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CHAPTER 1

Theories and Temporalities of Post-Conflict Heritage: The Importance of a Normative Approach

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The Politics of Post-Conflict Heritage

When Palmyra was captured by the militants of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS/ISIS/ISIL/Daesh) in May 2015, the Western world became gripped by the deliberate targeting of heritage in the face of armed conflict. In the pursuing months, antique statues and monumental structures were purposely destroyed by IS with lots of attention for spectacle and international messaging (Harmanşah, 2015). The destruction of heritage was as much a cultural act as it had political goals, where IS aimed to reach international audiences and consolidate power. In this effort of

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seeking and cultivating outcry, Palmyra proved successful in becoming part of the international news cycle and thus global agenda. In June of that year, the Lion of Al-lāt statue was targeted, in August the Temple of Bel was dynamited while also the site guardian Khaled Mohamed al-Asaad was executed. In October the famous Monumental Arch of Palmyra was destroyed.

Although numerous other sites such as Mosul, Aleppo or Hatra did receive attention in the (Western) popular media, Palmyra demonstrated to be an especially powerful metonym for discussing the targeting of culture during the Syrian armed conflict (2011–2024) and the War on IS in Iraq (2013–2017). Prominent headlines and snappy dispatches zoomed in on Palmyra, describing how the "Pearl of the Desert" had become a symbolic victim in the face of "barbarism". Imbued with a Western civilizational language steeped in colonial discourse (De Cesari, 2015), the loss of heritage at Palmyra and elsewhere prominently found its way into the news cycle in the West, the Arab region and beyond.

Because of this public attention, also in the arena of politics, the destruction of heritage in the Arab region proved a powerful capital. Irina Bokova, former Director-General of UNESCO 2009–2017, was quick to label the destruction of Nimrud by IS as "cultural cleansing" since it is "intended to destroy identities, tear apart social fabrics, and fuel hatred" (Bokova, 2015: 40–41). This message was again echoed in August 2015 by UNESCO when lamenting the destruction at Palmyra.[1] Not only this strong discourse comparing heritage destruction to the worst war crimes was quickly refuted (Rosen, 2022: 5–7). The fact that UNESCO used the theme of "cultural cleansing" in times of armed conflict as a vehicle to reclaim political power and significance on the global stage was strongly criticized (Meskell, 2018).

As much as the destruction by IS and the (re)actions of international and multilateral organizations (i.e. UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM) were textured by politics and geopolitical ambitions, the reconstruction of Palmyra served nothing more than a power struggle fostering agendas on a suite of scales. On 27 March 2016, Palmyra was liberated by a coalition of Syrian government army backed by Russian forces. Months

[1] Macchi, V. (2015). UNESCO: Palmyra Destruction a 'War Crime'. VOA News, retrieved on 1 August 2024,https://www.voanews.com/a/unesco-chief-says-destruction-at-palmyra-is-war-crime/2930215.html.

later, on 5 May 2016, the Syro-Russian alliance held the carefully orchestrated spectacle of "Pray for Palmyra: Music Revives Ancient Ruins" in the site's amphitheatre. As explosives were still being cleared by sappers, the renowned Mariinsky Orchestra from St. Petersburg performed a selection of classical pieces in the Roman amphitheatre. The audience included leaders from various Syrian religious communities, ethnic minorities, Syrian and Russian soldiers, Russian officials, heritage experts and ten prominent UNESCO ambassadors. Broadcast by the Russian-funded English-language news agency Russia Today (RT), the concert quickly gained coverage from all major international 24-hour news networks.

This heavily mediated event not only brought international attention to the resurgence of the al-Assad regime. It also provided Putin with a platform to convey his worldview and position in geopolitics to global audiences (Plets, 2017). But also at home, in Russia, the reconstruction efforts by the Russian Geographic Society and the Hermitage proved a powerful message to influence public opinion about the unique civilizational trajectory of Russia and its standing in the world (Plets & van der Pol, 2022). By publicly drawing attention to the shortage of support by the West and highlighting Moscow being alone in reconstructing Palmyra, it strengthened a cardinal narrative of Putinism: that Russia was a beacon of stability in a hostile and chaotic world order. Thus, the nation should be united behind its strong leader since foreign influence lurks behind every corner (Plets & Munawar, 2024).

