MUTABLE HERITAGE AND ITS VALUES
*El patrimonio mutable y sus valores*

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ABSTRACT

Heritage is defined by history which is by nature multi layered. The passage of time and the perspectives it affords, enables and even necessitates constant re-examination and reinterpretation of history. What effect do changes in historical perspective then have upon the definition of heritage which relies on an understanding of its history?

Heritage is temporal. Something considered ordinary today, can become heritage tomorrow. How is heritage and culture defined and what meaning does it hold? Is it the structure shell that survives, or, the object with beautiful workmanship? In more recent times, the idea of culture has taken on new dimensions. It is not only the object but also the narration associated with it. The events witnessed and recorded.

This is true more so with the disappearing boundaries. The new global sense of identity is blurring the demarcation more and more between what is your heritage and mine. A shared history involving different civilizations and regions has yielded diverse culture which enriches and connects undeniably.

The layered and diverse histories and cultures in the world are an important source of knowledge and wisdom. The enrichment of this cultural diversity should be actively promoted as an essential aspect of development.

Heritage as a concept is contextualized by the prevalent perspectives and theories, which limits it to the time frame where these particular ideas hold true. The perception and understanding of a certain heritage object or structure would different with changing phases.

The present paper attempts to engage with the notion of heritage, criteria of its definition, and the mutable nature of such designations, with examples of sites ridden with conflict such as the Bamiyan Valley. This site has been put under the 'World Heritage In Danger' list by UNESCO taking into account the destruction of the Buddha statues in the region. The act of vandalism itself has had dual implications. While causing an irreparable loss to mankind of its heritage, it also serves as an effective symbol of religious fanaticism that is a pressing concern of our times.

Reconstruction of the past always leads to looking at it with the wisdom afforded by hindsight and a more complete knowledge of the event or object. At other times, there is loss in translation and certain key information is missing. This completely alters our understanding and forces us to reinterpret with a new, possibly inaccurate, knowledge base.

Key words: War heritage, heritage values, mutable value.
RESUMEN

El patrimonio se define por la historia, que por naturaleza es multicaña. El paso del tiempo y las perspectivas que ofrece, permite e incluso requiere un constante reexamen y reinterpretación de la historia. ¿Qué efecto tienen los cambios en la perspectiva histórica sobre la definición de patrimonio que se basa en la comprensión de su historia?
El patrimonio es temporal Algo considerado ordinario hoy, puede convertirse en herencia mañana. ¿Cómo se define el patrimonio y la cultura y qué significado tiene? ¿Es el armazón de la estructura el que sobrevive, o el objeto con una hermosa mano de obra? En tiempos más recientes, la idea de la cultura ha adquirido nuevas dimensiones. No es solo el objeto sino también la narración asociada a él. Los eventos fueron testigos y registrados. Esto es cierto aún más con la desaparición de los límites. El nuevo sentido global de identidad está borrando la demarcación cada vez más entre lo que es tu herencia y la mía. Una historia compartida que involucra diferentes civilizaciones y regiones ha producido una cultura diversa que enriquece y conecta innegablemente.
Las historias y culturas en capas y diversas en el mundo son una fuente importante de conocimiento y sabiduría. El enriquecimiento de esta diversidad cultural debe promoverse activamente como un aspecto esencial del desarrollo.
El patrimonio como concepto está contextualizado por las perspectivas y teorías prevalecientes, lo que lo limita al marco de tiempo donde estas ideas particulares son ciertas. La percepción y comprensión de un determinado objeto o estructura del patrimonio sería diferente con las fases cambiantes.
El presente documento intenta relacionarse con la noción de patrimonio, los criterios de su definición y la naturaleza mutable de tales designaciones, con ejemplos de sitios plagados de conflictos como el Valle de Bamiyán. Este sitio ha sido incluido en la lista de ‘Patrimonio Mundial en Peligro’ de la UNESCO teniendo en cuenta la destrucción de las estatuas de Buda en la región. El acto de vandalismo en sí mismo ha tenido doble implicación. Al tiempo que causa una pérdida irreparable para la humanidad de su herencia, también sirve como un símbolo efectivo del fanatismo religioso que es una preocupación apremiante de nuestro tiempo.
La reconstrucción del pasado siempre lleva a mirarlo con la sabiduría que proporciona la retrospectiva y un conocimiento más completo del evento u objeto. En otras ocasiones, se pierde la traducción y falta cierta información clave. Esto altera por completo nuestra comprensión y nos obliga a reinterpretar con una base de conocimiento nueva, posiblemente inexacta.
Palabras clave: patrimonio de guerra, valores patrimoniales, valor mutable.

