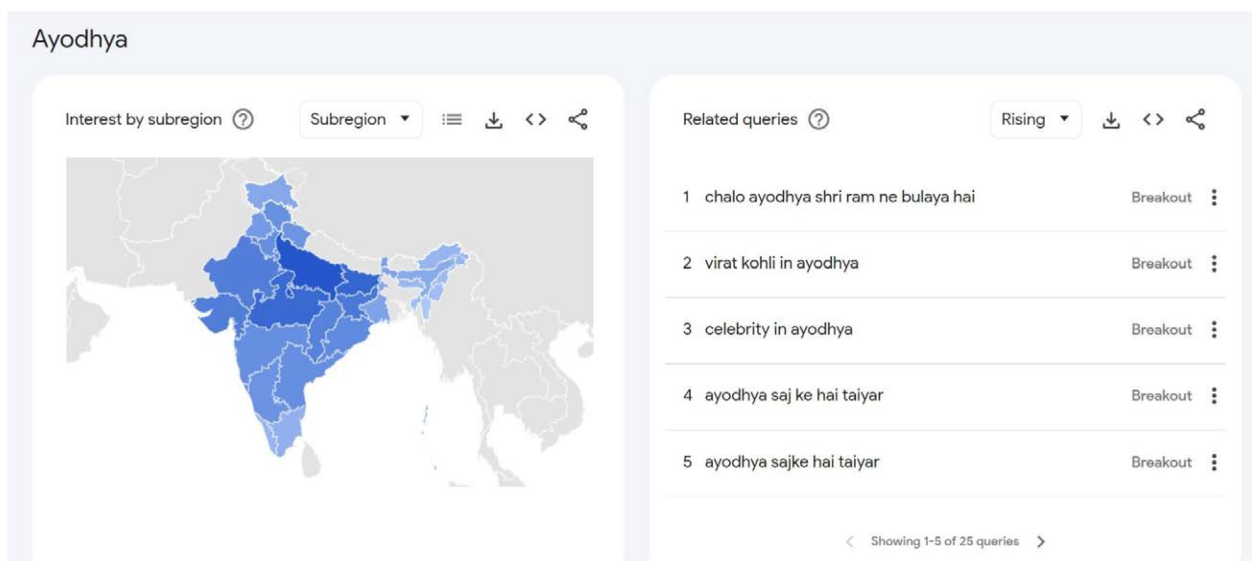

Figure 3: The 'breakout', top queries associated with Ayodhya on YouTube have been of interest in almost all states in India in the Jan-Feb 2024 period (Google Trends, 2024). © Google.

'*Mandir waha nahi banaya gaya*' (the temple is not being built on the site of the demolition) was a viral claim being spread on X, Facebook, YouTube, etc., and images of another temple were presented as the site for the Ram Mandir (Indian 2024). A Google Satellite search revealed that an incorrect tag had likely been placed on the SM sites (Madaan 2024). In other cases, simple reverse image searches have revealed that several viral images linked with the Ram temple were, in fact, showing completely different temples elsewhere in India (Anand 2024; BBC 2020; Logical Indian 2020). The images of established and particularly spectacular temples help to highlight the grandness of the new temple. With the lack of official images at that early point in the temple's construction, these other images filled the void and may have built anticipation of the opening day.

The spread of such false information often leads to a manipulated perspective on the temple itself, potentially rousing further communal tensions. Due to the nature of SM, its access, and repeated sharing, it can be difficult to trace original posts and examine the aims of those who share this content (Sirlin *et al.* 2021). The results, however, are more apparent. By sharing images of other temples, public attention is continually on the Ram Temple, which some have argued serves to detract from other political issues, as well as to act as propaganda during an election year (Gupta 2024). It can also be further interpreted as legitimising or detracting from the destruction of the Babri Masjid and encouraging similar actions against other heritage, including a historic mosque in Varanasi and even heritage of international renown, such as the Taj Mahal (Gupta 2024; Iyer 2022; Singh and Winter 2023).

In these cases, opportunists took the chance of the inauguration to manipulate people for different reasons, some political and some financial. For example, ahead of the inauguration ceremony, fraudulent links claiming to provide VIP tickets and Ram Temple prasad (offerings) were circulated on SM. A fake WhatsApp message with a QR code promising instant VIP tickets was extensively shared (Hindustan Times 2024), both of which are clear examples of attempting to defraud potential pilgrims. These issues caused the Indian Broadcasting and Information Ministry to issue an advisory to media outlets to 'refrain from publishing/telecasting any content that may be false or manipulated' and further cautioning SM platforms to do the same (Express News Service 2024; Pandey 2024).

The consequences of these falsified narratives are not simple misunderstandings of ceremonies and tickets. Each post and repost has been viewed thousands of times, and some have even been shared on traditional media (Pandey 2019; Prasad 2019). Considering the current tensions between the majority Hindu and minority Muslim communities in India, the re-emergence of the Babri Masjid-Ram Temple issue keeps the wounds of affected communities open. The spread of stories and misinformation on the temple via SM works to keep these issues and the Ram Temple in the political and cultural limelight. Globally, there is a growing lack of trust in authority figures, established news, and 'experts', and SM platforms can quicken the erosion of trust in 'trustworthy' sources of information by amplifying and promulgating misinformation through the 'echo chamber' effect they can be used to create (Massey 2018). This lack of trust, coupled with a general lack of media and digital literacy in the South Asian public (Guess *et al.* 2020; Sirlin *et al.* 2021), as well as growing numbers of social media users (Dixon 2024; World Bank 2020), has resulted in a proliferation of misinformation on many topics, but especially on politically charged topics such as Ayodhya.

A number of critics have raised concerns about the politicisation of the Ram Mandir, arguing that it erodes India's diversity, stifles religious debate, and contributes to the marginalisation of the country's Muslim population (Mendoza 2024). Professor Arjun Appudurai spoke extensively on how X and similar platforms have created 'flash mobs' online, where no one is accountable for real-life actions, and political groups use such action as a 'permanent strategy to bolster their power' (Gultasli 2024). Physical mobs, such as those that destroyed the Babri Masjid, existed before SM, but an archive of amplified tensions at a large scale is preserved on SM platforms. Gultasli (2024) also noted that although an area has been allocated for the 'potential' construction of a new mosque, this will be dwarfed by the Ram Mandir, furthering the marginalisation of Muslims in the region. Singh and Winter (2023) have argued that the example of Ayodhya may create the template for further attacks and manipulation of heritage in online spaces, especially focused on those deemed 'Islamic' heritage.

Case Study 2: Recording the Iconoclasm of Buddhist Heritage

In 2001, the Taliban regime destroyed two giant Buddha statues that had stood over the valley of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, since the sixth century CE. Not only was this a systematic destruction using explosives and the expert knowledge of engineers, but it was also a staged act involving rocket launchers and mortars. This performative destruction of heritage was, in part, one strand of a strategy to draw strong emotions from the national and international community (Alamsaya *et al.* 2022; Flood 2002; Harmansah 2015). Much has been written about the publicity generated by such events of heritage destruction in Bamiyan, Syria, and Iraq, among

others (e.g. Falser 2011; Gonzalez *et al.* 2018). However, there were also copycat cases of destruction that occurred in Pakistan, carried out by Tehreek-e-Taliban in Swat, and then subsequently by ordinary citizens, and these actions were then circulated as videos, but without the same level of international attention (Nazir *et al.* 2023). For example, in 2007, the Jahanabad Buddha in Swat was partially defaced in circumstances similar to those of the Bamiyan Buddhas. Although this destruction was not documented as extensively as the Bamiyan Buddhas, images of the defacement were shared widely on news channels and in newspapers, and then reshared on YouTube, Facebook, and other platforms online (Nazir *et al.* 2023).

Emotion is a major driver of the virality of SM content (Tellis *et al.* 2019). When videos and images of heritage destruction are shared online, these acts continue to have an online presence beyond the timeframe of the event itself. Even after the Taliban were mostly driven from the Swat region, occasional acts of iconoclasm and destruction of heritage continue to occur, such as in the case of four construction workers who filmed themselves smashing a Buddha statue with a hammer in July 2020 (Aajakia 2020; Sirajuddin 2020). This video was shared online and then subsequently cross-platformed onto X, TikTok, Facebook, and others (Sirajuddin 2020). The potential for small-scale acts to have a global audience marks a new impetus for undertaking these acts, giving them a power that had not previously existed.

The case of the Jahanabad Buddha statue underscores the detrimental impact of political upheavals and terrorist activities on cultural heritage. It also serves as a stark reminder of how SM can be used to propagate extremist narratives, increasing the 'reward' for such destructive actions. The interplay between religion, heritage, and SM in this case demonstrates the need for responsible and accurate information dissemination to preserve cultural heritage and promote peace. It should be noted that thanks to concerted efforts by Pakistani and Italian conservation specialists, the face of the Jahanabad Buddha was restored in 2017 (GeoNews 2016). In the case of the construction workers, police reports were filed almost as soon as the videos became known to the relevant authorities (Farmer 2020). In both cases, the local community, media and heritage professionals emphasised the importance of protecting this heritage for a sense of sustainability, peace, and tourism (Nazir *et al.* 2023). This local response has been reflected in the levels of regional and international news and SM coverage that both events achieved (Farmer 2020; GeoNews 2016; Nazir *et al.* 2023; Sirajuddin 2020; Zada 2012).

Case study 3: reporting of intangible and tangible heritage from marginalised communities

Social media has been a transformative force on politics and intangible heritage within marginalised communities in India and Pakistan, offering both opportunities and challenges (Batchelor and Newhouse 2022). Through the lens of identity and politics, the cases of Kashmir and the Kalash community illuminate the complex dynamics shaped by SM.

SM has emerged as a crucial platform for marginalised communities, serving as a powerful tool to challenge existing power structures and amplify their voices (Eickers and Rath 2021). Kashmir has witnessed a proliferation of polarised narratives on SM. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram and X have become a refuge for Kashmiris to share personal accounts and engage in citizen journalism, especially during internet and media blockages on both the Indian and Pakistani sides of the border. In the case of India this has often occurred in times of heightened tensions, such as the 144-day blockade which happened in tandem with the decision to revoke Kashmir's special 'autonomous' status through Article 370 in 2019 and resulted in both media and internet blockages in the country (Hussein 2023). Similarly, in the Pakistan-administered Azad Kashmir, mobile internet has been blocked in times of protest, such as the Imran Khan protests in 2023 (Al Jazeera 2023), or politically fraught times, such as elections (Hussain 2024). As in many such situations, internet users and journalists have learned to adapt, using VPNs and other methods to bypass blockages and share videos, photos and other messages on social media platforms (Catro 2024). However, this empowerment comes with a price, and online posts have led to the criminalisation of journalists and activists (Castro 2024; Cloteaux 2022; Osuri 2019).

Similarly, the Kalash community in Northern Pakistan, facing marginalisation and cultural erosion, has harnessed SM to promote and preserve its unique cultural identity. The youth of the Kalash community have utilised platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to showcase traditional dances, music, festivals, and craftsmanship. This proactive engagement has raised awareness about Kalash culture and has also fostered a sense of pride and unity within the community (Choudhry *et al.* 2018; Khan 2023). However, tourists and YouTubers often exploit Kalash festivals and daily life for content, disseminating inaccurate information and adversely affecting the tribe's reputation (Irfan 2021; SuchTV 2023; Torwali 2023).

Despite the potential for empowerment, both communities grapple with challenges posed by SM. In Kashmir, the governing powers and SM companies have

been complicit in suppressing dissenting voices, leading to internet blackouts and online censorship (Chak 2022). The Kalash community, on the other hand, faces misrepresentation and cultural insensitivity fuelled by tourism and SM. While SM has been instrumental in providing many marginalised communities with a platform to voice their narratives and promote their cultural heritage, it simultaneously poses threats through misrepresentation, discrimination, and external pressures. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that upholds cultural integrity, promotes responsible tourism, and ensures the fair representation of these communities in the digital realm. In navigating the complex interplay of identity and politics on SM, it is crucial to recognise both the opportunities for empowerment and the risks of perpetuating marginalisation and 'othering'.

Navigating Fraught Contexts

Despite their often-fraught nature, SM media platforms host a great deal of data that can inform heritage professionals about the ways that heritage is used, engaged with and perceived by the public, and this information can then inform better practice. Semantic analysis of cultural heritage news on platforms, aiming to derive the meanings, contexts and relationships behind text, can provide valuable insights into public perceptions and narratives (Maniou 2021). For example, image-sharing apps, such as Instagram, Flickr, and Facebook can contain geotagged images of heritage that are linked to thoughts and comments, but these images also provide information on trends through hashtags (#) and tags (@), which can be used alongside more traditional survey methods to understand public engagement with heritage (Farahani *et al.* 2018; Ginzarly *et al.* 2019; Ginzarly and Teller 2021; Loke *et al.* 2022).

Museums and heritage sites have used social media tools to simultaneously expand the accessibility and communication components of these institutions (Vassiliadis and Belenioti 2018), but such approaches have also been broadened to include whole heritage landscapes and cities with the idea of 'place branding'. The idea of the 'place brand' in social media has been especially impactful for heritage as it has become more and more incorporated with tourism (Kourtit *et al.* 2019; Vassiliadis and Belenioti 2018; Yoon and Won Chung 2018). This shift, combined with the concept of cultural heritage 'buzz', shapes destination images and influences tourist behaviours (Kourtit *et al.* 2019). Understanding these digital marketing trends can thus widen the interest in these places, but also better the communication between heritage professionals and visitors as well as increase respect by improving the communication given to visitors.

Engagement with SM can also facilitate the documentation of aspects of 'unofficial' heritage, such as intangible or subaltern heritage (Bonilla and Rosa 2015; van der Hoeven 2019). Importantly, SM platforms are not a one-way street, and they can provide an arena for online communities to actively participate in heritage-related activities, enhancing social inclusion in heritage planning processes (Bai *et al.* 2021), as seen in Karachi (Mazhar 2024). The contribution of SM apps to collective community memory and cultural expression also has the potential to urge policymakers to leverage these platforms for sustainable heritage conservation (Liang *et al.* 2021). The New Zealand Garden Survey project harnessed crowdsourced data on Facebook pages that they managed, focusing on creating 'Communities of Practice' in online spaces characterised by three elements: a domain, a community of people and a practice or common resources to work from (Liberatore *et al.* 2018). There was an emphasis on maintaining standards of reporting, which for heritage contexts, may be especially important as publicly publishing the exact locations of sites may also draw negative attention from looters and others who may harm it (Alamsyah *et al.* 2022).

The two-way nature of interaction on social media can be used as a form of citizen science, which can be an asset in science and research, offering a potent answer that tackles the professional labour constraint as well as the need for public engagement (Smith 2014). Both are issues particularly relevant to South Asian countries that have especially large constraints on resources for managing and reporting on heritage, although requiring careful consideration of how to equitably reward, acknowledge and support participating members of the community. Scholars have argued that the citizen science paradigm can be applied to archaeological research in four ways: through crowdsourcing heritage data online (Contreras and Brodie 2010); searching large satellite image collections for site identification and monitoring (Parcak 2020); using mobile applications for photography and data upload during fieldwork; and crowdfunding (Smith 2014). It has been a key method for bridging the divide between the 'expert' and the 'local communities' and/or 'general public' and building trust, especially in remote and dispersed communities e.g., the Nunalleq Project in Alaska (Milek 2018; van der Hoeven 2019). It is also understood in such projects that 'standardised' data is difficult to compile even with trained archaeologists working in the same team (Hawkins 2003; Smith 2014). Inconsistencies in the data can be mitigated by setting some standards that are managed by admins, but they can also provide varied and important perspectives toward heritage that may otherwise have been missed (Libertore *et al* 2018; Smith 2014).

In South Asia, SM has been identified as an emerging tool in popularising heritage sites in Pakistan to boost engagement and help with conservation (Umer *et al.* 2023). The transmission and preservation of intangible cultural heritage has also been aided using these tools, such as in the case of the Baul songs in Bangladesh (Khalid and Chowdhury 2018). This work emphasises the role of SM in disseminating and preserving cultural heritage, enabling communication and collaboration among individuals at a massive scale without the constraints of geography, time, and political systems (Khalid and Chowdhury 2018). Currently, the focus is largely on urban and built heritage (Aga Khan 2020; Bai *et al.* 2021; Umer *et al.* 2023). Although some research has been conducted on intangible cultural heritage (Khalid and Chowdhury 2018; Zargar 2023), there are still large gaps in its study in relation to SM. Often, the use of SM by agencies is due to specific areas or sites being easily linked to tourism and revenue generation, which can bring positive benefits to local communities. Aside from this work, there is remarkably little published work focusing on the South Asian context for SM and heritage. However, it may be possible for local stakeholders to consider examples from other regions facing similar issues, thereby helping them to more effectively understand and integrate social media into heritage reporting and management practices. Stakeholders such as academic institutions and heritage agencies must improve their literacy and understanding of social media as well as recognise and strategically harness the potential of SM for a comprehensive and sustainable cultural heritage engagement, navigating this intersection with scholars, institutions, and policymakers.