This latest episode in Palmyra's political biography might be well-documented because of the work of the editors of this volume. However, in the growing academic discussion on the "heritage-security nexus" (Rosen, 2022) the act of destruction of cultural property as part of hybrid warfare continues to receive significantly more attention. Recent edited volumes on heritage and war are the best evidence for this statement (Bonaviri & Sadowski, 2024; Finkelstein et al., 2022; Strecker & Powderly, 2023; Zarandona et al., 2023). Post-conflict heritage reconstruction is at best discussed as a postscript when exploring the memorialization practices (Sørensen & Viejo-Rose, 2015). The fact that the deliberate destruction of heritage is foregrounded in both research and policy because heritage destruction is understandable. First, it is a topic with strong optics, attracting attention (and clicks) in the popular media. Second, there is the popular and comfortable notion that technocratic solutions in the form of rules, charters and procedures can prevent future

destruction, or at least make future deliberate targeting of heritage prosecutable. Third, new theories and conceptualizations about the hybridity of conflict have ensured heritage has become perceived as an integral instrument in warfare and thus part of the mounting global security challenges we are increasingly facing (Hoffman, 2007).

Although we are sympathetic to this scholarly and media attention. We find a strong emphasis on the act of destruction compared to the work on post-conflict reconstruction inexpedient and even inconsistent. First, the politicization of heritage reconstruction and rehabilitation is equally important from a security perspective. In times of unconventional warfare, conflicts rarely know a distinct ending and rather face a protracted conclusion. This is especially problematic today since analyses from conflict studies show that there is often no singular distinction between war and peace (Heathershaw & Lambach, 2008), and geopolitical struggles continue in aid programmes and post-conflict recovery projects (Barakat, 2010). The temporalities of the post-conflict are discussed below in this introduction, but the point is that even when a conflict becomes frozen or protracted, heritage reconstruction can be an indirect tool to gain influence. Second, heritage reconstruction is an important policy arena for international donors and nation-states. Millions of dollars and euros in aid are pledged, but how do we measure "mission success", or rather how do these donors need to define success? We are writing this introduction as the Russia-Ukraine war (2022–) is underway and the war on Gaza (2023–2024) has just ended. In both contexts, heritage has been deliberately targeted (Azzouz, 2024; Kuijt, Shydlovskyi, & Donaruma, 2024), and in response major aid pledges have been made to assist reconstruction.[2] Third, and very much connected to the definition of "success", heritage reconstruction has a huge potential in peace-building efforts (Barakat, 2020). At the same time, it can also undermine long-term peace. When reflecting on the reconstruction projects of war-damaged heritage in the Balkans, Huigerias lamented that in the end, both UN policymakers, archaeologists and architects conducting the reconstruction "…realized that the politics of the issues at hand were well beyond our league. This was heritage heavily dependent on politics…" (Higueras, 2013, 100).

[2] United Nations (2024). Adopting Resolution 2735 (2024) with 14 Votes in Favour, Russian Federation Abstaining, Security Council Welcomes New Gaza Ceasefire Proposal, Urges Full Implementation. retrieved on 1 August 2024, https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15723.doc.htm.

Analysing the aftermath of the Kosovo War (1998–1999) and the heritage projects of the European Union (EU), Legnér (2018) echoes the message that politics in heritage rehabilitation programmes are often underestimated. Because of donors' unplanned and often naive trust in the objectively positive nature of heritage, these programmes can have a detrimental impact on the recovery of affected societies. Heritage reconstruction is not just an approach of selecting what to rebuild or memorialize and what to remain in a state of decay and ruins. All heritage is in its essence an artefact of meaning-making and thus politics. Donors unaware of the preexisting power configuration and centuries of cultural politics on the ground are not the only ones that need to be aware of here. Also, archaeologists, architects and spatial and urban planners accepting funding need to be attuned to local culture and be critical of the politics of the donors they are working with.

As the example of Palmyra shows, many aid programmes are driven by geopolitical goals. But also more invisible are the often deeply rooted assumptions and worldviews encoded in many aid programmes. On the one hand, deeply Western understandings of heritage focused on monumentality (and less so housing) can define reconstruction projects, while being opposed to local needs and interests. But as Chapter 5 by Mela Zuljevic in this book illustrates, donors can also be driven by certain free market ideas that through reconstruction projects can have long-lasting impacts on local communities and the political economies governing it.