INTRODUCTION

Heritage is the full range of our inherited traditions, monuments, objects, and culture. More importantly, it is the range of contemporary social activities, meanings, and behaviors that we draw from them.

Heritage includes, but is not limited to preserving, excavating, displaying, or restoring a collection of old things. It is both tangible and intangible, in the sense that ideas and memories--of songs, recipes, language, dances, and many other elements, of who we are and how we identify ourselves--are as important as historical buildings and archaeological sites.
The attempt made in this paper is to bring focus on the more recent trends in destruction of heritage and contemplate on the history that we remember and more importantly, that which we choose to forget. In recent times we see attempts to deliberately destroy heritage and consciously erase it from the memories. Every aspect and period of history is important and it has contributed in shaping the world. Thus one needs to take measures to protect the history being intentionally removed and make policy decisions to remedy this issue. The paper will explore examples of destruction of heritage such as Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, Babri Masjid in India and the destruction caused by ISIS in Hatra, Palmyra and Nimrud to examine the consequences of this kind of loss and the measures that might be taken to remedy it.

Heritage is, or should be, the subject of active public reflection, debate, and discussion. What is worth saving? What can we, or should we, forget? What memories can we enjoy, regret, or learn from? Who owns "The Past" and who is entitled to speak for past generations? Active public discussion about material and intangible heritage—of individuals, groups, communities, and nations—is a valuable aspect of public life in our multicultural world.

Our activities in the contemporary world also constitute heritage and have far-reaching effects. Heritage can be an element of far-sighted urban and regional planning, -it can be the platform for political recognition, a medium for intercultural dialogue, a means of ethical reflection, and the potential basis for local economic development. It is simultaneously local and particular as also, global and shared.

Heritage is an essential part of the present that we live in—and the future we will build.

Whether at an individual or a societal scale, heritage and well-being are often seen as disparate concerns. When heritage is viewed as related to community well-being, its value is often reduced to economic development and tourism, rather than something that might be integral to wellness on a larger scale. But how can the collective remaking of the past in the present play a role in imagining a more sustainable and healthy future?

A range of scholars have highlighted the ways in which people’s interactions with place can contribute to a sense of group resilience—a perspective often lost when heritage objects, sites and landscapes are assumed to carry their own inherent meanings. Jane Grenville (2007), for example, has highlighted how the built environment provides a sense of “ontological security” that can contribute to a sense of human creativity in the face of social upheaval. She expounds a theoretical approach to the conservation of built environment and suggests that psychological factors are as important as political or aesthetic issues. Within the context of conservation of historic buildings and townscapes, it examines the notion of ontological security and the importance of the physical world in its construction and takes case studies from post-war Europe and contemporary South Korea to illustrate its propositions. She argues that the urge to conserve the past—or alternatively to reject the past—is linked to an understanding of a sense of self, and to the three themes of individual personality, physical surroundings, and political context. These factors enable conservation to contribute to a ‘sense of place,’ the awareness that a place has a special and unique character that sets it apart. A conserved historic place also provides a ‘sense of time’ in that it illustrates a particular period in past history. (Grenville, 2007)
There is another element that could be included within the broad definition of heritage, i.e., heritage reflects both good and bad events and the varying experiences of a wide range of individuals and social groups. Heritage items should be preserved to reflect the entirety and diversity of historical experience. Which history should be told through interpreting heritage? History has many versions. The heritage we choose to keep should reflect changes in historical interpretation, such as the social historian’s interest in the histories of ordinary people, the experiences of minorities, the failures the successes as well as conflict and compromise.

**How do we decide what is significant and what is not? Who decides this?**

Cultural heritage is not just a set of cultural objects or traditions from the past. It is also the result of a selection process: a process of memory and oblivion that characterizes every human society constantly engaged in choosing—for both cultural and political reasons—what is worthy of being preserved for future generations and what is not.