Conclusion: Wielding The Double-Edged Sword

Social media presents both opportunities and challenges for heritage preservation in South Asia. While it can amplify extreme narratives about identity politics and endanger vulnerable sites–as seen in the examples of Ayodhya Ram Temple, the Bamiyan Buddhas and within marginalised communities in India and Pakistan–it also offers a powerful platform for engagement, documentation, and protection of cultural heritage as demonstrated by how heritage institutions, the public and social media channels are using SM in promoting heritage. To harness its potential effectively, a balanced and responsible approach is crucial.

The preservation of cultural heritage is a shared responsibility that extends beyond institutional efforts, with individuals and communities playing a pivotal role. Social media can serve as a platform for participatory praxis, enabling cross-dialogue between stakeholders and allowing users to become co-creators of their heritage (UNESCO 2011). Platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and others provide a public space for collecting diverse perspectives, especially from underrepresented groups such as the Kalash people in Northern Pakistan (Choudhry *et al.* 2018; Khan 2023) or heavily militarised areas such as Kashmir (Osuri 2019).

However, navigating fraught contexts requires a delicate balance. Leveraging social media's participatory culture, disruptive capacities, and responsible practices highlighted in academic research is essential. Establishing interdisciplinary frameworks and language is crucial for researchers and professionals to collaboratively address challenges posed by the rise of extreme forms of ethno-religious/national identity, extremist iconoclasm, and the endangerment of minoritised heritage. While heritage can serve as a unifying force, it is also susceptible to manipulation for political gains. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for fostering a nuanced perspective on the intersection of culture, politics, and national identity in both Pakistan and India (Alamsyah *et al.* 2022). Another major issue in online spaces is misinformation related to heritage, and heritage institutions must verify sources before posting or reposting information and images as they do in publication, and to improve their social media 'literacy' to understand how algorithms and trends impact how information on social media is spread and received (Guess *et al.* 2020; Sirlin *et al.* 2021).

Importantly, the SM digital sphere is not all conflict and misinformation, and there is an abundance of grassroots, high-quality, and detailed information posted by members of the public and accessible through social media that can help accomplish multiple objectives: aiding stretched heritage departments in recording and monitoring sites and buildings (Mazhar 2024; Siddiqui 2023); raising awareness and fostering a sense of community around sites and developing trust between stakeholders through increased engagement and information sharing (Milek 2018, Nazir *et al.* 2023). To harness this potential, heritage institutions can create a 'forum' on widely used platforms, such as Facebook, where local communities and interested parties can interact, offer support, and raise awareness of lesser-known and endangered heritage. Appointing 'admins' who can enforce 'Terms of Engagement' and flag posts about threatened or unrecorded heritage with relevant authorities would also support the promotion of verified information and build trust between SM users and heritage practitioners (Liberatore *et al.* 2018; Sirinelli *et al.* 2019).

Establishing standards for reporting and conduct, such as respecting nationalities, politics, and religion, posting relevant content, and providing basic information or templates for heritage reporting (e.g., site name, photo, site condition) is essential. Advising best practices, such as not publishing site locations and sending sensitive information via direct messages, can

help establish a practice of reporting that is useful for authorities and safer for those doing the reporting but is still engaging for locals (Smith 2014; van der Hoeven 2019). The need to obtain consent when reporting or posting about marginalised communities on social media, is a practice that is sometimes lacking due to the lack of enforcement and communication (NUJ 2018; SuchTV 2023; Torwali 2023). These are standards that are well understood in journalism and academic circles but then become neglected when it comes to social media, where the legal and ethical lines are blurred. The case studies above show the importance of continuing the good standards of reporting on social media as well as in journalism and more official reports.

Currently, heritage institutions are engaging with the public on social media, however, this is still happening at a relatively small and localised level (DivisionCulture 2020; DOAMPakistan 2021; Eftsindh 2020). The success of some accounts, such as Brown History (2024) and Enroute Indian History (2014), show that high followership and engagement are possible, whether it is through constant posting, higher social media literacy, or from other means. Heritage professionals and institutions can perhaps learn from these more successful accounts to not only raise awareness of heritage and conservation but also to build trust with local communities who can report on underreported, underrepresented, or endangered heritage (Aga Khan 2020; Bai *et al.* 2021; Farmer 2020; Mazhar 2024; Umer *et al.* 2023).

Looking ahead, there are many avenues where this research could be further developed. The utilisation of social media as archives of digital information could be further tested in real-life contexts, especially in South Asia. It would be useful to see whether platforms such as Facebook can be developed into forums where members of the public can safely report on heritage in their local area and serve as a direct line to heritage authorities who can help facilitate and guide the public on best practices. Other issues such as online safety for people and heritage alike, increased nationalism linked with heritage in online spaces, and social media as citizen science, are all areas that will be worth exploring further. Future research is needed to gauge the true impact of social media on the preservation or deterioration of archaeological sites and heritage, considering the rapid evolution of Web 2.0.

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Chapter 19.
From Darkness to Dawn: Cultural Heritage Restoration in Tigray, Ethiopia's Conflict Zone

Alula Tesfay Asfha

Introduction

The emergence of armed conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, in November 2020 initiated a multifaceted crisis, both humanitarian and political in nature, with far-reaching implications for the region's cultural heritage (Abay 2023: 222–239).

The conflict, primarily between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)-led Tigray regional government, was driven by longstanding political tensions, exacerbated by ethnic and regional dynamics. The involvement of regional forces, particularly from Amhara and the Eritrean Army, further escalated the conflict, adding a regional dimension. Tigray is predominantly inhabited by the Tigrayan ethnic group and holds significant cultural and historical importance within Ethiopia. It is home to ancient churches, monasteries, and archaeological sites spanning millennia, representing a rich cultural heritage and serving as repositories of historical knowledge and communal identity. According to the last census conducted in 2007 by the Ethiopian Central Statistics Agency (ECSA n.d.), the population of the Tigray region stands at 4.3 million, constituting approximately 5.82% of the overall Ethiopian population of 73.7 million. As of 2024, Ethiopia's population is estimated to be 129.7 million (UNFPA 2024), but accurate figures for Tigray are challenging to ascertain due to the ongoing conflict and other related issues.

Amidst the immediate focus on the humanitarian fallout of the conflict, the preservation of Tigray's cultural heritage has faced alarming threats. These invaluable assets, including renowned sites like the Negashi Mosque, have been not only physically damaged but also strategically targeted or utilised within the conflict's propaganda narratives. Reports and studies have documented widespread destruction, looting, and desecration of heritage sites throughout the course of the conflict, with particular intensification during periods of heightened violence during late 2020 and early 2021 (Plaut and Vaughan 2023; Asfha and Gebreananaye 2021).

This conflict not only threatened the lives and livelihoods of millions but also posed significant risks to the preservation of Tigray's rich cultural heritage and historical legacy. As the international community grapples with the immediate humanitarian fallout of the crisis, the plight of Tigray's cultural heritage remains largely overlooked, with limited attention directed towards assessing and mitigating the damage sustained by heritage sites amid the turmoil. This also has been sustained after the conflict with a lack of support and attention.

This oversight is particularly concerning given the unique cultural landscape of Tigray, characterised by a wealth of tangible and intangible heritage, including ancient churches, monasteries, and archaeological sites dating back millennia. These cultural assets not only serve as repositories of historical knowledge and artistic achievement but also embody the collective memory and identity of local communities. However, the persistent conflicts in Tigray have placed these invaluable cultural treasures at grave risk, with several reports and studies emerging of widespread destruction, looting, and desecration of heritage sites (Asfha and Gebreananaye 2021).

Against this backdrop, this chapter seeks to examine the challenges and opportunities inherent in preserving Tigray's cultural heritage amidst the tumult of conflict and its aftermath. By delving into the extent of cultural heritage loss, documenting the impact on heritage sites, and analysing the underlying factors contributing to their vulnerability, this study aims to elucidate the urgent need for global support in safeguarding Tigray's cultural legacy. Moreover, it endeavours to explore innovative strategies and collaborative initiatives aimed at documenting, restoring, and protecting Tigray's cultural heritage, thereby ensuring its enduring resilience in the face of adversity.

Through a comprehensive examination of the preservation efforts, resource mobilisation endeavours, and community-based initiatives undertaken to safeguard Tigray's cultural heritage, this chapter

underscores the imperative of international solidarity and collective action in preserving the cultural treasures of conflict-affected regions. By advocating for increased attention, funding, and research collaboration at both local and global levels, this study seeks to pave the way for the restoration and renewal of Tigray's cultural heritage, heralding a new dawn of hope and resilience for future generations.

Objective and Research Question

The central objective of this chapter is to illuminate the efforts to preserve cultural heritage in Tigray, Ethiopia, during and after the conflict. It aims to highlight the documentation and restoration efforts amidst challenging circumstances and raise awareness about the urgent need to preserve Tigray's rich historical and cultural sites. The chapter also advocates for international support to protect these vital assets, which are essential for the local community's identity and heritage.

This chapter seeks to address the core research question: What are the main challenges faced in reporting, documenting, and preserving cultural heritage in Tigray, Ethiopia, during and after the conflict?

- What efforts have been made to report damage, document, and safeguard cultural sites during this period, and how effective have these measures been?
- What is the cultural and historical significance of Tigray's heritage sites to the local community, and how has the destruction of these sites impacted the identity and heritage of the people?
- How has international support contributed to preservation efforts in Tigray, and what more can international organisations and stakeholders do to assist in the preservation and restoration of Tigray's cultural heritage?

Methodology

The chapter focuses on the reporting side of the heritage damage during the Tigray. However, the overall study employs a rigorous methodology to address the complexities of documenting and conserving cultural heritage in Tigray, Ethiopia, amidst conflict-induced challenges. The approach integrates remote sensing, open-access satellite imagery like Google Earth, NASA Worldview, ESA Sentinel Hub, USGS Earth Explorer, Copernicus Open Access Hub and traditional field assessments to comprehensively monitor and assess changes in cultural heritage sites affected by conflict.

Remote Sensing and Satellite Imagery: Utilising satellite data, this study detects alterations and potential damage to cultural heritage sites. Image processing techniques and spectral analysis are employed to accurately map and document inaccessible sites, providing quantitative metrics to evaluate preservation efforts over time. Data collected on affected sites are organised using Excel and analysed spatially in QGIS, enabling effective reporting and advocacy for endangered heritage. Several datasets collected by different research groups and government agencies are also used to enhance this research. (Annys *et al.* 2021; EEPA 2020–2023; UGent and ECC 2024; Mekete Tigray 2021; Negash, n.d.; TGHAT 2024a, 2024b).

Social Media and Formal Media Assessment: This section conducts formal media and social media assessments to gather real-time information and public narratives about Tigray's cultural heritage during the conflict. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter serve as crucial sources for understanding community perceptions and responses to heritage preservation and damage. Computational methods and sentiment analysis algorithms are utilised to extract qualitative insights, complementing traditional field assessments and offering a contemporary lens on local interactions with cultural heritage.

Field Assessments: Field assessments conducted in December 2023 and February 2024 provide crucial on-the-ground validations of remote sensing and social media findings. Out of nearly 400 sites documented remotely and affected by the conflict, 50 were accessible for initial observations and photographs, with detailed damage assessments of 15 sites. This involved using measurement tools, 360-degree photography, and photogrammetry. These assessments include direct inspections, methods, and geospatial tools to document physical conditions and assess structural integrity. Interviews with local stakeholders and community leaders enrich qualitative data, offering insights into the socio-economic implications of heritage preservation efforts during conflict recovery.

Integration and Advocacy: By triangulating data from satellite imagery, social media analytics, and field observations, this chapter aims to generate comprehensive insights into the preservation status of Tigray's cultural heritage. These efforts advocate for evidence-based policies and international support mechanisms to safeguard these irreplaceable assets amidst ongoing conflict.

Cultural Heritage Loss in Tigray

Tigray boasts a wealth of historical and cultural artefacts that encompass a timeline from the Middle Stone Age to the later Stone Age sequences, including rock art and evidence of plant domestication, among other significant developments. These cultural achievements predate the emergence of the Aksumite Kingdom, which thrived in Tigray and neighbouring Eritrea from

150 BCE to 800 CE (Bard *et al.* 2014; Philipson 2012). The religious importance of Tigray is significant, as it houses some of Ethiopia's earliest Christian churches buildings, dating back to at least the 4th-5th centuries (Harrower *et al.* 2023). Moreover, Tigray is renowned for having the largest collection of rock churches globally, with 121 within the Tentative List of the World Heritage List (UNESCO 2024b).

However, Tigray's religious heritage goes beyond Christianity. Islam also has ancient roots in the region, with one of Africa's earliest Muslim settlements and mosques dating back to the 7th century CE in Negash. Additionally, Tigray's connections to Judaism are evident in the legendary tale of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, with many believing the Ark of the Covenant is housed in Aksum today. Pre-Aksumite remnants further highlight the area's extensive political and cultural history, dating back even further in time.

Throughout history, Tigray has diligently preserved its cultural and religious heritage, which includes the distinctive Geez literary tradition. UNESCO (2024a) acknowledges the importance of Tigray's heritage by inscribing the Aksumite remains as a World Heritage Site in 1980, as well as other sites such as the Cultural Heritage of Yeha (UNESCO 2024b) and the Tigray Sacred Landscape (UNESCO 2024b), a serial collection of rock-hewn churches on the tentative list. The churches and monasteries in the region safeguard priceless manuscripts, including the Garima Gospels — the most ancient Ethiopic manuscripts known, and the oldest illuminated Bibles in existence, with some pages carbon-dated as old as the 5th century CE (Bausi 2021).

Despite the profound attachment of the Tigrayan people to their history, armed conflicts have inflicted severe damage on the region, leading to the looting and plundering of cultural and religious treasures. Tigrayan people, who have valiantly protected these institutions throughout history, have frequently sacrificed their lives. Regrettably, this destructive pattern persists in the ongoing conflict in Tigray.

The looting of Tigray's treasures has remained a recurring theme throughout various invasions and conflicts, driven by the perception of the region as holding significant wealth. The invasion of Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi, the two Italian invasions, and local imperial conflicts have all inflicted damage on Tigray's cultural heritage. In conversation with several church leaders, the author learned that the obscure legend of the invasions led by Yodit Gudit, credited in local lore as the cause of the decline of the Aksumite Empire, contributes to this narrative. Despite archaeological evidence, this story has become a living intangible heritage that one would hear in many churches, preserving memories of war and how to handle them appropriately. This has created resilience and traditional wisdom for the protection of heritage during times of turbulence.

It is essential to acknowledge that any removal of cultural materials from Tigray is due to looting or forced expropriation, as Tigrayan communities vigorously safeguard their heritage. The retrieval of artefacts such as the Selassie Chelekot crown emphasises the persistent endeavours to reclaim stolen treasures. Ultimately, the relentless plundering of Tigray's cultural wealth underscores a tragic facet of its history, one that perpetually jeopardises its priceless heritage.

In the 10th century, Yehudit Gudit, thought to be of Agaw or Damoutah origin, allegedly set fire to the Cathedral of Aksum, which was embellished with gold, silver, and diamonds. This invasion caused extensive destruction, leading to the cessation of economic and cultural activities, as indicated by the discontinuation of coin minting and the absence of inscriptions from that era.

In the 16th century, Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi, also known as Gragn Ahmed, spearheaded the conquest of the Christian Abyssinian highlands. With support from Islamic allies, this conquest inflicted widespread devastation, including the burning of churches, destruction of treasures, and erasure of heritage, reaching as far as the sacred site of Aksum, according to the local legend. This is another story obscured in legend. In Wukro Cherqos rock-hewn church, a priest shows the burned interior of the church, which they believe is from this time, although it is not possible to conclusively claim so. This story is told in most churches of Tigray, including Gunda Gundo, where the author interviewed the head priest.

The initial Italian invasion, culminating in the Adwa war of 1896, caused extensive destruction to heritage sites. Churches in Mekelle, such as the Enda Eyesus church, suffered severe devastation, and the surrounding forests were cleared by opposing armies (Sequar 2001). During the second Italian invasion, there was substantial looting of heritage, notably exemplified by the relocation of Aksum stelae to Rome under Mussolini's directives. Although some cultural treasures were returned to Ethiopia following the 1947 Peace Treaty with Italy, many items were not restored to their original locations in monasteries and churches (Pankhurst 1999).