State of the Art

Despite early acknowledgements that the process of reconstructing heritage is imbued with politics (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996) and can potentially undermine peacebuilding efforts (Barakat, 2005), the post-crisis phase in the complex cultural biography of a heritage site generally receives less attention. The literature debating post-crisis heritage reconstruction largely focused on the discussion of whether to preserve the ruins of destroyed sites as memorials or to reconstruct them into their former glory as a vehicle for societal rehabilitation (Ascherson, 2005; Stanley Price, 2005). Although heritage reconstruction—when done right—can make communities culturally resilient (Marojecvic, 2017), existing literature does not extensively debate the underlying political agendas and their long-term effects. Since significant funds are made

available to archaeologists, architects, heritage practitioners and conservation scientists for heritage restoration works in contemporary post-conflict regions, this lack of foregrounding of the political nature of heritage reconstruction is especially problematic. There is little reflection on the selectivity and long-term implications of the funding structures often administered by foreign nations, religious entities, NGOs and corporations. At the same time, since most programmes are focused on the rapid and efficient conservation and excavation of physical heritage, heritage rehabilitation has become framed as a technical problem, requiring technical solutions and innovations.

Since the Second World War, scholars have been looking at the best methods and techniques that assist in revitalizing heritage in the aftermath of the devastation of conflicts (Diefendorf, 1993). Historians, architects and archaeologists have used case study-based evaluations to demonstrate how the reconstruction of heritage is mobilized to re-shape and socially engineer a new nation and establish new political institutions (Bevan, 2016; Giblin, 2013; Munawar, 2022; Rowlands, 2008; Winter, 2007). As a result of the rise of heritage destruction incidents since the outset of the third millennium, new heritage rehabilitation research has focused on the benefits of reconstruction for communities and heritage. This includes surveying opinions and attitudes of local communities towards heritage destruction and reconstruction, developing innovative methods for including community engagement in decision-making processes, promoting cultural resilience and strengthening the sense of belonging and pride for societies affected by violence (Isakhan & Meskell, 2019, 2023; 2024; Isakhan and Shahab 2020; Joshi et al., 2021; Munawar & Symonds, 2022; Larkin & Rudolf, 2023; Salahieh et al., 2024).

Even though there is widespread consensus regarding the benefits of heritage reconstruction for communities, only a limited number of studies have analysed the political agendas that are embedded in several reconstruction programmes and the possible long-term impacts that these agendas could have on the post-conflict social recovery. The politicization of heritage and its management practices including preservation, presentation, restoration is the fundamental issue that we are investigating in this book under the title “Politics of Heritage Reconstruction in Post-Conflict Contexts”. This subject pertains to the factors that contribute to the selective reconstruction of cultural heritage in the aftermath of devastating warfare hostilities. In such circumstances, the victorious party is privileged

with the authority to determine the fate of the nation's heritage. The nuanced interconnection between the reconstruction of cultural heritage and politics is of interest not only to politicians and policymakers, but also to scholars, heritage professionals and most importantly to local communities who are frequently disregarded and considered burdensome or liability in post-conflict situations.

Besides the literature debating the benefits of heritage reconstruction and an extremely vast applied literature that deals with the technical challenges of heritage reconstruction, there is now a small but growing body of critical literature that explores the *cultural and political dimensions* of heritage rehabilitation (Munawar, 2017, 2022; Plets, 2017; Plets & Munawar, 2024; Stobiecka, 2020; Žuljević & Carabelli, 2024). As mentioned earlier, case study-based assessments have highlighted how heritage reconstruction is utilized as a tool for engineering new nations (Bevan, 2016; Giblin, 2013; Munawar, 2022; Rowlands, 2008; Viejo-Rose, 2013; Winter, 2007). Most of these works zoom in on the role of the nation-state, and how it selectively uses heritage to craft a new nation out of the ruins of violent war on its territory. This is especially the case in examples from Europe such as Dresden (Germany) (James, 2006), Dybbøl (Denmark) (Daugbjerg, 2009) and Warsaw (Poland) (Bevan, 2016). This foregrounding of the state in these examples is logical since heritage (re-)building in these settings happened within the context of nineteenth–twentieth-century European nation-building. Also beyond Europe post-conflict heritage practices serve nationalism. For example, the seminal work of Tim Winter (2007) on the reconstruction of Angkor Wat after the violent Cambodian Civil War (1968–1975) and Cambodian-Vietnamese War (1978–1989) described how heritage was key for the new Cambodian state to craft a unified identity and cohesion.

Heretofore, most studies on post-conflict heritage have taken a clear "single sovereign perspective", focusing on the role of the national government in rebuilding the nation following a conflict. This strong focus on the state as the central protagonist marks a broader trend in post-conflict studies (Heathershaw & Lambach, 2008) and heritage studies (Plets, 2024). This singular focus is understandable since national institutions have since the nineteenth century been amongst the key protagonists using heritage as part of their nationalist portfolio in imagining communities (Anderson, 1983). However, with the rise of internationalism in the heritage field following the establishment of UNESCO's World Heritage Convention (1972), post-conflict heritage

has also become a geopolitical exercise. For example, Philippe Peycam showed how post-conflict heritage practices at Angkor Wat were not only defined by national actors but also a tool for foreign donors to acquire influence (Peycam, 2016).