*Pic: Headlines of newspapers from World War II declaring war in various parts of Europe which is heritage rich in every region.*

In the recent past we see a pattern of destruction which is as a result of wars. This is incidental or deliberate destruction as compared to the reversible wear and tear to heritage as a result of environmental effect. The destruction from war is often complete, i.e. in razing structures to their foundations with no hope for reconstructing them.
One such event was the Second World War. Between 1939 and 1945, the world saw unprecedented destruction of architectural structures due to carpet bombing and also displacement & stealing of art by the Nazi forces. There have been efforts at restitution by institutions such as the Louvre in Paris which has dedicated a gallery to art that was displaced during the war and can be returned to families or individuals with documentation and proof of their ownership and subsequent loss during the war. (Katz, 2018) We must mention the remarkable and brave efforts of the French art historian Rose Valland who kept secret records of the systematic plunder by the Nazi forces in France of the French National and private Jewish-owned art collections from France, working with the French Resistance, she saved thousands of works of art. The Nazi forces used the Jeu de Paume Museum as their central storage and sorting depot, prior to distribution to various persons and places in Germany. Rose Valland, the volunteer assistant curator at the Jeu de Paume Museum, had kept detailed records of these illegal art transactions which eventually helped restore a lot of art to their original owners. (The Monuments Men)
At this point I’d like to draw your attention to the Bundeswehr Military History Museum in Dresden, Germany which chooses to display its World War II heritage in an attempt to provide a platform to allow debate on the consequences of war. The new military museum in Dresden wants to do away with this tradition. They want to examine the topic of violence from the perspective of cultural history. The museums’ façade designed by architect Daniel Libeskind who added a transparent arrowhead to the historic façade. This fascinating façade is representative of the questions the displays in the museum on the destruction caused by war and its consequences. The metallic arrowhead pierces the traditional facade and attempts to address the damage done to this building in the war. It is the question that the display in the museum poses, as to how we deal with the consequences of war.
Reconstruction of War Destroyed Heritage

The Bundeswehr Military History Museum stands at the border of the historic city of Dresden and presents an interesting case in the study of heritage preservation and reconstruction.

Pic: Dresden destroyed in the Second World War in bombing during a British/ American aerial bombing attack on the city which was the capital of the German state of Saxony.
Dresden, as a capital of the Electorate of Saxony from 1547, grew as an important center for culture, science and technology. The Electors Augustus I and Augustus II re-built the city in Baroque and Rococo Styles, after it was destroyed by a fire in the 17th century. The economy of the town developed further from the end of the 18th century when importance of the river for shipping increased and later when it was connected by railway to Berlin and Leipzig. In 1945, during the Second World War, the historic center was subjected to heavy bombing, and was destroyed once more. Several of the monuments have been restored and re-constructed since.

With the astonishing destruction, leaving only parts and fragments of the structure behind, to re-build the city in the image of the destroyed was an extraordinary task undertake. The debris was sorted through and an effort made to identify the pieces with the buildings and structures. Studies were conducted to understand the construction and structural details of the well documented Baroque structures. While replacing the missing portions, an attempt was made to stay true to the original image. Though new technology was used for construction, the original elements were replicated. Paintings made by Bernardo Bellotto, better known as Canaletto, were referred, to recreate the original views and vistas.

Since the original program of the buildings could not be retained for the same function the interiors spaces were repurposed to create the galleries as they stand today. Essentially, a new city was re-created in the exact image of the old, with an objective to make it a heritage centre, showcasing the culture in the best way possible. The buildings were now adapted to allow for modern technology and amenities.
The galleries housed in the monuments, hold one of the most fantastic collections ranging from porcelain and Messiaen pottery, paintings – displayed in the old masters (Alte Meister) and the new masters (Neue Miester) galleries, sculptures, mathematisch physikalischer salon-displaying mechanical marvels, time pieces and globes, the opulent royal collections in the Historisches and Neues Grünes Gewölbbe, the Turkish Krammer, and many more.

One of the most stunning recreations is the complex ring-ribbed vault on the area that earlier housed the palace chapel. A study in reverse engineering was carried out to understand the constructional details of the structure, making it possibly one of the only examples of such vaulting in the world.