These historical conflicts have resulted in the loss of numerous artefacts from Tigray, with many ending up in museums and private collections in the West.

Considering this historical context alongside the current conflict in Tigray, there is a substantial risk to cultural and religious heritage. Reports and photographic evidence suggest intentional attacks on buildings, including mosques and churches, identified as both local and international historical heritage sites.

The cultural heritage loss in Tigray paints a grim picture of widespread devastation, where cherished landmarks and sacred sites have borne the brunt of conflict-related violence and destruction. Among these cultural treasures are ancient churches, monasteries, and historical landmarks that have long served as symbols of Tigray's and wider Ethiopia's rich cultural identity.

Take, for instance, the historic city of Aksum, a UNESCO World Heritage site revered by Orthodox communities across Ethiopia and Eritrea for its religious significance and as the purported resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. The Aksum church is one of the strong binding heritage shared by the Orthodox Tewahido Christians in Ethiopia and Eritrea. The site had experienced intense combat, including air raids and artillery shelling. The Aksum stelae, which are already vulnerable to groundwater movement (rain/water table) (UNESCO 2024a), are especially sensitive to vibrations, shelling therefore posing a significant threat to these ancient relics. In the latter half of November 2020, there were reports of deliberate killings by Eritrean troops, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians. (Amnesty International 2021a; Anna 2021; Mak 2021). In a contrary narrative, the Federal Attorney-General reported 93 deaths, attributing them to clashes with forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front and denied the attacks (Walta Info 2021). The site remained closed to foreign media and agencies interested in heritage until recently, which made heritage reporting complicated. Despite its sanctity, Aksum had become a scene of horror as reports emerged of hundreds of civilians massacred within its sacred precincts, their lives brutally cut short amidst the chaos of conflict between 19 and 29 November 2020, on the eve of the most important feast (Amnesty International 2021b). Some researchers asked why followers of similar beliefs commit atrocities against other followers in the conflict (Antohin 2021). This tragic event not only robbed Tigray of precious lives but also inflicted irreparable damage to its cultural heritage, tarnishing the sanctity of a site held dear by generations. Now the annual feast of Saint Mary of Zion also commemorates the atrocities.

Cultural heritage in Tigray played a pivotal role in the conflict, deeply intertwined with identity and mobilisation rhetoric. Targeted destruction of heritage sites and artefacts evoked emotional responses and rally support. These cultural elements were not only symbolic but also held practical significance in daily economic and spiritual realms. The deliberate targeting of cultural heritage underscores its dual role as a casualty and a tool of warfare, reflecting broader strategies to destabilise communities and erase cultural identities. This was visible mainly in the Western and Northern part of Tigray, where villages were ravaged and names were changed.

During the conflict, the spokesperson for the federal army issued a threat (Reuters 2020; Gebremedhin 2020) to encircle and shell Mekelle City, Tigray's capital, using tanks, which was simultaneously broadcasted by national television stations. The city was later shelled with heavy artillery. Mekelle, with its ancient settlements dating back to the late Aksumite period, is home to numerous heritage sites from its time as an Imperial capital in the 19th Century (Asfha 2022). One of the airstrikes in Mekelle targeted the compound of St. George Church, resulting in shattered windows and damage to the church's glasswork (Tigrai TV 2020). Additionally, the bombardment destroyed the residence of church students, further worsening the destruction of cultural and religious landmarks in the city. Subsequently, major monuments of the city, such as the Emperor Yohannes IV's Palace (Asfha 2021a) and the Martyrs' Museum (Awet 2021), were looted, vandalised and repurposed as army stations. The Martyrs' Museum hosted the largest archival collection of pictures, videos, and documents in the region, which has been completely lost and urgently needs reorganisation.

In remote areas of the region, numerous reports have surfaced detailing massacres of local communities who attempted to protect their heritage institutions. One of the most harrowing accounts is the killing of over 750 people in Aksum city (EEPA 2021a), including those who were defending The Ark of the Covenant from looting within the church. Similar tragic incidents have been reported from various other communities, including Edga Arbi (where 24 Priests were murdered), Adi Fetaw, Gerhu Sernay (where 48 Priests were killed), Idaga Hamus (where a priest and other civilians were slain) (EEPA 2021a), and Medhani Alem Gu`etelo Church near Adigrat (EEPA 2021b) (with reports of dozens massacred).

The violence has also targeted sacred sites like St. Mary Church in Dengolat and others, as well as monasteries such as Abreha wa Atsbeha and Wukro Cherkos. These monasteries, which historically served as sanctuaries during conflicts, have sadly witnessed civilian casualties in alarming numbers. In one particular incident, Dengelat St. Mary monastery, renowned for its rare representation of Aksumite multi-floor architecture and well-preserved Stephanite paintings from the 16th century, became the scene of a brutal massacre,

claiming the lives of dozens of civilians (Arvanitidis *et al.* 2021).

One of the severe instances of heritage destruction during the conflict was the damage inflicted upon Negash mosque, which holds immense religious, historical, and cultural significance in Tigray and the wider Islamic world. In a February 2024 interview with the head of the mosque, it was recounted according to tradition that the mosque was established by early followers of Prophet Mohammed. These followers sought refuge from persecution by the ruling Quraysh tribe in Mecca and found sanctuary in Aksum. The mosque, believed to have been founded around 612 CE with the consent of the Christian Aksumite King (Negus), stands as a symbol of harmonious coexistence among religious communities and is a source of profound national pride (Henze 2000).

After a complete communication blackout that began with the war in November 2020 and lasted for over three years, internet access started to reopen in early 2023. This blackout is considered the longest in history (Anthonio and Tackett 2023; Internet Society Pulse 2024). Despite the blackout, initial images (Zelalem 2021) that surfaced on social media depicted severe damage to the main building and minaret of Negash Mosque, both directly hit by artillery. These images were captured by individuals using their cellphones and transmitted by travelling on foot to access NGO satellite internet. Widely circulated on social media, these images suggest extensive looting followed the destruction. The incident is believed to have occurred on 15 December 2020, coinciding with the reported massacre of 81 people within the mosque. There was a hurried rush to narrate and utilise the heritage as a propaganda tool. Ethiopian state television suggested that Federal Forces were responsible for the attack on the mosque, attributing the damage to Tigray forces allegedly digging trenches near the heritage site.

Moreover, St. Amanuel Church, situated near Negash, was also targeted by artillery strikes, damaging its roof and parts of the interior. Both heritage sites remain without restoration or any rescue activities as of March 2024 (Tigray OSINT 2022b). Debre Damo, one of Ethiopia's oldest monasteries, suffered a devastating attack when it was bombed by artillery (EEPA 2021c). This historic site is home to a valuable collection of manuscripts and cultural artefacts, making the loss of heritage even more tragic. Eyewitnesses reported that Eritrean troops shelled the monastery on 11 January, starting a nine-hour-long assault that claimed the life of one monk and demolished 26 monastic cells. Subsequently, the troops conducted two searches, during which they confiscated materials, purportedly in response to rumours of Tigray People's Liberation Front leaders seeking refuge there (EEPA 2021f).

In Adigrat, the Catholic Church faced significant damage when it was repurposed as an army command centre, resulting in harm to the seminary building, water tanker, and windows due to shelling fragments (Nzwili 2021). Additionally, many churches along the Ethio-Eritrea border suffered extensive damage. The newly constructed Aba Zewengel Church building at the Maebino Holy Cross monastery was demolished, while images revealed severe destruction to the Lgat Cherkos Church in Zalambessa, suggesting direct artillery strikes (Tghat 2021a).

Throughout Tigray, damage to churches and associated killings have occurred primarily during religious gatherings. On 5 January 2021, during the annual feast day at the Medhane Alem Church in Gu'itelo, Eritrean troops shelled the church and later shot congregation members, resulting in the deaths of four priests, as well as 30 civilians and 16 others in nearby villages, including priests and deacons (Tghat 2021f).

A massacre took place on 5-6 January 2021, near the Debre Abay monastery, where Ethiopian and Eritrean troops reportedly shelled the nearby town of Mai Harmaz before allegedly killing over a hundred people (Mas 2021; Tghat 2021b). It remains unclear if any monks from the monastery were among the casualties or if the monastery itself was targeted. Established in the 14th century CE, Debre Abay is renowned for its scholarly reputation and houses over a hundred monks and scholars.

A letter obtained by the UK *Daily Telegraph* in May, purportedly from members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Tigray, claimed that at least 78 clergy members had been massacred in one zone of Tigray in the past five months (Kassa 2021). Witnesses allege that Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers deliberately target churches during saints' days to inflict maximum casualties. On 9 January, during a celebration at Adi'Zeban Karagiorgis, eight soldiers shot 12 deacons aged 15 to 20. At Gergera Maryam, a dozen soldiers shot six priests, leaving only one survivor (Storchi 2021).

In addition to the devastation caused by warfare, there were acts of deliberate destruction of cultural property in occupied territories. A particular example is a widely circulated video from Humera town, showing Ethiopian soldiers and militias overseeing and celebrating the demolition of a statue at the town centre (Tigray OSINT 2022b).

Another pressing issue was the immediate threat posed to various research and archaeological sites, which remained vulnerable to looting and destruction amidst the conflict. One such site is the Mai Adrasha archaeological site on the outskirts of Shire city, where intense conflicts have taken place. This site is one of the

oldest known settlements in Sub-Saharan Africa and was undergoing archaeological excavations. According to Barnard and Wendrich (2022, citing an email received from the ground), Eritrean soldiers partially destroyed the dig house, stole project materials, and burnt it. They also report that the site is now extensively damaged, rendering further archaeological work unfeasible. The archaeological site of Mai Adrasha is extensively damaged, rendering further archaeological work unfeasible. It is now overgrown with plants like avocado and mango, with deep wells dug, and used as a stone quarry for building houses (Bernard and Wendrich 2022).

Before the outbreak of war, approximately 14 large-scale archaeological excavations were underway in Tigray. However, heavy fighting has been reported around several archaeological sites, including Beta Samati, Mifsas Bahri, Adi Ketema (Adi Gorazu), Gulo Mekeda, Wukro Gaewa, and Yeha. Reports indicate that Eritrean soldiers looted the community while sparing the church and archaeological sites in Yeha on 31 December 2020. Additionally, another instance of looting in Yeha was reported (EEPA 2021c), targeting the city and monastery of Abune Mezeraete.

During the conflict, universities, colleges, and government agencies in Tigray were deliberately targeted for looting and destruction. This is particularly troubling because Tigray's universities are vital for scientific research and preserving cultural heritage. These universities were working with the government as sole functioning institutions on restoration and conservation projects for heritage sites in the region.

The major universities in Tigray–Mekelle University, Adigrat University, Aksum University and Raya University were all targeted, though the details need further study. The targeting of universities in Tigray had a direct impact on the cultural heritage sector because these institutions played a crucial role in preserving and researching the region's heritage. Without the expertise and resources provided by universities, efforts to restore and conserve heritage sites are severely hindered. Additionally, the destruction of universities disrupts ongoing research projects related to cultural heritage, further delaying efforts to understand and protect Tigray's rich cultural history.

Since the conflict began, there have been reports of Ethiopian government troops and Eritrean forces in Tigray repeatedly shelling churches, mosques, towns, and villages. The destruction has extended beyond religious sites to encompass cultural landmarks of immense historical and architectural significance, as well as social infrastructure (TGHAT 2024b). For instance, the statue in Humera that symbolised Tigrayan identity was demolished. In Aksum, bullet marks mar several sites, including the Tomb of Gebremeskel. Negash Mosque, a symbol of religious harmony and coexistence, fell victim to war, with its sacred halls desecrated and artefacts looted amid the chaos of conflict. St. Amanuel Church was directly hit with artillery. Similarly, the fifth-century Debre Damo monastery, a repository of ancient manuscripts and cultural artefacts, faced repeated shelling, threatening to erase centuries of history and heritage. These acts of destruction not only targeted physical structures but also sought to erase the cultural memory and identity embodied within these sacred spaces, dealing a devastating blow to Tigray's heritage. Many villages in Tigray witnessed massacres of civilians who sought refuge in religious institutions, following a long tradition of these places serving as safe havens.

Moreover, major museums and archaeological sites, vital repositories of Tigray's cultural legacy, were not spared from the tide of destruction and looting. The Emperor Yohannes IV Palace museum, once a bastion of historical artefacts and cultural treasures, was transformed into a military outpost, its halls stripped bare by looters seeking to exploit the chaos of conflict for personal gain. Similarly, the archaeological site of Mai Adrasha, an ancient settlement steeped in history and archaeological significance, bore the scars of conflict-induced destruction, its archaeological treasures threatened by rampant looting and destruction, including in search of gold.

Beyond the physical destruction of cultural heritage sites, the communication blackout imposed at the onset of the conflict exacerbated the challenges faced in documenting and mitigating the loss. This blackout not only hindered rescue efforts and reporting of losses due to looting but also enabled criminal elements to exploit the chaos for their nefarious ends, further endangering Tigray's cultural heritage. Amidst this devastation, the urgent need to safeguard Tigray's cultural property becomes abundantly clear, underscoring the imperative of concerted efforts to protect and preserve this invaluable legacy for future generations.

During the conflict in Tigray, the region suffered significant losses in terms of religious buildings, libraries, archives, paintings, and artefacts. According to Article 8(2)(b)(iv) of the Rome Statute (International Criminal Court 1998), the destruction and looting of such cultural legacies are considered war crimes. Both Ethiopia and Eritrea have ratified international agreements aimed at protecting cultural property during armed conflicts, such as the 1954 Hague Convention (United Nations 1954) and the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1972).

Under international law, there are established precedents that consider intentionally destroying

cultural and religious heritage as punishable war crimes. For example, the International Criminal Court recently confirmed charges related to the war crime of intentionally attacking buildings dedicated to religion and historical monuments. Recent examples of intentional attacks on buildings dedicated to religion and historical monuments include charges confirmed by the ICC against individuals involved in conflicts in Mali (ICC 2016), Syria, and Ukraine, highlighting violations of international law and humanitarian norms. These incidents underscore the ongoing challenges in protecting cultural heritage during armed conflicts. To prove cases of intentional destruction of religious and cultural heritage, it is necessary to establish a connection between the destruction and an armed conflict. In the case of Tigray, the region was under intense military attack during the destruction of these historical, religious, and cultural sites, providing grounds for reasonable assumptions of war crimes.

Documentation and Reporting Efforts

In the challenging circumstances of conflict-stricken Tigray, documenting and reporting on the condition of cultural heritage have become crucial endeavours to protect these valuable assets. Despite facing obstacles like communication blackouts and limited access to conflict zones, various efforts are underway to systematically record the damage inflicted on cultural heritage sites and raise awareness about the urgent need for their preservation. All these activities were conducted voluntarily by concerned scholars and individuals.

The extent of destruction and looting, particularly as Ethiopian and Eritrean troops advanced towards Mekelle, has raised international alarm. The targeting of churches and religious sites, coupled with reports of looted goods appearing in markets, underscores the profit-driven nature of some of these actions. The looting of valuable religious artefacts poses a significant threat to the cultural and historical legacy of Ethiopia, particularly the Geez manuscripts, which are invaluable sources for scholars of early Christianity and Ethiopian history.

Reports from various sources, including academic institutions and international media, corroborate the systematic destruction and looting of cultural and religious sites in Tigray. This includes attacks on churches, mosques, and monasteries, as well as the theft and burning of manuscripts dating back centuries. Such actions not only constitute a grave violation of cultural heritage but also pose a direct threat to the identity and history of the affected communities.

In response to these alarming developments, scholars and academic institutions have mobilised efforts to raise awareness and advocate for the protection of Tigray's cultural heritage. Appeals have been made to international organisations, such as UNESCO, emphasising the urgent need to safeguard these sites from further destruction and looting. The Global Society of Tigray Scholars has highlighted the significance of these heritage sites in the context of international conventions and called for decisive action to prevent their irreversible loss (Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals 2021).

One notable example is the website Tghat, which was established in November 2020 by Netherlands-based scholar Gebrekirstos G. Gebremeskel. It was created in response to the media blackout enforced by the Ethiopian government during the conflict in Tigray. Tghat played a crucial role as a platform for documenting the atrocities inflicted upon the Tigrayan people and their cultural heritage. This documentation included accounts of civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure, and the spread of hate campaigns. Volunteers were mobilised to gather information from firsthand sources, data, and analysis to bring attention to the realities of the conflict. Tghat has become a valuable resource utilised by journalists, researchers, policymakers, and legal bodies seeking insights into the ongoing crisis (Tghat 2024a).