Not only foreign nations define the political landscape. Corporate players and a suite of non-state players now influence the government of heritage globally. In the past decade, foundations like ALIPH and Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) increasingly defined the heritage reconstruction field. These might offer alternatives to existing foreign aid programmes, but they are also textured by political values that deserve extensive research endeavours. This new set of actors and the growing promotion of neoliberal ideas by them in heritage reconstruction projects has been recently described by Constance Wyndham (2024) in her study of the politics of heritage reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Thus, the interplay of various players needs to be understood if we want to understand the sociocultural and political underpinnings of cultural heritage-making. This is not different in studying the processes of heritage reconstruction following warfare hostilities. Contributions from post-conflict studies have underscored that post-conflict environments are extremely dynamic: state and non-state players strive for power through a variety of instruments (Gagnon et al., 2014). In short, we need a far more pluralist and comprehensive study of post-conflict heritage rehabilitation and its multi-layered politics.

The suite of players (and their agendas) defining heritage reconstruction has been addressed through a few hallmark sites such as Mostar (Bosnia) and Angkor Wat (Cambodia). Explorations into these examples have shown that renovations funded by the central state, foreign nations, multilateral organizations or multinational corporations are often not so much about preserving the materiality of the past but about ensuring appropriate futures. Many projects ultimately take the form of soft power initiatives through which foreign states, NGOs or multilateral organizations "can set the agenda for others or shape their preferences" (Nye, 2009: 160). Through bricks and shovels, they are successful in creating a preferable brand (Winter, 2015), or in perpetuating neo-imperial hierarchies (Luke & Kersel, 2013). As commented by Higueras (2013) and Legnér (2018), the field of power relations influencing the conservation of heritage in Bosnia and Kosovo was often extremely messy and difficult to understand. Ultimately, the long-term effects of the diverse players rebuilding heritage in the Balkans were substantial. For example,

religious NGOs selectively preserving Islamic sites and buildings meant that this normalized the image of Bosnia and Kosovo as a monoethnic Islamic region, despite multi-ethnic pre-war realities.

Heritage reconstruction is an intricate multi-temporal process that has the potential to impact societies profoundly. When the time for heritage reconstruction comes, decision-makers find themselves encountering a set of questions that can turn into dilemmas if not addressed promptly, postponed, or solved tentatively. These questions encompass various aspects such as the decision to rebuild war-damaged heritage; the plans and consequences in the short, medium and long-term; the approaches of heritage intervention (such as protection, salvage excavation, documentation, limited restoration and reconstruction); the preservation of wartime memory; the incorporation of individual memories; the commemoration of conflict heroes; the potential impact on the cultural identity of society; the modification of educational curricula and the inclusion or exclusion of heritage, memory and identity representing ethnic or religious minorities, which could potentially result in ethnic cleansing and widespread displacement.

The Temporality of Post-conflict

The term "post-conflict" reflects the authors' intention to shift the focus of heritage and conflict studies from destruction and prevention to the politics of reconstruction. However, the notion of peace and the belief in discrete endings to wars is inherently a Western construct, rooted in a European teleological discourse of linear progress (Howard, 2001). Our language surrounding "post-conflict" has its shortcomings. Terminology is a difficult business; sometimes we need to make our hands dirty to draw attention to underrepresented dynamics (i.e. politics of reconstructing heritage). Nevertheless, in this section, we wish to draw attention to the difficult temporality of post-conflict reconstructions. Not only to nuance our approaches but also to underscore that post-conflict heritage reconstruction, part of wider post-conflict recovery processes, is an integral dimension of the contemporary landscape of military and foreign intervention (Barakat & Zyck, 2009).

The temporality of post-conflict settings and war, in general, has been a topic of debate explored across various disciplines. Historians, anthropologists, political scientists and peace studies scholars have all explored the idea of "post-conflict" or "peace" (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020; Howard,

2001). While they acknowledge their importance as both policy goals and analytical tools, they also critique their limitations. Especially "post-conflict" is both extremely useful and contentious. It is a clear temporal referent and is implicitly imbued with the promise of transformation, progress and leaving the past behind (Mueller-Hirth & Oyola, 2018). For scholars it allows us to create a distinct periodization. In foreign policy and the aid field at large, it signifies the ultimate expectation, that society moves beyond violence and enters a phase of peace and democracy (Call & Cousens, 2008).