The site was awarded the status of a world heritage site in 2004. With the revival of the city and further development, it has become an expanding centre putting a strain on the resources. One of the main points of concern was the increasing traffic on the Augustusbrücke, which is the main bridge connecting the city on the either side of the Elbe. This was solved by the construction of the Waldschlösschen bridge.

The Waldschlösschen adds an element of contemporary construction on the river which already has beautiful constructions like Augustusbrücke and the Blue bridge. It also became the reason for a reversal of the decision by UNESCO and Dresden Elbe Valley losing the world heritage status.

Over use of the Augustusbrücke would have led to a deterioration of the structure along with the congestion of traffic causing several other problems of circulation in the adjacent areas. This would have eventually led to damages to the bridge as well as the access zones to the bridge.

Despite the loss of the world heritage tag, the site continues to thrive as a heritage destination for tourism. The museums constructed with modern displays and services are comparable with the best in the world.

After the end of world war II, cities like London and Japan were in need of vast rebuilding. In London, architects and planners saw the opportunity for remodeling while the population reorganized and rejuvenated itself. Even before the war ended, planners such as Patrick Abercrombie came up with proposals to reconstruct the capital.

**Political Driven Agenda Vs. Religious Propaganda**

The destruction seen in World War II was driven political & territorial ambitions. The loss of heritage was incidental to the bombing done by both sides during the war, and there was distress for loss and destruction of heritage and wide scale active attempts to restore it to its formal glory. In more recent times we see a different kind of destruction, one that is far more effective in removing layers of history, destruction for religious propaganda & extremism.. The sites are carefully selected & clinically destroyed as they represent a portion of history of the given region that is at contrast to the current dominant religious groups.

**Bamiyan Buddhas, Afghanistan**
An apt example is the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas sculptures in 2001 under the support of the Taliban led government.

Prior to their recent destruction, the 6th-7th century, rock-cut Buddha sculptures in the Bamiyan Valley of central Afghanistan were considered the largest in the world. Known collectively as the Bamiyan Buddhas, the two monumental sculptures have amazed both Buddhist and non-Buddhist visitors for more than a thousand years. Like many of the world’s great ancient monuments, little is known about who commissioned the Bamiyan Buddhas or the sculptors who carved them. However, their very existence points to the importance of the Buddhist faith and the Bamiyan Valley during this period. (Rod-ari)

Both the destroyed images were carved into niches of the cliff side in high relief. The areas near the heads of both Buddha figures and around the larger Buddha’s feet were carved in the round, allowing worshippers to circumambulate. Circumambulation, which is the act of walking around an object such as a stupa (a reliquary mound) or an image of the Buddha, is a common practice in Buddhist worship.
Pic: Screen grab of CNN video showing the Bamiyan Buddhas being destroyed by drilling holes and exploding them with dynamite under the support of the Taliban led government.

The two large Buddha images reflected the global confluence of culture in the Bamiyan Valley and were influenced by the art and cultures of India, Central Asia and even ancient Greece. For example, both Buddhas wore flowing robes and were described as having wavy curls of hair. This hairstyle and the flowing drapery are elements rooted in early Gandharan Buddhist imagery that combined Hellenistic Greek traditions of representation with Indian subject matter.

Mullah Omar ordered Taliban forces to demolish the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001. The destruction was complete. Only outlines of the figures and a few details remain. The direction to destroy the Buddha images was motivated, in part, by the Taliban’s extreme iconoclastic campaign as well as their disdain for western interest and funding that had gone to protecting the images while there was an intense and growing need for humanitarian aid in the region. The Taliban’s claim that destroying the Buddha sculptures was an Islamic act is belied by the fact that Bamiyan had become predominantly Muslim by the 10th century and that the sculptures had up until 2001 remained largely intact. (Harding, 2001)

The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas was a huge loss for our understanding of human history. However, light has a way of emerging, even from the depth of darkness. Since their destruction several new discoveries have been made near the sites of the Bamiyan Buddhas including the discovery of fragments of a 62-foot long reclining Buddha.