Another important documentation effort came from the Europe External Programme with Africa (EEPA), a non-governmental organisation based in Belgium, which has compiled and disseminated numerous reports. This programme aims to be 'committed to advancing human rights and promoting greater European Union engagement in the Horn of Africa and North Africa regions.' These reports have served as valuable references and starting points for reporting for various entities and organisations, including the United Nations and international media outlets (European Union 2024).

Scholars worldwide have been actively documenting and reporting on the alarming destruction of cultural and religious heritage in Tigray, Ethiopia. This concerted effort is driven by the profound concern over the escalating losses experienced in the region.

In response to the escalating conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, Ghent University's Department of Geography embarked on a crucial initiative to document civilian casualties and update the Tigray Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation (Annys *et al.* 2021). Despite facing significant challenges such as communication blackouts and regional lockdowns, the dedicated team at Ghent University remains steadfast in their commitment to employing rigorous methodologies to professionalise the database of civilian casualties. Supported by 'Every Casualty Counts' (UK), this project served as a pivotal

resource for comprehending the profound human impact of the ongoing conflict in Tigray, shedding light on the plight of affected civilians amid the turmoil. With a primary focus on confirming massacres and civilian deaths, the project also endeavoured to enhance and maintain an updated database of civilian victims while 'adhering to international standards and best practices.' By consolidating the data and ensuring its accessibility to the public, the team facilitated informed discourse and decision-making surrounding the humanitarian crisis in Tigray. The data provided by the team was extensively used by other decision-makers. Furthermore, the regular updates to the Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation provided a comprehensive overview of the evolving crisis, enabling stakeholders to better understand the dynamic nature of the conflict and its ramifications on the civilian population. Ghent University's initiative underscored the critical importance of diligent data collection efforts in humanitarian crises and highlighted the indispensable role of academia in addressing complex global challenges (UGent and ECC 2024).

Other Tigrayan diaspora based organisations also work in the documentation and reporting of cultural heritage damage. These include Mekete Tigray and OMNA. OMNA Tigray, named for 'our large tree' in Tigrigna, is a diaspora organisation dedicated to 'advocating for Tigrayan human rights and economic development. OMNA Tigray strives to protect and promote the rights of all Tigrayans' (OMNA 2024).

As researchers from outside Tigray gathered data from remote areas, they relied on various tools to assess the extent of damage to heritage sites. Freely available open-source satellite imagery like Google Earth proved invaluable for capturing detailed pictures from space, enabling researchers to analyse and map the destruction of tangible heritage such as churches, monasteries, and archaeological sites. This information was crucial for making informed decisions on how to protect and conserve these sites when accessibility to the site was limited.

Additionally, experts and local individuals on the ground conducted detailed assessments of heritage sites by physically inspecting them, documenting any damage, and noting instances of theft or vandalism of cultural artefacts. These on-the-ground assessments offered firsthand insights into the condition of Tigray's cultural heritage, guiding preservation efforts. For example, a preliminary assessment of Emperor Yohannes Palace Museum was conducted by the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Tigray in collaboration with various stakeholders. This helped to assess damage and support advocacy (Asfha 2021a). Local assessment and documentation were mainly conducted by the Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau, an agency overseeing cultural heritage in Tigray, and local universities in Tigray.

The Tigray Administration-affiliated media outlets Tigrai Television and Dimtsi Woyane have extensively covered heritage damage by sending journalists to report from specific sites (The Defense Post 2022). Many of their journalists have lost their lives, including while reporting on airstrikes. These stations continue to report heritage damage after the communication blackout is released.

The Tigray Media House (TMH), a private satellite television outlet based in Washington since 2019, served as the main source of coverage in the war's initial stages from the Tigray side. TMH did not have its own reporters stationed in Tigray; rather, it depended on citizen journalists who submitted videos and news stories. This highlights the significance of citizen journalism in offering an alternative perspective to mainstream media narratives (Nigussie and Kiflu 2024).

The Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide, established under the Tigray Interim Administration and recognised by the Ethiopian government, released its initial report in March 2024. According to the report, based on extensive documentation efforts utilising the General Damage and Loss Assessment methodology facilitated by the ODK (Open Data Kit) application, data was systematically gathered from every household in the Tigray region. The commission conducted surveys covering over 650,000 households, focusing on inquiries related to the areas of Economy, Social Issues, and Humanitarian concerns. Additionally, the assessment included over 580,000 girls aged 15 years and older. These efforts aimed to comprehensively document the impacts and experiences of the population affected by the conflict. According to the report, the findings are currently being finalised and will be presented in the initial draft of the comprehensive report. This report will serve as a critical resource for understanding the humanitarian and social consequences of the events in Tigray (Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide 2024).

Local communities also played a vital role in reporting damage to heritage sites, leveraging their knowledge of these sites to promptly report any observed damage or looting. This grassroots reporting using traditional institutions ensured that damage to cultural heritage was swiftly documented, facilitating timely interventions to safeguard these sites with available means.

Moreover, digital tools such as social media platforms were utilised to share information and images of

heritage sites, raising awareness about the threats facing Tigray's cultural heritage and mobilising support for preservation efforts. By leveraging technology for communication, these initiatives amplified the voice of Tigray's cultural heritage concerns globally.

The total communication blackout in Tigray (Anthonio and Tackett 2023; Internet Society Pulse 2024) during the conflict had severe consequences, creating an environment where malicious actors, including local individuals seeking subsistence and criminal elements, could exploit the chaos for looting and destruction of cultural heritage. This unfortunate situation underscored the urgent need for robust documentation and reporting efforts to counteract these threats and safeguard Tigray's rich cultural heritage from further harm. Despite the challenges posed by the communication blackout, efforts were made by various stakeholders, including local authorities such as the Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau and local universities in Tigray, to conduct assessments and document the state of cultural heritage sites. These on-the-ground assessments provided valuable firsthand insights into the condition of Tigray's cultural heritage, helping guide preservation efforts amidst the turmoil of the conflict. Additionally, a new agency dedicated to documenting instances of genocide in Tigray was established by the Tigray Interim Government, further emphasising the importance of comprehensive documentation efforts in the face of such grave threats.

However, it is important to note that many of these documented incidents were not reported or made widely available, posing challenges for researchers and stakeholders aiming to assess the extent of damage and devise effective strategies for protection and preservation. Several factors contribute to this lack of reporting and dissemination. Authorities may influence information to control the narrative, and local researchers and institutions might hesitate to report findings due to potential consequences. Additionally, logistical constraints and limited resources could also hinder reporting efforts. This highlights the need for greater transparency and collaboration in documenting and reporting on the impact of the conflict on Tigray's cultural heritage, ultimately contributing to its long-term conservation and safeguarding.

Resource Mobilisation and Protection

Resource mobilisation for cultural heritage restoration in post-conflict Tigray, Ethiopia, presents a multifaceted challenge intertwined with various factors such as budget constraints, funding opportunities, community engagement, and advocacy efforts. The restoration of cultural heritage sites in areas affected by conflict is not just about preserving historical artefacts; it also plays a crucial role in promoting community resilience, facilitating healing, and supporting peacebuilding initiatives. This section aims to delve into the complexities of resource mobilisation in the context of restoring cultural heritage in Tigray, exploring the hurdles faced and the strategies employed to address them.

Traditionally, local communities have been entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding cultural and historical assets. However, the management of these sites now falls under the jurisdiction of the Tigray Bureau of Culture and Tourism. Unfortunately, the bureau is currently grappling with a significant challenge posed by a rising number of incidents involving the destruction of heritage sites, despite the relentless efforts of the staff under the leadership of Dr Atsbha Gebreegziabher, a technocrat appointed from Mekelle University.

Restoring heritage sites in post-conflict Tigray presents significant challenges primarily stemming from limited funding and budget constraints in addition to accessibility and other challenges. The prolonged conflict has placed immense strain on the region's resources, leaving little to spare for cultural heritage preservation efforts. With the majority of the population grappling with the effects of a prolonged siege, including food insecurity and famine, active community participation in heritage conservation becomes increasingly challenging.

This dire situation is exemplified by sites like the Nejashi Mosque and Abune Abraham Monastery, which remain unrepaired and vulnerable to further damage. The local community, already burdened by the struggle to meet basic needs, faces difficulties in securing the necessary resources for the preservation of these sites, particularly as they approach the rainy season when the risk of additional damage escalates.

On the contrary, some local communities have taken the initiative to restore heritage sites using local resources. One notable example is the restoration of the Abune Penteleon Monastery in Aksum World Heritage Site. Located on Mai Qoho Hill, this monastery dates back to the 5th century and was established by Abune Penteleon, one of the Nine Saints. It holds historical significance as the final resting place of emperors Kaleb and Gebremeskel.

In response to the urgent need for heritage preservation in Tigray, innovative approaches such as crowdfunding have emerged. For example, the local community has partnered with Aksum University, the Tigray Bureau of Culture and Tourism, and the Orthodox church to initiate a crowdfunding campaign. This campaign aims

to support restoration efforts, specifically targeting the damaged hill of the Abune Penteleon Monastery before the rainy season caused further damage in 2023.

However, challenges to heritage preservation extend beyond financial constraints. Historical and geological factors, such as the site's past use as a trench during conflicts and geological instabilities like water leakage and slope instability, add complexity to restoration efforts. Recent events, such as a landslide in August 2022, have heightened the risk of collapse. Ineffective conservation attempts, such as improper use of cement on cracks and retaining walls, have also contributed to the deterioration in the Abune Penteleon Site.

Moreover, the absence of a dedicated budget for documentation and rehabilitation within the regional Bureau for Culture and Tourism exacerbates the challenge of resource mobilisation. To address these issues, increased attention and resource mobilisation at both local and global levels are crucial. Local and global partners can play pivotal roles in providing funding, conducting research, and offering training to support the restoration process. By pooling collective efforts and resources, stakeholders can effectively protect and preserve Tigray's cultural heritage for future generations.

The restoration team at Abune Penteleon, which includes members from the Archaeology and Heritage departments at Aksum University, as well as the church and local contractors, has focused on making the cliff multi-functional by creating seating and planting areas. Nevertheless, similar preservation efforts are required in the densely heritage-rich Aksum World Heritage Site. Effective implementation of such projects in this area by Aksum University necessitates professional support and collaboration.

International collaboration plays a pivotal role in mobilising donor resources and necessary skills for heritage protection. An illustrative example is the resumption of the Yeha Project led by Dr Iris Gerlach from the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), Oriental Department. Despite facing disruptions lasting more than three years, a team from the DAI, with support from the German Embassy in Addis Ababa, was able to return to their archaeological research sites in the Tigray region. This international collaboration facilitated the continuation of essential research and conservation efforts in the area, highlighting the significance of cross-border partnerships in heritage preservation (New Business Ethiopia 2024).

The HEAL Project within the RELIGHT initiative stands as one of the best case studies for international collaboration and immediate restoration work. Led by Professor Catherine D'Andrea of Simon Fraser University, this project exemplifies a synergistic approach integrating academic expertise with local engagement and cultural sensitivity. Focused on providing trauma counselling to the community of Maryam Dengelat following a devastating massacre of 164 worshippers (Arvanitidis *et al.* 2021), HEAL partnered closely with Adigrat University, local leaders, priests, and trauma professionals to develop and implement culturally appropriate interventions. Supported by donations and stakeholders, including Simon Fraser University's Faculty of Environment, HEAL not only addressed immediate needs but also promoted long-term cultural preservation and resilience, setting a precedent for effective, respectful, and sustainable development efforts in fragile regions (The HEAL Team 2023).

The resource mobilisation aspect of cultural heritage restoration in post-conflict Tigray, Ethiopia, is a multifaceted endeavour aimed at addressing budget constraints and seeking funding opportunities to support the rehabilitation of heritage sites damaged during the conflict. Budget constraints pose a significant obstacle to heritage restoration efforts in Tigray, with limited financial resources allocated by local authorities for preservation initiatives. The economic strain caused by the conflict exacerbates this shortage, diverting resources towards immediate humanitarian needs and leaving heritage sites such as the Nejashi Mosque and Abune Abraham Monastery unrepaired and vulnerable to further damage, particularly during the rainy season.

In response to these challenges, local communities have demonstrated resilience by initiating restoration efforts, exemplified by the collaboration between the community and Aksum University to restore the damaged Abune Penteleon Monastery through crowdfunding. However, regional authorities, such as the Bureau for Culture and Tourism, often lack dedicated budgets for documentation and rehabilitation, emphasising the need for external support.

Advocacy for increased attention and mobilisation of resources at both local and global levels is crucial to addressing these challenges. International collaboration plays a pivotal role in securing funding, research, and training needed for effective heritage restoration. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, and international donors are essential for securing the expertise and resources necessary to safeguard Tigray's cultural heritage amidst the aftermath of conflict.

Overall, the resource mobilisation aspect of cultural heritage restoration in Tigray underscores the need for concerted efforts to address budget constraints,

leverage community-led initiatives, and foster partnerships to effectively preserve the region's cultural heritage in the wake of conflict.

Discussion

Documenting Cultural Heritage in Tigray

The endeavour to document cultural heritage in Tigray amidst the challenges posed by armed conflict and its aftermath is a multifaceted and complex undertaking. The conflict has not only disrupted the daily lives of millions but has also profoundly impacted the region's cultural landscape, endangering centuries-old heritage sites and intangible cultural practices. In the face of these challenges, innovative and adaptive strategies have been employed to gather data on the status of heritage sites and document the extent of cultural heritage loss.

One of the primary challenges in documenting cultural heritage in Tigray has been the restricted access to conflict zones and the inherent risks associated with operating in volatile environments. Communication blackouts and limitations on movement have hindered traditional methods of data collection, requiring researchers and preservationists to explore alternative approaches. Despite these obstacles, efforts have been made to leverage technology and remote sensing techniques, including open-access satellite imagery, to monitor and assess the condition of heritage sites from a distance while cross-referencing local reports. These methods provide valuable insights into the extent of damage sustained by cultural heritage assets and help prioritise areas in need of urgent intervention (EAMENA Project 2023).

Additionally, social media platforms have emerged as important tools for documenting cultural heritage loss in real-time. Local residents, activists, and heritage enthusiasts have utilised social media channels to share firsthand accounts, photographs, and videos documenting the destruction of heritage sites. These grassroots efforts not only contribute to the documentation process but also serve as a means of raising awareness and mobilising support for heritage preservation initiatives both locally and globally.

The extensive use of social media in Ethiopia includes most government offices, media outlets, and officials utilising Facebook, YouTube, and other platforms as their primary sources of information dissemination. Websites and print media are widely unpopular in Ethiopia, which makes the collection of relevant data reliant on social media analysis.

Furthermore, ground-level communication with individuals and communities directly affected by the conflict plays a crucial role in documenting cultural heritage in Tigray. Engaging with local stakeholders, including community leaders, religious authorities, and heritage custodians, allows for a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the conflict on cultural heritage and enables the development of context-specific preservation strategies. Despite the challenges of navigating security concerns and building trust in conflict-affected communities, these efforts are essential for ensuring that the voices and perspectives of those most affected by heritage loss are heard and integrated into preservation efforts.

Restoring Cultural Heritage in Tigray

The task of restoring cultural heritage in Tigray presents a formidable challenge in the wake of the devastating armed conflict and its aftermath. The conflict has inflicted extensive damage on tangible sites and associated intangible heritage, including ancient churches, monasteries, archaeological sites, and cultural landscapes, which serve as invaluable repositories of Tigrayan history, identity, and spirituality. Addressing the restoration needs of these heritage assets requires a concerted effort to overcome logistical, financial, and socio-political hurdles.

One of the primary challenges in restoring cultural heritage in Tigray is the extent of the damage inflicted on heritage sites during the conflict. Many historic structures have been subjected to deliberate acts of destruction, including vandalism, looting, and arson, resulting in irreparable harm to architectural features, artworks, and sacred relics. The scale and severity of this damage pose significant obstacles to restoration efforts, requiring comprehensive assessments and prioritisation of sites based on their cultural significance and restoration feasibility.

Limited funding opportunities and budget constraints further compound the challenges of restoring cultural heritage in Tigray. The conflict has strained local resources and infrastructure, leaving heritage restoration initiatives underfunded and understaffed. Government agencies, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations face competing priorities in allocating resources, leading to gaps in funding for heritage preservation projects. Moreover, the closure and defunding of primary hubs of heritage preservation, such as public universities and cultural institutions, have further hampered restoration efforts, depriving communities of essential expertise and institutional support.