This "expectation" of transition from war to peace is often at odds with the complexity of conflict. This brings us back to Howard's (2001) timely argument that the concept of peace is a modern invention, originating in Enlightenment Europe. He presents peace as a condition that must be constantly constructed and maintained through effort and commitment. While the idea of peace is noble and important, distinguishing between conflict and post-conflict is always somewhat artificial. This distinction assumes a linear progression from violence to democracy, which doesn't always reflect reality. In many cases, especially in non-Western contexts and hybrid warfare scenarios, violence continues even after official peace is declared or ceasefires are signed. The struggle for geopolitical influence and security needs persists, blurring the lines between conflict and post-conflict periods.

Acknowledging the shortcomings of such linear thinking is relevant in light of the politics of reconstructing war-damaged heritage. By challenging the teleological narrative of progress away from dark politics and violence, we can see the reconstruction of heritage as a potential site of struggle for influence. The opening example of Palmyra underscores this, and the chapters in this book about Spain (Chapter 3), Bosnia and Herzogovina (Chapter 5) and Georgia (Chapter 10) prominently show the conflictual aspects of rehabilitating heritage in the so-called post-conflict period. Being aware of the cultural assumptions encoded in our own temporal regime vis-à-vis "post-conflict" forces us to explore whose heritage is reconstructed and for whom.

Another reason we need to be cautious with the Western timescape encoded into concepts such as peace, transitional justice or post-conflict recovery is the consideration of local needs. As argued by Christie and Algar-Faria (2020), based on their analysis of the protracted conflicts in Cambodia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the "liberal policy" and "inter-governmental" temporal regimes that aim to quickly transition from

conflict to peace limit the local temporal horizon. Similarly, Mueller-Hirth (2016), drawing on insights from South Africa, emphasizes that victims' processes of healing often require patience and a long-term perspective. Thus, there is an inherent clash between the demands of the accelerated "move on" discourse prevalent in late modern Western perspectives on conflict and the needs of local communities.

An example in this book illustrating this issue ironically comes from the West: the case of Ypres (Belgium) (Chapter 2). Although many lamented (at that time and still today) the slow reconstruction of Ypres due to bureaucratic and political problems, the long reconstruction ensured local engagement and prioritization. In more recent conflicts, Western norms around "quick progress" often clash with local needs through the mechanism of aid. Meskell and Isakhan (2023: 4) describe how in Mosul (Iraq), Euro-American priorities in addressing certain monuments and museums first are misaligned with local issues. Rapid wins through heritage can negatively impact peacebuilding and undermine the intercultural dialogue that many reconstruction projects aim to foster. This so-called clash between Western notions of heritage reconstruction and local perspectives is something we see in most, if not all chapters in this book. If UNESCO and other international partners become involved, Western temporal understandings of peacebuilding define the rules of the game to the detriment of local concerns. It is then not a surprise that some projects celebrated in the West, such as Mostar, are fraught with contention on the ground.

So now we have established that reflection on the temporality of post-conflict is both important and problematic, we need to define our working definition of post-conflict. It is not our ambition to reproduce Western norms and temporalities, quite the opposite, we see them as one of the many factors contributing to failure. We uphold the periodization of "post-conflict" because we want to ensure a focus on research on the afterlife of a heritage object post-damage. For the editors of this book, the post-conflict phase for a war-damaged monument or site begins when the hope or prospect of peace takes root in people's minds, shaping their heritage choices. Thus, a post-conflict reconstruction or recovery of a site can already start before peace is declared or a ceasefire is signed. This is best illustrated by the chapters on Benghazi (Libya) (Chapter 9) and Ukraine (Chapter 11) in this book. Especially in the case of Ukraine, decisions to protect or rebuild heritage during the war are of key political importance to the regime to showcase resilience and project post-conflict

futures. Perhaps the best way to approach the thorny conceptual dimensions of post-conflict heritage is through a heritage futures approach. By letting the post-conflict start when heritage is mobilized for promoting certain futures and normalizing certain imaginaries of a not yet achieved peace, we both acknowledge its political dimension and the messy nature of peace.