An incident in 2013 demonstrated the sensitivity of the subject. A decade ago Unesco authorised archaeologists and engineers to consolidate the two niches, with props and grouting and nothing else. Almost two years ago someone noticed that, on the site of the small Buddha,
a team from the German branch of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (Icomos) was beginning to rebuild the feet. This was contrary to Unesco policy, based on the 1964 Venice charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites, which requires the use of “original material”. If work on the Bamiyan remains disregarded this rule, then the site would be struck off the World Heritage list. The Afghan authorities ordered the Icomos team to down tools, leaving the remains even less consolidated than they were before. (Bobin, 2015)

In the Bosnia-Herzegovina War in the 1990s, extensive deliberate damage was perpetrated to the heritage of Catholic Croatians and Bosnian Catholics and Muslims, reprisals followed. Churches, mosques, the National Library and the town of Mostar were deliberately destroyed to wipe away any trace of the people who lived there.

**Babri Masjid, India**

Another example of such deliberate destruction is that of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya; India on 6th December 1992. This Sixteenth Century monument was destroyed with no action on the part of the government to stop the damage.

Pic: Babri Masjid constructed built by Mughal general Mir Banki in the Sixteenth century under the rule of the Mughal emperor Babar.

Mughal general Mir Banki built the Babri Masjid in the Sixteenth century, under the rule of Mughal emperor, Babar. This was constructed in Ayodhya which according to the great Indian epic Ramayana, is the birthplace of Lord Rama. There isn't much that Hindus can do in the rule of the Mughals. Localized attempts continue to redeem the temple. Hindus wanted to get back
these temples, but under Mughal rule it was impossible to rebel against the authority. Thus, first of the major disputes was started in 1853. Which led to an outbreak of violence.

The British government got faced severe controversy and erected fences in 1859. This allowed Hindus to worship on the outer court of the Mosque, while still having the Muslims use the inner court. (Rajgopal, 2017)

Pic: Local Channel news grab on coverage of destruction of Babri Masjid on 6th December 1992 by a large rally of religious extremists.

The mosque was built as a paradigm example of the Tughlaqi architecture and the plan was the prime example of the mosques built during the Delhi Sultanate. This was the forerunner of the Indo Islamic style adopted by Akbar.

"A whisper from the Babri Masjid Mihrab could be heard clearly at the other end, 200 feet [60 m] away and through the length and breadth of the central court" according to Graham Pickford, architect to Lord William Bentinck (1828–33). The mosque's acoustics were mentioned by him in his book *Historic Structures of Oudh* where he says "for a 16th century building the deployment and projection of voice from the pulpit is considerably advanced, the unique deployment of sound in this structure will astonish the visitor"

Modern architects have attributed this intriguing acoustic feature to a large recess in the wall of the Mihrab and several recesses in the surrounding walls which functioned as resonators; this design helped everyone to hear the speaker at the Mihrab. The sandstone used in building the Babri Mosque also had resonant qualities which contributed to the unique acoustics. (Shankar, 2010)
On December 6, 1992, a large crowd of religious extremists, demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. During a political rally at the site involving 1,50,000 volunteers, protesting the mosque, the rally turned violent, and the crowd overwhelmed security forces and tore down the mosque.

Currently the site is stuck in a property dispute between religious groups and it is likely that a temple dedicated to Lord Ram will be erected at the site which used to hold the significant Masjid of Mughal era. No debates are being raised about the great loss of heritage particular to the era of Mughal rule in India. Efforts must be raise to make this lost heritage available to the community through carefully designed interpretation centers and further change in policy to prevent such destruction of any site in future. Efforts must be made to conserve heritage and not destroy it.

**Destruction By Isis**

Another more recent example of such deliberate destruction is by the so called Islamic State. The region around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers—today comprised largely of Syria and Iraq—is one of the oldest and most storied places in the world. From ancient Mesopotamia, followed the Roman empire down to the Ottoman conquests, the region has witnessed the rise and fall of many a civilizations & empires. For the past several years, it has been embroiled in an ongoing civil war that has been devastating for not only its countries’ people, but also the region’s cultural heritage.

At the end of April 2017, Iraqi forces retook the ancient city of Hatra in Iraq from the ISIS militants. When the state’s antiquities department inspected the site, it found that the city, previously one of the country’s best-preserved archaeological sites, and one that had been damaged during ISIS’s first occupation in 2014, had luckily suffered less additional damage than estimated. But countless more cities across Syria and Iraq have suffered irreparable damage since the conflict began in 2010.