The seasonal challenges posed by adverse weather conditions, particularly the rainy season, further exacerbate the risks facing heritage sites in Tigray. Unrepaired and vulnerable structures are at heightened

risk of structural collapse, erosion, and water damage, jeopardising their long-term preservation. Moreover, the lack of adequate infrastructure and disaster preparedness measures exacerbates the vulnerability of heritage sites to natural hazards, including floods, landslides, and earthquakes, which can compound the challenges of restoration and recovery.

Despite these challenges, opportunities for restoring cultural heritage in Tigray exist through innovative strategies and collaborative partnerships. Community-based initiatives, leveraging local knowledge and expertise, play a crucial role in prioritising restoration efforts and mobilising grassroots support for heritage preservation. Moreover, international collaboration and support, including technical assistance, funding, and capacity-building programmes, can provide essential resources and expertise to complement local restoration efforts. Public-private partnerships, harnessing the resources and expertise of the private sector, academia, and civil society, offer additional avenues for mobilising resources and expertise for heritage restoration initiatives.

Challenges and Opportunities

The preservation and restoration of cultural heritage in Tigray amidst the aftermath of armed conflict present a myriad of challenges, alongside opportunities for innovative approaches and collaborative initiatives.

Challenges

Damage and Destruction: As stated in the discussion, the Tigray conflict has severely damaged cultural heritage sites, including churches, monasteries, and archaeological sites, with vandalism and looting hindering restoration efforts.

Limited Funding and Resources: the restoration of cultural heritage in Tigray is hindered by limited funding and budget constraints. Government agencies, international organisations, and NGOs face competing priorities, leading to gaps in funding. The closure and defunding of key heritage preservation hubs further exacerbate these challenges.

Environmental Risks: The seasonal challenges posed by adverse weather conditions, particularly the rainy season, further exacerbate the vulnerability of heritage sites in Tigray. Unrepaired and vulnerable structures are at heightened risk of structural collapse, erosion, and water damage, jeopardising their long-term preservation. Moreover, the lack of adequate infrastructure and disaster preparedness measures exacerbates the vulnerability of heritage sites to natural hazards, including floods, landslides, and earthquakes.

Opportunities

Community Engagement and Empowerment: Community-based initiatives play a crucial role in prioritising restoration efforts and mobilising grassroots support for heritage preservation. Engaging with local stakeholders, including community leaders, religious authorities, and heritage custodians, allows for a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the conflict on cultural heritage and enables the development of context-specific preservation strategies.

International Collaboration and Support: International collaboration and support offer essential resources and expertise to complement local restoration efforts in Tigray. Technical assistance, funding, and capacity-building programmes provided by international organisations, academic institutions, and cultural heritage agencies can contribute to the sustainability and effectiveness of restoration initiatives.

Innovation and Technology: Leveraging technology and innovation can enhance the documentation and restoration of cultural heritage in Tigray. Remote sensing techniques, including open-access satellite imagery and 3D documentation, can provide valuable insights into the condition of heritage sites and prioritise areas in need of urgent intervention. Moreover, digital tools and platforms can facilitate community engagement, raise awareness, and mobilise support for heritage preservation efforts.

Public-Private Partnerships: Public-private partnerships offer additional avenues for mobilising resources and expertise for heritage restoration initiatives in Tigray. Collaboration between government agencies, private sector entities, academia, and civil society can harness the collective resources and capabilities needed to address the complex challenges of cultural heritage preservation effectively.

The implications of cultural heritage preservation in Tigray are profound and multifaceted, reflecting its dual role as a vital component of cultural identity and a potent instrument for promoting community resilience and facilitating healing. Beyond serving as physical remnants of Tigray's rich history and cultural heritage, these sites hold deep symbolic significance for local communities, anchoring their collective memory and sense of belonging.

In the aftermath of conflict, the restoration of heritage sites takes on added significance as a means of healing trauma and fostering reconciliation. By preserving and revitalising these cultural landmarks, communities in Tigray can reclaim a sense of continuity and pride, reaffirming their resilience in the face of adversity.

Heritage restoration initiatives offer tangible opportunities for communities to come together, collaborate, and actively engage in the rebuilding process, thus laying the groundwork for sustainable peace and reconciliation.

Moreover, the significance of cultural heritage preservation in Tigray extends far beyond its borders, resonating with broader global discussions on heritage conservation in conflict zones. The challenges faced in Tigray underscore the urgent need for a reevaluation of international approaches to heritage preservation, emphasising the importance of integrating cultural heritage considerations into broader peacebuilding and development agendas. By recognising the healing and unifying power of heritage, the international community can better support local efforts to safeguard cultural treasures and promote sustainable post-conflict recovery.

In this broader context, the preservation of cultural heritage in Tigray serves as a poignant reminder of the intrinsic value of cultural diversity and the need to protect it as a shared human heritage. By fostering greater awareness and appreciation for the cultural significance of heritage sites in conflict-affected regions like Tigray, we can amplify their role as catalysts for healing, reconciliation, and sustainable peacebuilding efforts worldwide.

Conclusion

The widespread destruction of cultural heritage in Tigray underscores the urgent necessity for comprehensive efforts in documentation, preservation, and restoration of these invaluable assets. Tigray's historical richness spans from the Middle Stone Age to later Stone Age sequences, encompassing rock art and evidence of plant domestication. The Aksumite Kingdom, thriving in Tigray and neighbouring Eritrea from 150 BCE to 800 CE, contributed a diverse array of culturally and religiously significant artefacts, pivotal not only regionally but also globally within the African continent. From distinguished rock-hewn churches to ancient mosques and monasteries, Tigray's cultural heritage manifests a tapestry of enduring religious and cultural diversity.

The ongoing conflict in Tigray has not only inflicted severe damage on these cultural treasures but also threatened to erase centuries of history and heritage. The deliberate targeting of religious sites, museums, and archaeological sites by armed forces has resulted in widespread devastation, with reports of looting, vandalism, and destruction of priceless artefacts and manuscripts. Moreover, the communication blackout imposed during the conflict has hindered documentation efforts, making it challenging to assess the full extent of the damage and devise strategies for preservation and restoration.

Despite these challenges, there is hope in the concerted efforts of local communities, scholars, diaspora organisations, and international institutions to safeguard Tigray's cultural heritage. From grassroots reporting and documentation initiatives to advocacy campaigns and international appeals, there is a growing recognition of the urgent need to protect and preserve these cultural treasures for future generations.

Moving forward, it is imperative for the Ethiopian government, international organisations, and the global community to prioritise the protection and preservation of Tigray's cultural heritage. This includes implementing measures to prevent further damage, supporting restoration efforts, and ensuring accountability for crimes against cultural property. By preserving Tigray's rich cultural legacy, we not only honour its past but also lay the foundation for a more inclusive and resilient future for the region and its people.

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Chapter 20.
Endangered Cultural Heritage in Northern Nigeria Amidst Terrorism: Myths, Mistakes, and Misunderstanding

Favour Chukwuemeka Uroko

Introduction

Cultural festivals in northern Nigeria were well-celebrated moments that brought spectators from all over Nigeria and beyond, uniting different groups in northern Nigeria. These festivals were used to promote unity, equity, and trust amongst the various religions in northern Nigeria. In northern Nigeria, the major religions are Islam and Christianity, with a moderate population of followers of African traditional religions. During these festivals, followers of both religions would come out *en masse* to participate and serve as spectators of the events until the banditry and terrorism that have engulfed northern Nigeria since 2015.

The year 2011 marked a period of an increase in terrorism in northern Nigeria, in part due to the fact that the two main parties, divided along religious lines, were competing in elections–each with their flag bearer: The People's Democratic Party was led by Goodluck Jonathan, while the All Progressive Congress was led by Muhammadu Buhari. It was during this period that politicians began to support terrorism to discredit the government in power. There was a suicide attack on the United Nations headquarters in Abuja on 26 August 2011, along with an escalation of attacks on Nigerian Christians, as well as a renewed focus on attacks against the Nigerian security apparatus (police and army) in Northern Nigeria (Cook 2012). The government in power was led by Goodluck Jonathan. Several churches and mosques were burned. People were killed in their houses and in marketplaces. This made the people of northern Nigeria, both Christians and Muslims, afraid of going out to public spaces. Consequently, most celebrations, such as cultural festivals, that generated fanfare were stopped to avoid the activities of suicide bombers. This was the beginning of the collapse of cultural festivals in northern Nigeria.

Some of the cultural festivals that were previously celebrated in northern Nigeria include the Argungu Fishing Festival, the Durbar Festival, the Kaduna International Film Festival, the Akata Benue Fishing Festival, the AyetAtyap annual cultural festival, and the Ogani Festival, among others. During these festivals, people would swim to catch the biggest fish; they dressed in colourful garments, with different music being played. According to Adeeoso (2023), the Durbar and Argungu festivals often begin with prayers, followed by a parade of the Emir and his entourage of horses, accompanied by musicians, and ends at the Emir's palace, where a colourful display of culture, full of pomp and pageantry, concludes with a spectacular traditional concert and bazaar of African music. Unfortunately, the emergence of terrorism and banditry led to the decimation of these cultural activities. There have been cases where a cultural festival was ongoing and people were killed. For instance, 19 persons were injured by gunshots from terrorist groups, and ten persons were killed during a cultural festival in Bassa community (Abraham 2022). There was also a situation where a terrorist was made the head of a community, which made people afraid of going out to any public festivals. Nigerians were stunned when Adamu Aliero, wanted by police in three states for over 100 murders, was turbaned as 'Sarkin Fulani' –leader of Fulani – by the Emir of Yandoto, Zamfara State, Aliyu Marafa, ostensibly to keep other bandits away and allow farming and commerce to resume in the area (Punch Editorial Board 2022).

The systematic religious crisis that came in the form of Fulani herdsmen and banditry led to the decline of cultural festivals in northern Nigeria. First, this study looks at some of the historical festivals in northern Nigeria. Second, it explores the characteristics of festivals in Nigeria. Third, it looks at how religious terrorism has affected cultural festivals in Nigeria. This is a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. The qualitative method of phenomenology provides a theoretical tool for educational research as it allows researchers to engage in flexible activities that can describe and help to understand complex phenomena, which include the various aspects of human social experience (Alhazmi and Kaufmann 2022).

Historical Festivals in Northern Nigeria

There are various historical festivals in northern Nigeria. Some of them are listed below.

Durbar Festival

The Durbar festival takes place in the historical northern cities of Kano, Katsina, and Zaria, among others. The word 'Durbar' comes from Hindi-Urdu 'darbar': dar meaning door and bar meaning entry or audience (Tour n.d.). Each year, Kano hosts several Durbar festivals. The festival has its origins in the traditional martial parades of the emirates in the region, where warriors and horsemen would showcase their skills and pay homage to the emir, or traditional ruler. Today, the Durbar Festival has evolved into a major cultural extravaganza, typically held during Muslim holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. It features elaborate processions of beautifully adorned horses, camels, and horsemen, accompanied by traditional music, drumming, and colourful attire. During the festival, participants, including members of royal families, nobles, and ordinary citizens, dress in their finest traditional attire, often embellished with intricate embroidery, beads, and jewelry. The event provides a platform for showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the Hausa people and fosters a sense of community pride and identity. The Durbar Festival attracts both local and international tourists who come to witness the spectacle of the parades, enjoy traditional music and dance performances, and experience the hospitality and warmth of Northern Nigerian culture. Okungbowa (2022) noted that the Durbar celebration, which is one of the most captivating and colourful events in the state's tourism calendar, is expected to reignite the state's tourism, which has been on a downward trend. It serves as a celebration of tradition, unity, and heritage and is an integral part of the cultural fabric of the region.

The Durbar festival can be traced to the period when horses were used for war, especially in northern Nigeria, which was under the emirate system. The largest Durbar festival takes place in the Kano Emirate of Kano, drawing numerous tourists every year (Mayowa 2021). The festival showcases the people's humility towards the rulership of the emir, even to the point of being willing to die for the protection of the emirate. This is why only men participate in the parade during the festival. They wear colourfully designed robes in various hues. Hausa cultural music is played to add fanfare to the festival. According to Tour (n.d.) and Omoruyi (2021), the Durbar Festival spans four days filled with magnificence, skillful horsemanship, and captivating equestrian parades. It begins with Hawan Sallah—the Festival Riding, followed by HawanDaushe, HawanNassarawa, and concludes with HawanDoriya. According to Maishanu (2024), the 'Hawan Nasarawa', is considered the climax of Sallah Day by residents of Fagge. Of these, HawanDaushestands out as the most captivating and remarkable aspect of the Durbar festivities, showcasing the 'Jahi,' which draws the attention of spectators worldwide.

Horses across regions from Niger to Kastina and down to Sokoto and Kano are adorned with decorations days ahead of the Durbar event. One notable decoration is the horse headdress called Kwalkwali. This ornate style is elegantly displayed on the headpiece worn by the horses, serving as a fashion statement rather than protective gear.

Argungu Fishing Festival

The Argungu Fishing Festival is held in the town of Argungu in present-day Kebbi State. It marks the end of the farming season and the start of the fishing season and is said to preserve tradition and promote conservation (Sobamiwa 2023). Activities during this festival include fishing, sports, and wrestling. During the ceremony, participants wear beautiful and colourful attire and engage in traditional dance. This festival has its origins in traditional fishing practices and marks the end of the growing season and the beginning of the fishing season for the local communities.

The four-day Argungu Fishing Festival began in 1934 to mark the end of hostilities between the Sokoto Caliphate and Kebbi Kingdom (Babangida 2023). The two empires had fought for centuries, and hostilities only ceased with the arrival of the British (Shyllon 2007). During the festival, thousands of fishermen and spectators gather along the banks of the Matan Fada River, armed with various traditional fishing implements such as nets, traps, and baskets. The highlight of the event is the fishing competition, where participants dive into the river en masse, attempting to catch the largest fish using their traditional methods. The festival also features cultural displays, traditional music and dance performances, wrestling matches, and various other activities that showcase the rich cultural heritage of the region. Additionally, visitors have the opportunity to enjoy local cuisine, arts, and crafts.

The Argungu Fishing Festival attracts tourists and visitors from all over Nigeria and beyond, making it one of the most prominent cultural events in the country. Skills involved in festival activities are transmitted to younger generations formally and informally (Olagunju 2008). In 2016, it was designated as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Editor 2016; UNESCO 2016), further cementing its significance and ensuring its preservation for future generations.

Terrorism in Northern Nigeria

Terrorism in Northern Nigeria has been a significant challenge for both the region and the country as a whole. Several factors contribute to the presence of terrorism in the region, including economic disparities, political instability, social grievances, and religious extremism. One of the most prominent terrorist groups operating in Northern Nigeria is Boko Haram, which seeks to establish an Islamic state and opposes Western education. According to Afzal (2020), the group does not call itself Boko Haram; its preferred name is the Jamaat-u-Ahlis Sunna-Lidda-Awati Wal-Jihad, 'the organisation committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad.' Boko Haram has carried out numerous attacks, including bombings, kidnappings, and raids on villages, resulting in thousands of deaths and displacements of civilians.

In addition to Boko Haram, splinter groups and offshoots such as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have emerged, further complicating the security situation in the region. These groups often target civilians, government institutions, security forces, and educational facilities, instilling fear and instability in affected communities. According to reports, Boko Haram has killed thousands and displaced over 2.5 million people in a never-ending conflict (Iyorah 2023). Efforts to combat terrorism in northern Nigeria have involved both military operations and counter-insurgency strategies. The Nigerian government, with the support of regional and international partners, has deployed troops, established joint task forces, and implemented measures to counter the influence of terrorist groups and address the underlying socio-economic issues driving extremism.

Factors That Have Endangered Cultural Heritage in Northern Nigeria

Due to the impact of terrorism, as discussed above, historical festivals have been seriously affected. The following are some of the reasons that have made historic festivals an endangered phenomenon:

Politics

Playing politics with terrorism in northern Nigeria refers to the manipulation or exploitation of terrorist activities by political actors or groups for their own strategic interests. It has been revealed that Nigerian politicians are involved in sponsoring terrorism (AriseNews 2021). Some of these politicians may have used their money to buy guns and even import terrorists from neighbouring countries in northern Nigeria, such as Niger and Chad (Dogru 2020). They sponsor terrorism so that they can score cheap political points. Political leaders manipulate myth, symbolism, and rhetoric to influence opinions and ideologies regarding religion (Baines and Shaughnessy 2014). Most times, terrorism escalates in Nigeria when elections are near. Once they start sponsoring terrorism, the same politicians often find it difficult to control those terrorists. Thus, the terrorists use their guns to wreak havoc in northern Nigeria. They enter communities, kill people, and take away their farm produce. There have been reports of villagers paying dues to terrorists to avoid their attacks. It is on this premise that people are afraid of organising any of these historical festivals. Even when they are organised, people in northern Nigeria will not attend for fear of death.