A Normative Approach to Post-Conflict Reconstruction

An unnuanced reader might distil two points from our argument in the introductory section about heritage reconstruction: firstly, heritage reconstruction has not been addressed or tackled in academia and policy, and secondly, heritage reconstruction presents political challenges and is problematic. This could be read as an argument for non-interference by donors; this is not our argument. The seminal 2005 ICCROM report *Cultural Heritage in Postwar Recovery* edited by Stanley Price (2005) already convincingly argued that the reconstruction of heritage after the conflict is immensely important in reconstructing a society. Weighing the benefits of reconstruction against leaving war-torn heritage in a ruined state, Price (2005) and others (Ascherson, 2005; Rowlands, 2008) argue that reconstructing heritage engenders cultural resilience. Meaning that heritage can restore a sense of place and community, enabling a fractured society to overcome or at least negotiate trauma and conflict. This argument is furthered in this book in the chapters by Plets and Dendooven (Chapter 2), and Onyemanchalu and Viejo-Rose (Chapter 6). As Van der Pol shows in Chapter 11 on Ukraine, even during war heritage safeguarding and making plans for reconstruction can provide an uplifting narrative and, thus hope. What we wish to argue is that rebuilding a heritage site is as symbolic as the destruction that predicates it. It is precisely the failure to recognize the politicization of heritage reconstruction that renders cultural healing impossible (Rowlands, 2008).

The hopeful message in the above paragraph is something we wish to stress. Both editors, together with quite a few authors of chapters in this book, have grown up in a post-conflict setting or are longing to revisit their still war-torn city or village. One of us fled Aleppo (Syria) in 2012 and is hopeful for a new future for his hometown that continues to operate as a palimpsest of different heritage layers and cultural narratives. The other grew up in Flanders Fields (Belgium) near Ypres, a now

fully reconstructed region where regional identity continued to be strong. Although Medieval history was erased by the Great War (1914–1918), its heritage and place-based identities continue to be relevant because of those efforts to reconstruct it. Both of us are believers in reconstruction. We wish to go beyond criticizing each example or point at the identitarian politics in each project. We are not naive but hope for better reconstructions, to mediate loss and build peace.

What we argue for is a normative approach to post-conflict reconstruction. With this, we do not mean that there are good and bad examples. There are quite successful projects and disastrous ones, but there is also a lot of grey in between. From these many examples, we can learn that they should not be templates per se for future projects, but they can be inspiration for policy. There are perhaps three concrete findings from all the chapters in this book. First, no reconstruction project can underestimate the politics on many levels. Second, echoing Henri Lefebvre (1974), space is always socially constructed and experienced through everyday life. Historic towns, sites and cultural landscapes are social spaces valued because of the lived experience of their inhabitants. Prioritizing monuments over historic housing or public space is a concrete example of post-conflict reconstructions disrupting the social dimensions of heritage spaces. Thus, the true determinant for success is the involvement of local institutions in planning, engaging, deciding, executing and sometimes even funding reconstructions. Third, and interconnected with the previous determinant, is time. Space is imbued with (local) cultural affordances, and time is as well. We know from conflict studies that Euro-American perceptions of time in conflict settings can clash with local needs and interests in overcoming violence and victimhood. Even if this ensures a reconstruction project takes considerably more time, the prioritization of long-term success outweighs quick cultural diplomacy wins.

Beyond politics, time and local institutions, we do not wish to define more variables that influence the course of heritage reconstruction. The local context and nature of the conflict have such a strong influence that we cannot provide a decision tree for future reconstructions. Further comparative research by large interdisciplinary teams is needed for such an understanding. By selecting examples from across the globe, set in different historical periods, we intend to at least encourage the field to develop a global and transhistorical understanding on the role of time, politics and local institutions in heritage reconstructions. This edited volume is far from complete, we are cognizant of the heritage

projects in post-conflict zones like the Arab region (Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen), West Africa (Mali and Nigeria) and Central Asia (Afghanistan). We know that in contexts experiencing, conflicts, societal transformations and political transitions like Central Europe (Poland and Hungary), the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and South-East Asia (Myanmar, Indonesia and Cambodia) heritage continues to play a central role in mediations of conflict. By showcasing the research of established and early career researchers in this volume we hope to encourage further attention and case study-based analysis.

The book brings together a collection of studies co-authored by a diverse group of heritage scholars, experts and early career researchers from various disciplines. These experts and researchers come from or are based in zones that have gone through conflict or are now experiencing examples of heritage reconstruction. We do not contend to provide non-Eurocentric frameworks or best practices. This is almost entirely impossible with such a modernist thing as heritage. However, this book explores global case studies, allowing us to cultivate a profound comprehension of the rehabilitation of cultural heritage following periods of violence. Examining the politics of both contemporary heritage reconstruction programmes and those that have been conducted since World War One, this book aims to investigate the short-, medium- and long-term plans and consequences of various heritage rehabilitation programmes that have taken place after conflicts.