*Pic: Hatra Ruins in current state.*
UNESCO considers the intentional destruction of cultural heritage a war crime, but ISIS has been known to ostentatiously do just that. The group considers representational art idolatrous, and as a result, works of art at museums, mosques, and churches have become targets of its hammers, axes, bulldozers, and bombs. The group also continues to destroy and loot archaeological sites, selling the objects on the black market to fund their activities—although researches have struggled to determine just how much money these sales generate. (Shabi, 2015)

Syria’s six certified cultural heritage sites have all been officially endangered since 2013, and all had been reported damaged as of March 2016, representing an obliteration of much of the region’s long, rich history. Besides those mentioned, the ancient archaeological sites like the Ancient Roman capital Bosra, Assyrian Tell Sheikh Hamad, Ebla and Mari from the Bronze Age, Dura-Europos, home to the world’s best-preserved ancient Synagogue, the Crac des Chevaliers medieval castle complex, and the ancient cities in Northwestern Syria, between Aleppo and Idlib, have also been damaged and/or looted during the conflict.

Aleppo stood at the crossroads of major trade routes from the 2nd millennium onwards, and before the war contained the remains of structures from many points in time, like its citadel from the 13th century, Great Mosque built in the 12th century, 6th century Christian churches, and Ottoman mosques and palaces. Its layers of architectural history go back to Greco-Roman times.

Rebel fighters first invaded the city, previously Syria’s largest, in 2012, and battles continued there until December 22, 2016. According to a satellite map by UNOSAT, 35,722 structures had been damaged in Aleppo as of September 2016. By UNESCO’s count, 30 percent of the historic Old City has been destroyed. (Alyssa Buffenstein, 2017)
A city 160 kilometers east of Aleppo, on the Euphrates river, Raqqa was the first provincial capital to be captured by ISIS, and, functioning as the group’s capital, is one of few cities still occupied. According to an interactive map published by the New York Times in 2015, ISIS militants destroyed three historic shrines to Islamic figures at the Ammar bin Yasir Mosque, a Shiite pilgrimage site. There has been damage reported to the historic Old City, which was the Abbasid capital between the years 796 and 809, specifically in the area around the Raqqa Museum, which was dedicated to preserving Raqqa’s cultural heritage.

ISIS has occupied Palmyra twice, and Syrian and Russian forces most recently reclaimed the city in March of 2017. During its first occupation in 2015, militants destroyed the Al Lat Lion, a 2,000-year-old statue that once guarded an ancient temple dedicated to the pre-Islamic goddess Al Lat, and was a modern tourist favorite after its excavation in the 1970s. The lion guarded the Palmyra Museum, and while most of the museum’s artifacts had been moved elsewhere in the country for safekeeping, ISIS defaced what remained. Objects from the museum have also shown up on the black market.
That same summer, ISIS bombed the Temples of Bel and Baalshamin, and the nearby ancient and medieval tombs. The group had intentions to destroy more cultural heritage, leading to the tragic execution of Khaled al-Asaad, the museum’s head of antiquities, who was charged with “managing Palmyra’s collection of idols” and killed when he refused to reveal the location of precious objects.

In October, ISIS destroyed the city’s Monumental Arch. Other damaged structures include the Al Sultaniya Mosque and the Museum of Folk Arts, both destroyed by ISIS-planted bombs. Most recently, during ISIS’s second occupation of the city, the group destroyed the remains of the ancient Roman Tetrapylon and part of a nearby Roman theater, sometime between December 2016 and February 2017.

Yet it is during conflict that we often see the true and enduring power of heritage to heal and bring peace. During the protests in Egypt in 2011, after looters tried to break into the National Museum, “young men — some armed with truncheons taken from the police — formed a human chain outside the main gates on Tahrir Square in an attempt to protect the collection inside.” (DIAA HADID, 2011)

Within days, the same action was seen not just in the protection of the past, but of the present as well.
After a series of bombings at religious sites, Christians protected Muslims to allow their brethren to worship in peace, and Muslims joined hands around Churches, guarding them. These acts not only brought the two communities closer together, but resonated around the world, showing people that peace is possible, and that disparate peoples can work together, and risk their lives for each other, for their shared past, and for each other’s beliefs. It gave people the proof that peace is possible. Such enduring actions have continued to spread: human chains of protection continued to be formed.
Heritage can also be a symbol of remembrance, marking events which are vital to our collective memory. In Mostar, after the war, the historic bridge linking the two sides of the town was rebuilt, literally bringing the two communities back together. The reconstructed Bridge, and the Old Town of Mostar, are now inscribed on the World Heritage list.