In northern Nigeria, political leaders or parties may attempt to deflect responsibility for the persistence of terrorism onto their opponents or rival factions. This could involve accusing political opponents of being sympathetic to or even colluding with terrorist groups, often without substantial evidence, to undermine their credibility or weaken their electoral prospects. Politicians may selectively highlight or downplay certain terrorist incidents or threats, depending on their political agenda. They may exaggerate the severity of attacks in areas where their opponents hold power or understate the impact of terrorism in regions where they seek to gain support, thereby manipulating public perceptions and sentiments for political advantage. Politicians exploit religion by aligning themselves with terrorist groups under the guise of being Islamists and claiming to share the same objectives as these extremist organisations. In doing so, they finance terrorist activities in Nigeria, aiming to destabilise the opposition government (Osewa 2019). This has ensured that most of the historic festivals are no longer held for fear of terrorist attacks.

For instance, in Katsina State, the Emirate Council announced the suspension of the Durbar during the Eid-el-Kabir festivity on Saturday, 9 July 2022, and expressed deep concern over the security situation in parts of the emirate (Misau 2022). The Emir further noted that the Durbar festival dates back hundreds of years and involves the display of horse riding skills by districts and nobility households, who pay homage to the Emir on Eid day, known in Katsina as 'Hawan Daushe'. The emir, on his part, leads a contingent of members of the Emirate Council, district and village heads in a procession of horses, known as 'Hawan Bariki', to pay homage to the state governor, a day after the Eid. Furthermore, the Argungu Fishing Festival was halted in 2009 due to threats from Boko Haram terrorists (Obiezu 2020). Lawal (2018) lamented that the festival, last held in 2009, was suspended due to the challenges of Boko Haram. The government feared that the insurgents might take advantage of the crowd at the festival to strike and cause damage.

Religion

Religion is a system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and values centred on the worship of a higher power or deity, often involving moral codes, spiritual guidance, and community engagement. In Nigeria, the two major religions are Christianity and Islam. In northern Nigeria, Islam is the majority, while in southern Nigeria, Christianity is dominant. In northern Nigeria, there are frequent religious crises. Sometimes, Christians are accused of blasphemy; other times, there are conflicts over Christian influence in parts of northern Nigeria. Abolurin (2012) observed that religion significantly contributes to the cultivation of terrorist inclinations due to its tendency to designate certain groups as superior while considering others inferior, often stemming from claims of exclusive access to and control over a perceived supreme universal entity.

One of the ongoing crises is the Jos Crisis, which has continued up to 2024. The capital of Plateau State in central northern Nigeria, Jos, has experienced recurrent religious violence between Muslim and Christian communities. The clashes have been sparked by various factors, including disputes over land, political power, and economic opportunities. These conflicts have resulted in significant loss of lives and property over the years. There is also the Kaduna Crisis, which has been systemic since independence. Kaduna State has been a hotspot for religious violence since the 1980s. The city of Kaduna has witnessed numerous clashes between Muslims and Christians, leading to deaths, injuries, and the destruction of property. The underlying causes of these conflicts often revolve around issues of religious identity, political marginalisation, and socioeconomic disparities.

Furthermore, there are the Kano religious riots. Kano, one of the largest cities in northern Nigeria, has experienced several religious riots, particularly in the early 2000s. These riots have been characterised by violence between Muslims and Christians, often fueled by religious extremism, political tensions, and socioeconomic grievances. There is the Zamfara Religious Crisis, which has been fueled by disputes over land, resources, and political power, as well as by religious extremism and intolerance.

The Growing Influence of Non-State Actors

Non-state actors include organisations and individuals that are not affiliated with, directed by, or funded by the government. These include corporations, private financial institutions, and NGOs, as well as paramilitary and armed resistance groups (ECR n.d.). In Nigeria, non-state actors such as religious organisations, seem to be influencing the peace in northern Nigeria. Some of these organisations have religious extremists as their leaders and spokespersons. Certain organisations have even issued warnings to the organisers not to hold any of these historical and cultural festivals. Some of these non-state actors are so powerful that the government in northern Nigeria has allowed them to continue their activities. For instance, the terrorist Adamu Aliero attempted legitimisation in 2022 was an abject capitulation to non-state actors and signals helplessness, the failure of formal authorities to enforce their writ, and a loss of monopoly over the instruments of coercion, a major condition of state sovereignty (Punch 2022). This growing influence of non-state actors has negatively affected the economy of northern Nigeria due to the loss of revenue that would have been generated from tourists (Adams 2021). The collusion between government and security forces with non-state actors in the North is thriving, making these non-state actors authoritative in determining which festivals or occasions can proceed and which must be prohibited. According to Danladi (personal communication 2024), there was a time when the terrorist group in Argungu wrote to the Emir, instructing him not to organise any Fishing Festival in Argungu. In Kebbi State, the Argungu Fishing Festival has been halted since 2009 (VOA 2020).

Government Sympathy with Terrorist Groups

Some government officials and authorities believe that some of the terrorist groups are fighting for the rights of the people of northern Nigeria. Several reasons can be cited as motivators of government sympathy towards terrorist groups. First, the increasing corruption within government institutions and security forces is a pervasive issue in Nigeria that has exposed the fault lines. Allegations have been made that corrupt officials may turn a blind eye to or even actively support terrorist activities in exchange for bribes or other benefits. Second, political and ethnic factors have also contributed to this sympathy. Nigeria's diverse ethnic and political landscape sometimes influences perceptions of government actions. Accusations of favouritism or bias towards certain ethnic or political groups may lead to suspicions that the government is sympathetic to or colluding with terrorist organisations. Third, in the historical context, past instances of government neglect or mishandling of security challenges have fueled scepticism about the government's commitment to combating terrorism. In the words of the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (2022: 1), 'Nigerians deserve to know where the Tucano military bombers bought to fight terrorists are and why the government is sparing the terrorists while thousands of so-called repentant terrorists are released regularly by the Borno State governor, Babagana Zulum, and the Federal Government.'

Criticism of slow or ineffective responses to terrorist attacks has led some to question whether there is

underlying sympathy or tolerance for these groups. Other scholars have mentioned that the inactivity of the Nigerian security agencies has been sustained by this sympathy. Some observers have pointed to instances where security forces have allegedly failed to adequately respond to terrorist threats or have been slow to apprehend known militants. This perceived inaction has raised concerns about the government's willingness to confront these groups directly. The perceived sympathy has led to terrorist groups becoming more ruthless in their killings and destruction. Consequently, people are afraid of coming out to witness these festivities.

Fear and the Demise of Cultural Heritage in Northern Nigeria

The concept of fear is multidimensional. In the context of this article, fear is an emotional response characterised by a sense of apprehension, worry, or unease in the face of perceived danger, threat, or harm. The phenomenon of fear can manifest in various forms, ranging from mild discomfort to intense terror, and can be triggered by specific stimuli, events, or situations. It often includes physiological changes such as increased heart rate, sweating, and heightened alertness, as well as cognitive and behavioural responses aimed at avoiding or mitigating the perceived threat.

First, during historic cultural festivals, public announcements are made about the dates and expectations of the events. Because they are public events, the citizens may fear that they could be attacked there. During attacks, terrorists may use children as foot soldiers because people rarely suspect children as terrorists. Also, children are seldom searched during the entry process into venues of the Durbar, Argungu, or any other festival. Thus, terrorists in northern Nigeria prefer the use of child soldiers during attacks (Odeniyi 2023). These child soldiers sometimes find their way into the centre of any occasion and blow themselves up. It is important to note that terrorist groups often choose targets based on familiarity and strategic advantage. They may target places they know well due to factors such as proximity to their bases or areas they have previously operated in, knowledge of local security vulnerabilities, or perceived symbolic significance. By selecting familiar targets, terrorists can exploit their understanding of the terrain, security measures, and potential escape routes, increasing the likelihood of successful attacks and evading capture by security forces. Additionally, targeting familiar locations allows terrorists to maximise the impact of their attacks by selecting high-value targets with strategic importance or symbolic value. Before striking, they may analyse patterns of movement, assess security measures, and exploit weaknesses in infrastructure to plan and execute attacks on targets outside their known areas of operation. Ultimately, terrorists seek to strike targets that will generate the greatest impact in terms of casualties, economic disruption, and media attention.

Second, during these historic cultural festivals, people wear large garments, which allow terrorist sympathisers to easily hide weapons, such as machetes, bombs, and knives. According to Ahmed (personal communication 2024), some of these people that hide these instruments under their clothes are just new recruits of terrorists groups who do not understand the impact of their actions. Thus, one may decide to attend any of these festivals and may be killed by the person close to them. In the words of Bello (personal communication 2024), some parents do not allow their children, especially daughters, to attend festivals. This is because when the terrorists attack, girls may find it more difficult to resist attack or escape, especially if their aggressor is sitting nearby. There is also freedom for people to carry swords during some of these festivals. Unfortunately, any small conflict can easily escalate to a full-blown war in northern Nigeria. This has led the government to restrict these festivals out of fear of witnessing destruction to lives and property.

Third, terrorists are known to carry out attacks in crowded places like the market and worship centres. During periods of the celebration of some of these historic cultural festivals, thousands of people gather at these centres to join the festivities. However, with the widespread activities of terrorist groups, people are now afraid of going to historic cultural festivals in northern Nigeria. Aisha (personal communication 2024) lamented that even though some of these programmes have been restored in northern Nigeria, attendance has decreased significantly. Aisha further noted that people are afraid of attending public functions, especially when they have lost close family members due to terrorist activities. Sule (personal communication 2024) lamented that the Durba Festival once brought socio-economic development to his community, but today, many people are no longer interested because of growing poverty and fear of attack. In the past, terrorists have targeted public places such as markets, worship centres, malls, hotels, bars, football viewing centres, camps for internally displaced people, transport terminals, security points, and educational facilities, among others (Oluwafemi 2022).

Furthermore, in northern Nigeria, terrorist groups often target crowded places as part of their strategy to maximise casualties, create widespread fear, and garner attention for their cause. Crowded areas such as markets, transportation hubs, religious sites, entertainment venues, and government buildings are

attractive targets for terrorists because they offer the opportunity to inflict mass casualties and generate significant media coverage. By attacking crowded places, terrorists aim to disrupt normal life, undermine public confidence in the government's ability to provide security, and instill a sense of vulnerability and fear within the population. The psychological impact of such attacks can be profound, leading to heightened anxiety, social withdrawal, and changes in behaviour among the affected population. Additionally, targeting crowded places allows terrorists to exploit vulnerabilities in security and infrastructure, making it more challenging for authorities to prevent or respond to attacks effectively. The indiscriminate nature of these attacks means that anyone, regardless of nationality, religion, or ethnicity, can become a victim, further amplifying the sense of fear and insecurity.

Solution to the Endangered Cultural Festivals in Northern Nigeria

Cultural festivals are important in northern Nigeria because of the enormous benefits that come with them. These endangered cultural festivals have led to increased unity amongst the various ethnic groups in northern Nigeria. They have also boosted economic inflow into the northern region. Several approaches could be adopted to preserve these cultural events.

First, there is a need for the federal and state governments to collaborate with local movement leaders. Local government leaders have easy access to the activities of terrorist groups and are the closest to some of their members. The government can work with them to understand the grievances of these radical groups and respond to their positive and rational demands. When this is done, the right atmosphere has been established for the continuation of cultural festivals in northern Nigeria.

Second, the government can engage with religious leaders, especially those of the Muslim faith. Religious leaders are respected by radical groups, who believe that these religious leaders are sent by God. When the government engages religious leaders and emphasises the importance of promoting peace and stability in northern Nigeria, the number of terrorists may reduce. Some of the terrorists were indoctrinated by extremist religious leaders. With close cooperation between the government and religious leaders, some extremists who masquerade as religious leaders will be caught and prosecuted.

Third, the government also needs to take both proactive and reactive measures before and during festivals. This could involve increased surveillance using drones and an increase in the number of security personnel that could be stationed in areas where cultural festivals are held. Additionally, there should be strict screening of individuals attending these cultural festivals, with no exception of gender or age, including children.

Fourth, the importance of public awareness campaigns cannot be overemphasised. Public awareness campaigns against terrorism in Nigeria are essential for fostering a culture of resilience, promoting community engagement, and mobilising collective action to address the root causes of terrorism and build a safer society. Public awareness campaigns educate citizens about the signs of suspicious activities and behaviours associated with terrorism. By empowering individuals to recognise and report suspicious incidents to authorities, these campaigns contribute to enhanced vigilance within communities, thereby improving overall security.

Public awareness campaigns can help raise awareness about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, promote critical thinking, and foster resilience against terrorist propaganda, particularly among vulnerable populations such as youth. Moreover, public awareness campaigns encourage citizens to actively participate in efforts to prevent terrorism and promote peace and security in their communities. By engaging individuals in constructive dialogue, promoting civic engagement, and providing avenues for reporting suspicious activities, these campaigns empower citizens to play a proactive role in countering terrorism.

Conclusion

Historical cultural festivals in northern Nigeria have been abandoned due to the increasing terrorism in the region. These cultural festivals have served as avenues for relaxation and tourism development in northern Nigeria. They have also been a source of internally generated revenue and boosted economic activities. However, the increasing terrorist activities since 2010 have led to a decline in the number of cultural festivals that take place in northern Nigeria. At the centre of this issue is fear– fear among the public of being attacked in these venues. Politics, religion, the influence of non-state actors, and the government's sympathy with terrorist groups have all contributed to the persistence of terrorist activities in northern Nigeria.

To stem this alarming trend, there is a need for collaboration between the federal government, state government, local government leaders, religious leaders, and security agencies to address the issue of terrorism effectively. When terrorism decreases, there will be a revival of the historic cultural festivals in northern Nigeria.

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Chapter 21.
Heritage Destruction and its Preservation as a Legitimising Tool in the Russian Media

Thomas Richard

Following the outbreak of the Syrian Revolution in 2011, as it gradually developed into a civil war, and as fighting intensified, growing attention was devoted in academia and the global media to the situation of Syrian heritage (Cheikhmous 2013). As battles between regime forces and opposing groups continued, Syrian heritage became a critical issue, with extensive damage done to the monuments and archaeological sites in and around Damascus, the souks, the historical citadel of Aleppo, and Palmyra, among others. This growing concern reached its peak when ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) took control of the city of Palmyra and, in line with its previous actions, destroyed some of the most iconic buildings of Syrian heritage, including the temples of Bel and Baalshamin, while extensively damaging other ancient remains and using the ancient theatre for graphic executions of Syrian soldiers and scientists who had worked on the site.

These actions were widely covered by both traditional and social media, and, to some extent, could be interpreted as a theatre of violence, perceived as an attack on humanist values, as well as an assault on the country's past, which was being brutally erased (Harmansah 2015). This so-called spectacle echoed past occurrences of heritage destruction based on political grounds in Iraq and Afghanistan, arousing outrage among foreign nations and international institutions. It was strongly condemned by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization), leading to extensive initiatives to preserve what had been spared and prepare for reconstruction efforts (Al Quntar and Daniels 2016; Perini and Cunliffe 2014). The issue of Syrian heritage became the subject of numerous conferences, media interventions by specialists, and extensive social media discussions, attesting to the sentimental value attached to these destructions (Cunliffe and Curini 2018) in the face of what has been described as 'socially mediated terrorism' (Smith et *al.* 2016).

Nevertheless, this attention was not without criticism. First, it was seen as focusing more on the destruction of buildings rather than on the human losses occurring daily in the country (Matthes 2018), raising an ethical issue. Second, the ambiguities surrounding the notion of 'shared heritage' were brought to light, as such efforts could be seen as patronising the Syrians who tried to protect their heritage (Labidi and Qassar 2016), while seemingly ignoring the extent to which this heritage had been locally and nationally appropriated (Munawar 2022) since at least the Mandate period (1920-1946).

With the development of the Russian military involvement in the Syrian Civil War, starting in 2015, these issues became even more important, as Russian media extensively covered heritage destruction and the efforts made to preserve it as part of their broader war narrative (Russo and Giusti 2019). Russian reporters on the ground, sent by private channels and embedded within Syrian troops (most notably those of the ANNA News agency), as well as cameramen from the state media such as Sputnik and Russia Today, devoted extensive coverage to heritage protection, culminating in the live broadcast of a classical music concert held in Palmyra after the city was retaken from ISIS (Plets 2017). This chapter aims to analyse the narrative behind this media coverage, examining how heritage has been used to legitimise both the Russian intervention and the Syrian regime, and as a tool in what Russian media call an 'information war' (Pomerantsev 2015) against what they claim to be a hegemonic and biased Western narrative of the war. Thus, this chapter seeks to contribute to the discourse on the politicisation of heritage (Amineddoleh 2019; Dodd 2007) through a media analysis framework. Heritage issues in Syria have been framed within the context of securitisation (Russo and Giusti 2019), and this chapter follows in their footsteps by examining how this securitisation process has been made possible through the development of a coherent, complex, and well-crafted narrative that renews the political value of heritage sites.