Through the incorporation of insights from archaeology, anthropology, conflict studies and history, we investigate the impact of heritage reconstructions on the transformation of national and ethno-religious identities, as well as the multi-layered memories of communities affected by these reconstructions. The invitation sent to the contributors of this book was meticulously prepared, considering various factors. These factors included interdisciplinarity, with authors demonstrating expertise in numerous disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, heritage studies, museum studies, architecture, history and tourism. Additionally, we considered geographic distribution, with authors affiliated with academic institutions in the Arab region, Europe, North America and South Asia, or having close ties to and based in the regions discussed in the book. Lastly, we considered the level of expertise, with authors ranging from PhD researchers and early career researchers to established scholars, heritage practitioners and museum professionals.

Lessons Learned?

As mentioned earlier, we deliberately chose not to identify parameters for success in post-conflict heritage work. This is partially because others have done so already. But also because each context is so different that any index of factors, and the implicit hierarchy in such a list, could become a too distracting lens to look at other examples. However, there are some lessons learned, or rather warnings across the examples in this book for future post-conflict heritage work. As highlighted above, attention to politics, time and local institutions should be at the heart of any initiative.

First, all case studies in this book show how important heritage is post-conflict. Heritage is not just about physical structures but also about the identity and collective memory of a suite of parties. Because the destruction of cultural sites is often a deliberate strategy to erase people's history and identity, preserving and reconstructing heritage is crucial for restoring identities and showcasing resilience. This exactly makes heritage also after conflict such an apt political instrument. As new realities and futures are negotiated after the most intense fighting and destruction, through heritage competing imaginaries can clash or be promoted at the detriment of others. Arguments that heritage's relevance during and after conflict is overstated in the light of humanitarian drama, might be fitting if too much attention is given. But ignoring it in aid programmes is similarly dangerous. Since it is one of those tools through which competing actors engage in politics, one needs to deeply be aware of heritage's political potentialities.

Second, in any project one needs to balance immediate needs with long-term goals. While immediate humanitarian needs take precedence, it is important to integrate heritage preservation into long-term recovery plans. This ensures that cultural heritage can be part of the healing and rebuilding process. Healing takes time, and post-conflict heritage practices should be set in this long-term time horizon. A longer term perspective can mean delaying the reconstruction of enigmatic monuments. At times, the local population—the main stakeholder—might even be frustrated about this. However, acting too fast through large-scale initiatives with little room for local contestation and mediation might disrupt the long-term benefits and processes of recovery.

Third, as with any heritage project the balance between top-down policy goals, experts and local stakeholders is always difficult to find. Especially since heritage recovery is a costly process. However, engaging

local communities in the preservation and reconstruction process is essential. This not only ensures that the efforts are culturally relevant but also fosters a sense of ownership and resilience. Perhaps this last and most simple factor seems a self-evident afterthought. But truly building in local collaboration at the heart of any heritage recovery effort is perhaps the key single ingredient for a successful project. Attention to the local has an effect on the timeline of a project and the politics. Taking the local central can help in slowing down and at times accelerating heritage projects. This can come with political contestation, providing unwanted stress and uncertainty. But in the long-term through "structured oscillation" (Macdonald, 2009) new and hopefully alternative solutions are found. But problematic political structures can also become visible, bringing them into the limelight and to be reckoned with.

Chapters of the Book

The chapters in this book aim to evaluate the politics of heritage reconstruction following conflict. Most contributions in this edited volume address the often-conflicting temporalities and political agendas between (Western) foreign donors and local actors. All chapters are normative, assessing successes, shortcomings and lessons learned. They identify areas for further research and future policy, serving as reflections rather than templates for future reconstruction projects. They emphasize the importance of acknowledging the local context. This book examines a diverse range of conflicts globally and across time, including contemporary examples and cases with a longer historical perspective. This allows readers to identify striking similarities and differences. The chapters are organized chronologically, starting with World War One and concluding with contemporary Ukraine. The final chapter on Ukraine (Chapter 11) serves as a postscript, reporting on very recent developments on the ground. Given the ongoing conflict, Chapter 11 does not offer a normative evaluation of heritage practices.

Chapter 2 by Gertjan Plets and Dominiek Dendooven explores the reconstruction of Ypres, Belgium, after its devastation in World War One (1914–1918). This case exemplifies the potential of a strong local agency. Under the leadership of Mayor René Colaert and architect Jules Coomans, the local government prioritized rebuilding homes and public infrastructure to restore community life before focusing on monumental buildings. This phased approach, combined with local expertise and

political debates, ensured a thoughtful reconstruction that respected the town's historical heritage. The famous Cloth Hall was only fully reconstructed after World War Two. The decision to first reconstruct public spaces and revive intangible heritage practices, and only later address large monuments, was made despite significant political struggles between local, national and international actors. These deliberate choices played a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity and community spirit despite almost destruction during World War One, symbolizing how a reconstruction with respect for local needs can contribute to a town's resilience and continuity.