Measures to be Taken Against Loss of Heritage

UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention was adopted in 1972 on the principle that sites of outstanding universal value to all mankind should be protected and passed on to future generations, acting as a source of peace and sustainability. Syria has 6 such sites, and a further 12 on the list for Tentative consideration. Apart from these, Syria has hundreds of lesser known sites of historic importance and great value to her people, some of these people are willing to risk their lives to protect their heritage. Heritage is a symbol of the achievements of our common ancestors, and of the values which all of humanity shares, and through that, it is a powerful tool for peace, and must be protected.

Amidst such systematized destruction we need scholars working to document damage, promote global awareness, and plan emergency and postwar responses.

In 2003, Corine Wegener, then a curator at the Minneapolis Museum of Arts and an Army reservist, was mobilized as an Arts, Monuments, and Archives Officer to help protect the Iraq
National Museum as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Thieves had looted an estimated 15,000 items from the museum, including antique bronze sculptures and ancient Assyrian, Babylonian, and Mesopotamian artifacts.

"How is it possible that there’s not some form of Doctors Without Borders for cultural heritage?" she recalled thinking upon her return. "This work is not like the church that goes for two weeks to build houses in Haiti, where you take people who have some basic carpentry skills.... When you’re doing a disaster assessment of cultural heritage assets, you really need trained conservators, logistical support, security." (Stiffman, 2015)

Another problem faced in attempts to deal with such situation is that volatile, unpredictable situations with immediate needs often don’t fit well with funding cycles of foundations.

Specifically in terms of cultural properties, armed conflicts impose different types of damage, such as:

1- Deterioration and weathering due to lack of the needed resources and/or accessibility to maintain cultural properties

2- Collateral damage due to military operations, or intentional targeting once they are used as military bases. An example of this is the destruction of the minaret of the Umayyad Mosque in Aleppo after it became a base for the regime’s snipers.

3- Intentional targeting by groups intending to damage the racial, national or religious symbols of others or to impose specific ideologies. Such as the destruction of shrines by the Islamic fundamentalist group ISIS in both of Iraq and Syria

4- Illicit excavations and trade of antiquities by organised networks, which often causes irreversible damage to the material culture, as in the case of the archaeological sites of southern Iraq and Syria.

5- Use by people to survive the harsh conditions of war. For example, the Roman tombs of the dead cities of northern Syria are used as shelters by families who lost their houses in the conflict. Likewise, in Idlib, a governorate in Syria, 600 people are making a living by providing antiquity dealers with coins they find in their lands ('Arja 2014).

Another factor contributing to the deficiency of the protection of cultural heritage is its politicization. Cultural heritage has been recruited to play a major role in conflicting political agendas in order to make political, ethnic or religious gains.

To sum up, the recent trend in considerable destruction of heritage is due to wars and deliberate acts of destruction, most commonly with religious agendas. As a consequence, a portion of our history ends up being a permanent erasure. This kind of obliteration of history is more permanent and dangerous in its completeness. As we have seen in case studies such as the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, Babri Masjid in India, and the destruction done by the Islamic State in Syria, this kind of destruction is often complete and permanent with no hopes of salvage. But there is hope since discoveries such as new caves that have been done in the
niches of the Bamiyan Buddhas. There have been reports of unexplored castles and structures of past civilizations seen in satellite images of Afghanistan as well which could tell us more about the various developments in this region when it was an important point on the famous Silk Route. Several caravanserais have been discovered which date back to B.C.E. (Lawler, 2017)

Another problem affecting war looted heritage is illegal transactions on the black market. Measures must be taken to arrest such transactions and to take action to prevent future incidents.

We must take action for regions of armed conflict and create lists of culturally important sites for the Department of Defense to avoid striking when possible. Policies need to be amended to account for measures to be taken to protect sites from destruction in future conflicts. Action needs to be taken to protect further damage to heritage in conflict situations. We need to address this issue of attempts made to deliberately obliterate portions of our history. There are deliberate attempts to lose portions of our identity.

Saving people also means saving their heritage, one can’t separate these things.

References