To achieve this, I analyse a corpus of videos and documentaries produced by the aforementioned Russian media[1] that focuses on heritage to frame the

[1] Due to the ban on Russian media from Western European broadcasting channels and their reduced presence on Western online platforms since the start of the war in Ukraine, a significant proportion of the videos consulted for this study before February

narrative issues at stake, beginning with reports on heritage destruction, followed by the reconstruction efforts, as framed by Russian reporters. This approach will allow for a deeper understanding of how these media outlets have adopted seemingly neutral issues and buzzwords associated with heritage preservation. By integrating these into their war narrative, they have transformed them into political tools.

Framing a Narrative of Destruction

The Russian media's portrayal of the destruction of Syrian heritage is complex. Although they are aware that the Syrian regime forces may be responsible for some of the destruction, journalists carefully avoid such criticisms. They construct a narrative that steers clear of accusations of appropriation and places the blame on opposition forces

Whose Heritage?

Russian media coverage of heritage destruction in Syria, featuring drone footage and detailed reports on Aleppo and Palmyra, places significant emphasis on UNESCO World Heritage sites like Palmyra, the ancient city of Aleppo, Apamea, and Bosra. These sites are internationally renowned archaeological remains. However, the focus is not on their status as world heritage but rather on their importance as symbols of Syrian national heritage. According to Russian media, these sites, which have been integral to the Syrian national narrative, were protected by the regime before the Civil War. The regime reportedly used these remains to legitimise its interpretation of Syrian national identity (Munawar 2019).

As seen in *Aleppo Earthquake*[2], a documentary produced by ANNA News that deals extensively with the destruction in the Old City and the Citadel of Aleppo, the focus is on the daily experience of Syrian citizens with their heritage rather than on its universal aspect (Jones 2023). Syrians are invited to testify in front of the camera about the importance of these sites as a lived heritage—one that was part of their daily lives and integral to their national identity. The documentary focuses on an emotional narrative of loss from the personal perspectives of these Syrians. Those testifying before reporters' cameras are often seen not just as citizens, but as cultural gatekeepers and mediators. These individuals are schoolteachers, guides, priests, imams, and others, as opposed to high-profile intellectuals or heritage specialists. While one might assume that such professionals would be accessible and prominent in the discourse, in both Syria and Russia, their actual presence in media coverage is remarkably rare. This absence may be deliberate, aligning with the Russian media's narrative that favours a more grassroots portrayal of heritage over expert analysis. At the same time, this bottom-up approach allows such coverage to avoid accusations of focusing more on the stones rather than the people. The narrative is about the people (and those involved at the grassroots level of heritage preservation) speaking about what the stones meant to them and sharing their intimate feelings about these sites.

This narrative allows Russian media to depict their country as taking a hands-off approach, with Russian institutional involvement not being emphasised, and Russia acting solely as a supporter of the legitimate Syrian authorities and cultural mediators. This portrayal subtly reaffirms the legitimacy of the regime through its care for antiquities. In Aleppo, the role of the Russian military police is highlighted, with members emphasising their facilitative work while maintaining a reserved attitude towards Syrian heritage.[3] This restraint is particularly notable since Palmyra holds a special place in the Russian psyche, with St. Petersburg often dubbed the 'Palmyra of the North' (Renate 2004). Despite this connection, the reference is underplayed in Russian media narratives.

However, one aspect strongly links Syrian heritage to Russia in the media: the filming style of heritage destruction. War-torn cities are commonly captured from above, with a focus on heritage monuments in long, wide shots that convey the extent of the losses. These shots are usually silent or accompanied by minimal commentary, noting the battles and scale of destruction. This style of filming ruins closely resembles the portrayal of destroyed Soviet cities during the Second World War, as seen in films like 'Stalingrad' (Varlamov 1943). Such imagery is deeply embedded in Russian collective memory, synonymous with the immense cultural losses of that era, transcending political views. For example, Alexander Sokurov, who is not a Kremlin proponent, included in his 2015 film 'Francofonia' extensive footage of damage to the Hermitage Museum during the siege of Leningrad. Given the importance of Second World War memories in Russian civic and national identity, and their role in foreign policy (Domanska *et al.* 2022; Turmakin 2003), these images enable the Russian audience to immediately connect with the situation in Syria. The

2020 are no longer available easily. References will be as precise as possible given this situation, and when necessary, news excerpts from these media will be referenced.

[2] *Aleppo Earthquake by ANNA TV*, last accessed 03/03/2024 : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIwrrckuqIE&ab_channel=HANDSOFFSYRIA (This is not the original upload, but a reupload on YouTube by a pro-regime channel)

[3] Syria: Russian military police protecting Aleppo citizens (not the original upload, but a re-upload from ANNA News reports), last accessed 03/03/2024: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHZBkPhHk5c&ab_channel=TrueWorldOrder

framing of such images serves as a symbol to rationalise the Russian intervention: Russian soldiers are depicted as being sent to Syria to confront a challenge akin to what the Soviet Union faced in 1941, against an enemy likened to the Nazis.

Enemies Portrayed as Barbarians

Time and again, ANNA News reporters sarcastically refer to the Syrian rebels as 'moderate head-choppers' to mock Western views of the Syrian opposition forces. Russian media consistently portray them as jihadists or, at the very least, as the objective allies of such groups. This portrayal includes actors like the White Helmets in Aleppo, often celebrated in the West (Cosentino 2020).[4]

Reports frequently highlight what are termed 'terror weapons' used by the rebels, specifically improvised mortar shells fashioned from gas cylinders. These have been indiscriminately fired at government-held areas and are commonly displayed at parades where weapons captured from the rebels are shown to Russian and Syrian officials, serving as evidence of the rebels' disregard for the preservation of Syrian heritage. In stark contrast, the coverage omits or downplays the damage attributable to indiscriminate bombardment by Russian or regime forces, which, if mentioned at all, is framed as a regrettable necessity of war. *Aleppo Earthquake* delves into the substantial damage to the Aleppo Citadel, attributing the primary responsibility to rebel forces and their relentless attacks on the government-held site. It does not, however, question the Citadel's use as a stronghold by pro-regime troops. Instead, reporters focus on the destruction resulting from the conflict, suggesting that the Citadel has been somewhat preserved under government control. The rebels, despite being identifiable by the reporters in videos, are rarely differentiated and are depicted as having a uniform disregard for heritage sites. For example, their occupation of Aleppo's historic old city is documented, with the souks' destruction being ascribed to their reckless military occupation of a World Heritage site. In contrast, Sergey Badiuk, a former Spetsnaz, presenter, and action movie actor, now serving as a 'citizen reporter' for ANNA News, is able to film the souks' revival under the regime after the area has been recaptured.[5]

In line with this framing of the enemies, it is no surprise that many reports emphasise the contrast between Syrian government fighters–depicted as citizens mobilised to defend their country, their way of life, and their heritage, like those during the siege of Deir Ezzor[6]–and the jihadis, portrayed as a rag-tag group of fanatics, joined by numerous foreigners, concerned solely with the destruction of Syria and the spread of terror. Particularly during the operations that led to the recapture of Deir Ezzor and Palmyra by pro-regime troops, graphic events such as suicide attacks by jihadi fighters are documented and used as evidence of the futility of negotiation.

Reports seldom feature footage of the destruction filmed by ISIS, which is consistently referred to as an organisation 'forbidden in Russia'. Nonetheless, these images are assumed to be well-known to viewers, and field reports are often presented in contrast. Despite a significant focus on the relationship between people and heritage sites, these sites are portrayed as symbols of victory—be it in Aleppo, the Damascus region, or especially in Palmyra.[7] 'Liberating Syria' visually translates to saving its monuments from ISIS's control, effectively conveying to the audience an urgency to halt the destruction. This sentiment is so pervasive that the recapture of Palmyra is depicted in ANNA News reports as a literal race against time, with each update tracking the Syrian forces' progress until a photo of one of their journalists can be snapped in front of the ancient theatre, a site previously used for executions by ISIS.

Thus, the conflict in Syria is often depicted in rather simple terms: a battle between good and evil, between defenders of culture and barbarians (Issaev and Eremeeva 2021), without delving into the political complexities of the situation. Issues are presented as straightforward, with heritage being a focal point. It appeals to the audience's memory and emotions (Grigor and Pantti 2021) as it symbolises that which is worth defending against a contemptible enemy that shows no regard for it, ultimately leading to portrayals of reconstruction efforts.

Being There For Reconstruction

While Russian reporters devote considerable time framing the issue of heritage destruction, they also highlight the reconstruction efforts undertaken to rebuild and preserve historical sites. These actions, in turn, contribute to the legitimisation process and allow Russia to be portrayed as a defender of high culture, emphasising its activities in the field.

[4] *White helmets, the face of terror,* last accessed 03/03/2024 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSgKdo9NKCU&list=PLadCwih6z92PY-UHR4bkv57B9sgZ7GstY&index=6&t=9s&ab_channel=HANDSOFFSYRIA
[5] "Final report with Sergei Badiuk from Aleppo," Vlad Nikolaev, last accessed 03/03/2024: https://anna-news.info/spetsialnyj-reportazh-s-sergeem-badyuk/ (Originally published 25/02/2017).
[6] Deir Ezzor under siege, last accessed 03/03/2024: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KewY8HETxhY&ab_channel=R%26UVideos *Deir Ezzor under siege* last accessed 030/03/2024
[7] "Palmyra has been taken! ANNA News reporter with the vanguard of SAA forces in the historical part of the city," Artem Berezhetsky, published 03/02/2017, last accessed 03/03/2024: https://anna-news.info/palmira-vzyata-zhurnalisty-anna-news-s-peredo/ (SAA stands for Syrian Arab Army, the official name of government forces, systematically used in Russian reports).

Russia as a Defender of High Culture

Compared to the foreign fighters who joined ISIS and took part in the destruction of heritage sites, the Russian intervention is portrayed as the exact opposite–a defence of high culture. It emphasises some of the most esteemed art forms, such as dance and classical music. Educational cooperation was one approach, exemplified by the opening of a Pushkin centre at the University of Damascus. However, the most notable action depicted on screen was the staging of a classical concert in Palmyra's ancient theatre. This concert featured musicians from one of Russia's most prestigious institutions, the Mariinsky Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Valery Gergiev, who had previously led performances after the Beslan school siege and the Russian intervention in Georgia. The event was broadcast live on Russian channels and online[8], and preceded by an online speech by Vladimir Putin from Sochi, in which he praised the organisation of the concert and compared terrorism to a 'cancer' in line with the framing of enemies seen above.

The concert itself was an official event and was attended by ministers, officers and officials, but that is not where cameramen and the TV director focused. They preferred to film the crowd and the musicians. The latter were to play pieces by Bach, Prokofiev, and contemporary composer Rodion Shchedrin. All of these pieces were carefully chosen: Bach can be interpreted as representing order and harmony above the chaos that ISIS wrecked in the ancient city. Prokofiev may symbolise the Russian contribution to the liberation of the city, while Shchedrin, one of the most important Russian's composers symbolises the vitality of this high culture today, heard within the walls of the ancient theatre. On the other hand, no military music was played, making it seemingly a purely cultural manifestation, albeit being politically heavily loaded.

Beyond the officials, the audience included Russian soldiers in fatigues, filmed attentively listening to the music; they were portrayed as civilians in arms, appreciating the culture they had ostensibly defended during the recapture of the city, according to the Russian media narrative. Alongside them were numerous foreigners invited to participate in the event, their presence suggesting that the concert was intended for an international audience and that its significance extended beyond a mere celebration of victory. The majority of the audience were Syrians, including children, many dressed in traditional festive attire, representing another aspect of cultural and heritage preservation in defiance of ISIS. This was manifested through everyday and intangible heritage. The link between the people and their heritage was again emphasised on screen, with cameramen focusing on these individuals. The video editing conveyed the universal appeal of the concert alongside the national significance of the site, crucial to the Russian narrative. Rather than appropriating the site, the video was edited to present it as a gift to the Syrian people.

The concert, from a media perspective, should be understood as the initial step in Russia's efforts to participate in the restoration of heritage sites in Syria. It represents a prime example of cultural diplomacy accompanying the Russian intervention, yet its significance is more profound. On one hand, this concert, following a similar event in Georgia, can be seen as part of the aestheticisation of the Russian intervention, legitimising it (Makarychev and Yatsik 2017), and emotionally reinforcing the narrative of good versus evil in contrast to the chaos wrought by ISIS in the city. To emphasise this, the concert was juxtaposed with images of destruction in Palmyra, providing a stark counterpoint to the music. On the other hand, the concert is also to be recognised as the first act in the physical reconstruction of the city. Although the music exuded pathos, the organisers and video directors did not present the concert as a lament for what was lost in the war. While this element was acknowledged, the performance was intended to herald the start of the site's reconstruction, a project in which Russia aimed to be visibly involved (Plets 2017). In this sense, the concert served as an inauguration, paving the way for the tangible preservation efforts on the site.

Russian Participation in the Reconstruction Efforts: Boots on the Ground

The 'violins' mentioned by Gertjan Plets in his article on post-conflict Russian reconstruction efforts in Syria are as evocative as the 'trowels' in the media narrative (Plets 2017). Specifically, in the case of Palmyra, Russian media have focused on mine detection efforts.[9] Images and footage of mine-clearing teams working amidst the ruins have become emblematic in Russian media narratives. This imagery has transcended news coverage to inspire the feature film 'Palmyra,' also

[8] 'Pray for Palmyra : Russian maestro performs in Syria with Mariinksy orchestra', last accessed 03/03/2024 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLyxTc96oUI&ab_channel=SuatMetin

[9] "Over 150 troops deployed to Syria for mine clearing in Palmyra – MOD," Sputnik International, 16/03/2017, last accessed 04/03/2024: https://sputnikglobe.com/20170316/syria-russian-troops-1051631006.html
Images of this clearing work can be seen on the Russian Ministry of Defence YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v= v8sY7A7X- bw&embeds_referring_euri=https %3A %2F%2Fo001oo.ru%2F &feature=emb_imp_woyt&ab_channel=%D0%9C%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0 %BD%D1%8B%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B8 (last accessed 04/03/2024)
Also covered by China's CCTV: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNzCHEePmYY&ab_channel=CCTVVideoNewsAgency (last accessed 04/03/2024)

known as 'Once in the Desert' (Kravchuk 2022). The film follows the story of a sapper team leader training Syrian soldiers to remove explosives from heritage sites, set against the backdrop of the Mariinsky Orchestra concert in Palmyra. While most of the film was shot in Crimea, it includes scenes filmed on location at the historic site of Palmyra by a Syrian crew.

The main character's role as a sapper instructor is significant within the narrative of war as framed by Russian media, reflecting the broader focus on military police and sappers rather than combat troops. Such focus allows for the operational secrecy required by combat units and obscures the full scale of Russia's involvement in Syria. However, it also supports the narrative of Russia acting as a supportive ally to Syria rather than as a cultural appropriator. According to ANNA News reports, the fighting is carried out by Syrians, suggesting that the protection and restoration of heritage sites will ultimately be in the hands of the Syrian people, with the Russian sapper instructor portrayed as merely an assistant in this process. In the film, this character's symbolic death at the end—sacrificing himself for the preservation of heritage—leaves the responsibility to his Syrian trainees. This storyline aligns with the news narrative that emphasises a demonstratively 'hands-off' Russian approach to Syrian heritage, carefully avoiding the image of an imperialist power claiming heritage under the guise of universality. As Ammar Azzouz notes in his analysis of reconstruction projects in Syria and their criticism (2022), Russian media are cautious to avoid the perception of 'our pain, their heritage project,' suggesting, at least ostensibly, a Syrian-led heritage preservation project.

The emphasis on mine-sweeping teams is strategic, allowing Russia to be depicted as actively engaged on the ground, literally having boots on the ground, rather than merely bemoaning the destruction. This stance stands in contrast to Western powers, who, due to their support for the rebels, are perceived as unwelcome at heritage sites. Russia positions itself as proactive, willing to risk its soldiers to preserve heritage, rather than observing from afar. From this stance, Russia can advocate for the formation of an international coalition to assist in clearing Syria of landmines.[10] Such a narrative fosters an emotional investment in Russian operations in Syria, as these images resonate more powerfully than lengthy discourses on heritage preservation (Crilley and Chatterje-Doody 2020), while sidestepping the scientific and political complexities that the presence of soldiers at heritage sites might entail.

This fieldwork is augmented by collaboration with Syrian authorities in their efforts to preserve historical sites. Though Russian scientists are active at heritage sites in Syria, their appearance in videos is uncommon, with the spotlight remaining on Syrian reconstruction teams. However, one initiative that has garnered significant attention is the creation of a highly accurate 3D model of the ancient site of Palmyra by the Institute for the History of Material Culture. This achievement has been widely reported in both Russian and Syrian media, with dual objectives.[11] On one hand, it showcases Russia's archaeological and computer modelling capabilities, holding its own against Western achievements in the field. These types of models gained prominence following the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, with a surge in similar projects after ISIS's destruction in Iraq, undertaken by various institutions and private initiatives (Al-Baghdadi 2017), and becoming somewhat of a keyword in heritage preservation. Russian media have seized this trend in 3D modelling to display a narrative of Russian excellence.

Another emphasised aspect is the donation of this model to Syrian authorities to aid in their reconstruction efforts. While it is not unprecedented for 3D heritage models to be freely available online, in this case, the handover was marked by a formal ceremony. This allowed Russia to reinforce its image as a loyal ally respectful of Syria's national narrative, one that avoids cultural appropriation or imposing its own interpretations of the monuments onto Syrians. From a media standpoint, the act of presenting the model—and ensuring it is publicly recognised—is almost as significant as the creation of the model itself.

Conclusion

The widespread criticism of Russian interventions in Georgia, Syria, and now Ukraine—particularly regarding indiscriminate bombardments and the destruction of historical sites—might suggest that the country is indifferent to heritage conservation during military campaigns. However, while this may be a matter of debate from a military perspective, an analysis of the media coverage by Russian reporters in Syria presents a quite different picture with regard to political communication.

[10] "Moscow urges creation of international coalition on mine clearance in Syria," Sputnik International, 06/04/2017, last accessed 04/03/2024: https://sputnikglobe.com/ 20170406/ russia- mine-clearance- syria- 1052359312.html

[11] See additional coverage by Sputnik International, TASS, SANA, and the Russian Geographical Society regarding the 3D model of Palmyra:
Sputnik International: https://sputnikglobe.com/20171114/russia-syria- palmyra- 3d-model- 1059088709.html
TASS: https://tass.com/society/973185
SANA: https://sanasyria.org/en/?p=200638
Russian Geographical Society: https://www.rgo.ru/en/article/3d-model- ancient- palmyra- now- available- online-everyone

The widespread outrage over the destruction of heritage in Syria has enabled Russian media to craft a narrative that taps into emotions and collective memories of past destruction. This narrative justifies Russia's presence in Syria and utilises heritage preservation as a means to legitimise both the Russian intervention and the Assad regime. It draws upon concepts originally promulgated by Western nations, such as the significance of universal heritage and the duty to protect it while engaging with local communities. However, these concepts are adapted to align with Russian military objectives, portraying the country as a defender of culture in a challenging environment. It would be naive to consider heritage politically neutral. In any conflict, heritage can become a point of contention. In Syria, it has been incorporated into securitisation strategies, and, particularly in the Russian context, it has been weaponised (Clack and Dunkley 2022: 120), a tactic that has subsequently been replicated in Ukraine (Khislavski 2022)

To merely describe the heritage situation in Syria as a case of propaganda or an exercise of soft power would likely be an oversimplification, even though these elements are indeed present. The stakes in Syria are more profound, as they intertwine political, emotional, military, and cultural dimensions of heritage sites, synthesising various facets of international politics from a realist perspective with postcolonial insights into the Syrian national narrative. Such an approach, albeit deeply embedded within a war narrative linked to the Syrian regime, resonates with a Western discourse that can be perceived as patronising. If, in the West, the Russian strategy appears as a sort of guerilla information war, its images are far more common elsewhere: in Syrian or pro-regime channels, as in Iran, but also in countries that have adopted a more neutral stance about the Syrian situation, such as India or China.

At the heart of this may be an attempt to establish new norms in the international arena regarding heritage preservation. These norms could reinterpret the concept of universal values of heritage that has been constructed over recent decades and might even internally undermine the foundational idea of heritage preservation itself. Russia might be setting new norms when it comes to the preservation of heritage, with potentially serious consequences, including for international organisations. UNESCO, already facing difficulties regarding the politicisation of its actions, might have to take such new norms into account, to avoid being the target of criticisms rooted in an equivalent narrative, or to avoid being used as a legitimising body during a conflict. Preserving heritage is political, and the Russian narrative renews this politicisation on a scale that needs to be addressed–deeply, humbly, and thoroughly.

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OXFORD RECOMMENDATIONS ON REPORTING HERITAGE DESTRUCTION

Endangered **C**ultural **H**eritage in the **G**lobal **S**outh **H**ub

Oxford Recommendations on Reporting Heritage Destruction

Introduction

Cultural heritage, as a living and dynamic concept, holds multiple layers of significance. It carries historical values and serves as a representation of the development of human societies while at the same time forming an intricate link to modern societies, playing a central role in moulding individual and communal values and identities, and significantly contributing to their continuous development. Targeting and destroying cultural heritage not only endangers its material and tangible values, but also puts its intangible values at risk. In addition to violating international laws, it fuels hatred and conflict. This centrality means that cultural heritage is therefore also a human rights issue. Together, these multiple factors underscore not only its importance but also the imperative need for its protection.

While multiple policies from the UN and international heritage organisations clearly establish the protection of cultural heritage as a human rights concern and emphasise the importance of documenting and monitoring heritage, they do not extensively delve into the detail of reporting on the destruction of cultural heritage, its ethical framework, nor associated challenges within the broader social and cultural contexts.

Historical conflicts, particularly those since the 1990s, have been accompanied by the widespread destruction of cultural heritage, at times intentionally and systematically planned. These have underscored the far-reaching consequences of extensive media and social media engagement in reporting on heritage destruction. While on the one hand, this has raised international awareness, on the other hand, it has also facilitated the dissemination of propaganda and, in some instances, led to mistrust within the affected and concerned communities.

Media reporting plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of conflicts, human rights issues, and even cultural heritage. This role can act as a double-edged sword if it is conducted without considering the various social, cultural, political, and economic aspects intertwined with cultural heritage. As cultural heritage destruction is increasingly recognised as a human rights violation, it is crucial to take a more proactive role in addressing these emerging issues. This includes providing guidance and resources to media professionals and journalists on how to report ethically and accurately on heritage destruction in a way that respects the cultural sensitivities of affected communities and promotes the protection of cultural heritage as a fundamental human right.

The recommendations set out here arise from discussions initiated by Oxford's Endangered Cultural Heritage in the Global South Hub, which engages journalists, policy-makers, and scholars from various disciplines and organisations. The purpose of these recommendations is to provide a guiding framework for journalists and news platforms reporting on cultural heritage destruction in a conflict context, highlighting the manifold challenges associated with this issue. However, these recommendations can also aid relevant governmental authorities and international organisations, civil societies, and researchers in better engaging with reporters and gaining a deeper understanding of issues related to the destruction of cultural heritage.

These recommendations should always be considered in conjunction with the highest existing standards and codes of conduct for journalism, which encompass impartiality, public interest, freedom of expression, accuracy, and fairness.

Recommendations:

Personal Safety First!

Reporting should not put individuals, including journalists and involved communities, at risk of additional harm nor cause unnecessary distress.

Cultural Heritage is a Human Rights Issue

Cultural heritage is of great significance, encompassing not only historical, aesthetic, economic, and scientific values but also important as a matter of human rights and the associated right to one's cultural identity. Therefore, ensuring access to, and enjoyment of, cultural heritage at all times is essential. Deliberate destruction of heritage is considered a war crime under International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Reporting on such destruction should try to shed light on human rights violations, war crimes, and other atrocities committed against people's cultural heritage.

Cultural Heritage Values

Cultural heritage goes beyond archaeological landmarks recognised by UNESCO or other international and national authorities. Cultural heritage encompasses a diverse range of both tangible and intangible values, including local and indigenous values. It is understood in conjunction with its place, surrounding environment and social, political, and economic contexts. Understanding and reporting on cultural heritage may not be immediately feasible for journalists and researchers unfamiliar with this context. It is essential to acknowledge that local heritage or the heritage of minorities and marginalised groups can often be targeted during conflicts and crises, but be neglected or overlooked in the reporting process where the focus may be on the internationally known or monumental heritage. Reporters and researchers should ensure that their reporting includes the wider aspects of cultural heritage and does not solely focus on globally recognised sites.

Avoiding Heritage Propaganda

Cultural heritage, especially due to its centrality in defining identity, can be subject to misuse for political and ideological propaganda. Reporting heritage destruction can deliberately or inadvertently encourage and promote greater destruction, as well as the recruitment of volunteers and raising of finance by extremist ideologies. As a means of communication, reporting can also create fear and compliance. The destruction, or even protection and reconstruction of cultural heritage can become a tool for misinformation, manipulation, or even justification of military intervention. Unbiased reporting on cultural heritage must refrain from any instrumentalisation or weaponisation of cultural heritage and always prioritise the human and human rights aspects of heritage.

Respecting Human Dignity

Cultural heritage is intertwined with the history, identity, and sense of belonging of people and communities. In reporting on the destruction of cultural heritage, both individual and collective dignity should be considered and respected. There should be a balance between portraying violence towards cultural heritage while preserving the dignity of communities and individuals who may feel insulted, humiliated, and violated by witnessing such crimes. Nonetheless, the freedom of expression for reporters and researchers should also be upheld.

Responsibilities

In times of crisis, media professionals and researchers have a crucial obligation to maintain the highest levels of professionalism and ethical conduct. They carry a special responsibility to deliver the public with timely, accurate, impartial, and comprehensive information while being sensitive to the rights and feelings of others, especially considering the uncertainties and fears that may arise during such situations. This is particularly the case when the point of the destruction is to induce fear and social/ emotional loss.

Sources of Information and Journalistic Material

Establishing accurate, independent, and impartial facts in reporting on cultural heritage is of utmost importance. While initial information can be gathered through official channels or remote sensing, verifying their accuracy and credibility, as well as involving the voices and perspectives of local and affected communities, is highly significant. Safeguarding reporters' rights to withhold confidential sources of information, especially when individuals may be at risk, should be respected by governments and various local, national, and international bodies. On the other hand, if reporters are embedded as journalists within the armed forces to collect information or commissioned to collect this information on behalf of military or government actors, it is recommended they clearly disclose this in their reports.

Legal and Technical Evidence

The intentional destruction of cultural heritage during conflict is a war crime and a violation of international laws. Additionally, damaging and destroying cultural, ethnic, and religious heritage can be indicative that other crimes are occurring, such as ethnic, racial, and religious cleansing, or gender-based violence. Hence, gathering the necessary evidence and documentation to facilitate fair legal prosecutions is of utmost importance. In many cases, reporters and journalists are among the first people who access scenes in the aftermath of an attack and can observe related evidence. Being careful and accurate in recording this evidence, and understanding the types of evidence, reasons, and patterns of cultural heritage destruction is crucial for reporters, as access to such evidence may become limited or impossible later on. Timely and accurate reporting can sometimes prevent further damage or facilitate protection and reconstruction. Therefore, it is necessary for reporters to receive appropriate training in specialised reporting in the field of cultural rights and cultural heritage and seek advice from experts in this domain.

Inclusive, Community-Based and Long-Term Approach

Cultural heritage should be considered within the broader political, social and environmental contexts that contribute to its recognition, protection, and

destruction. Disconnecting heritage from its wider contexts should be avoided and the local community, political factors, as well as human suffering should be acknowledged in reporting and research.

While reporting on the destruction of cultural heritage can be impactful in raising public awareness about crises threatening various societies and capturing the attention of global audiences, its long-term effect is limited if such reports fail to follow up on the affected communities and their heritage. Where possible, these communities should be assured that addressing their needs and cultural heritage is not merely for news headlines to feed short-term global attention and will not be neglected after the immediate headline impact. Follow-up stories hold significant importance in the medium and long term as well. The role that researchers play in extending the longevity of information gathering and sharing is also crucial.

Understanding and accurately reporting on the threats to cultural heritage requires dialogue and collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including government and non-governmental bodies and organisations, local communities, academia, journalists, lawyers, and cultural heritage experts and researchers. At the very least, reporters should ensure that they have engaged with the local community and specialists from the heritage sector. A wider collaboration is needed to maintain and update a flow of accurate, fair, impartial, and unbiased information.

The Role of Social Media

Social media, especially during crises, provides valuable platforms for the public, as well as various institutions and agencies, to share and receive information and express opinions and concerns. These platforms have gained popularity for documenting, monitoring, and disseminating information related to cultural heritage during conflicts and disasters. However, they are highly susceptible to the spread of misinformation, propaganda, extremist views, and illegal activities related to cultural heritage. They are also known to produce 'echo chambers' and, through networks and algorithmic technologies, channel, choreograph and polarise views. Just as editorial sensitivities regarding issues related to abuse or harmful content are increasing, cultural heritage should also receive attention as a human rights issue from these social media outlets and their operators. Measures should be taken to verify the accuracy of information and combat propaganda, misuse, and illegal activities related to cultural heritage, encompassing both human editorial and automated technological approaches.

Note

The initial drafts of these recommendations were developed by the Endangered Cultural Heritage in the Global South (ECHGS) Hub at Oxford, including Bijan Rouhani, Bill Finlayson, and Timothy Clack, in collaboration with members of the Working Group. Established in December 2022, this working group played an active role in shaping the scope of topics associated with these recommendations through both face-to-face and online discussions.

Working Group Members:

Ammar Azzouz, Sussan Babaie, Robert Bevan, Tim Clack, Jacob Davey, Faisal, Cecile Fabre, Bill Finlayson, Stephanie Grant, Richard Hughes, Maev Kennedy, Eliya Lucks, Charlotte Hanson, Lynn Meskell, Vernon Rapley, Bijan Rouhani, Sebastian Usher.

Relevant Documents

Reading the following documents is recommended for a better understanding of reporting in conflict and crisis situations, as well as issues related to cultural heritage.

BBC Editorial Guidelines 2019. *Section 11: War, Terror and Emergencies*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidelines/war-terror-emergencies/ (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

Council of Europe 2007. *Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Protecting Freedom of Expression and Information in Times of Crisis*. Available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805ae60e (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

Council of Europe 2022. *Journalism in Situations of Conflict and Aggression: Principles Extracted from the Relevant Council of Europe and Other International Standards*. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/compilation-of-coe-standards-relating-to-journalism-in-situations-of-c/1680a5b775 (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

Council of Europe, Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media 2020. *The Role of the Media in Times of Crises*. Reference 4535 of 12 October. Available at: https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/CULT/Pdf/TextesProvisoires/2021/20211202-MediaTimesCrisis-EN.pdf (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

Office of the Prosecutor 2021. *Policy on Cultural Heritage*, International Criminal Court (ICC), https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/itemsDocuments/20210614-otp-policy-cultural-heritage-eng.pdf

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 2019. *Guidance on Casualty Recording*. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/

sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Guidance_on_Casualty_Recording.pdf (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

UNESCO 2008. *The Human Rights-Based Approach to Journalism Training Manual: Viet Nam*. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000179185/PDF/179185eng.pdf.multi (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

United Nations, Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights 2016. *Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights*. Reference A/HRC/31/59. Available at: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/016/97/PDF/G1601697.pdf (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

United Nations, Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights 2016. *Report on the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage as a Violation of Human Rights*. Reference A/71/317. Available at: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/254/44/PDF/N1625444.pdf (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

United Nations Human Rights Council 2018. *Resolution on Cultural Rights and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*. Available at: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/099/81/PDF/G1809981.pdf (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

The contributions in this volume, an output of the University of Oxford's Endangered Cultural Heritage of the Global South (ECHGS) Hub, speak to some fundamental questions about the reporting of heritage destruction: who is reporting, what is being reported and how, and what are the implications of such reporting? Given that cultural heritage can serve as both a trigger and a casualty of conflict, the relentless flow of reporting from news outlets and social media and user-generated content has consequences. The complex and evolving relationships between communities, media, human rights issues and heritage can also serve to endanger and safeguard identities in the present as well as the tangible and intangible legacies of the past. This volume explores these topics through a diversity of perspectives, including from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The collection culminates with the 'Oxford Recommendations', an ethical reporting framework recommended for use by journalists and others confronted by such issues.

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Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East & North Africa

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