Chapter 3 by Julie de Vos discusses how spaces of violence from the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) were normalized under Franco's dictatorship by deliberately ignoring them. Franco's regime focused on reconstructing Spain with a narrative that favoured the victors, suppressing the memory of the defeated. This led to the erasure of sites of Francoist violence from public memory, even in democratic times. The chapter highlights the importance of acknowledging these sites to prevent the normalization of violent spaces and to foster a critical memory culture. It also emphasizes the role of time and passive neglect in the disappearance of these memory sites. It ultimately reminds us how reconstruction or rehabilitation can be key for ensuring the reconstruction of social space for future generations.

Chapter 4 by Monika Stobiecka explores the decision of the right wing Polish government to rebuild the Saxon Palace in the Polish capital, Warsaw. The monumental palace had been devastated during World War Two (1939–1945), following the Warsaw Uprising. In her chapter, Stobiecka emphasizes how the decision of the current Polish government to rebuild the Baroque style monument triggered political discussion within the Polish society. Chapter Four provides an analysis of the factors and politics influencing the rebuilding decision of the Saxon Palace, which serves as a representation of Polish sovereignty for the conservative-populist members of the ruling Law and Justice party. In this chapter, Stobiecka argues that heritage reconstruction projects serve as a means to fulfil imagined projections for political elites.

Chapter 5 by Mela Žuljević examines the post-conflict heritage reconstruction of the Old City of Mostar following the Bosnian War (1992–1995). By focusing on the enigmatic Old Bridge, Žuljević showcases that the international project might symbolize reconciliation, but the city

remains divided. The reconstruction, driven by international stakeholders like UNESCO and the World Bank, aimed to promote tourism and economic development. However, this neoliberal approach often prioritized economic goals over genuine reconciliation and public interest. A clash between neoliberal temporalities and local needs is apparent in this critical exploration of Mostar. The chapter highlights how the reconstruction project, while symbolically significant for the EU and international community, failed to address deeper social and political divisions, leading to a commodification of heritage and ongoing challenges in managing public space and historical narratives.

Chapter 6 by Stanley Jachike Onyemachalu and Dacia Viejo-Rose explores the role of intangible heritage in mediating the aftermath of the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967–1970). By particularly focusing on food heritage it charts how communities (re)create intangible practices to narrate loss and adversity. It highlights the transformation of Àbàchà, a local dish made from cassava, from being associated with poverty to becoming a symbol of survival and elevated status in postwar southeastern Nigeria. The chapter discusses how local culinary practices are essential in post-conflict reconstruction and resilience. It underlines the importance of intangible heritage, in expressing and reconstructing community identity and memory. Chapter Six also provides insights for heritage professionals and stakeholders on designing post-conflict interventions that acknowledge the significance of intangible heritage.

Chapter 7 by Madison Leeson and Christina Luke draws attention to the "Save Carthage" campaign (1972–1992) led by UNESCO in Tunisia. The chapter discusses how the project had both important successes and shortcomings. It successfully established the Centre for Studies and Archaeological Documentation of Carthage (CEDAC) in 1977, symbolizing Tunisian autonomy in heritage management and archaeology. However, it faced challenges, including power struggles between Tunisian authorities and Western entities, difficulties in asserting control over national heritage and balancing collaboration with international partners. The chapter draws out two of the cardinal arguments of the book. First, conflicting perspectives on post-conflict development and heritage define rehabilitation efforts when intrinsically Western organizations such as UNESCO are involved. Second, despite these issues, the campaign highlighted the importance of heritage reconstruction for advancing cultural resilience.

Chapter 8 by Erda Rindrasih and Ayudhira Pradati offers valuable insights into the reconstruction of cultural heritage and historical monuments in Borobudur, Indonesia, following the events of crises and disasters. The chapter examines the governmental policies that played a key role in rehabilitating heritage sites and cultural landscapes. Rindrasih and Pradati utilize a qualitative analytical approach to uncover how post-crisis heritage reconstruction has the potential to foster the resilience of local communities and influence changes in public policy about cultural heritage management. This chapter navigates the intricate socio-economic dynamics and the particular needs of the local society in the aftermath of the crisis.

Chapter 9 by Nur Alah Abdelzayed Valdeolmillos discusses the potential risks faced by Benghazi's cultural heritage in Libya during the post-conflict period. Valdeolmillos, a local Libyan architect, examines how cultural heritage in Benghazi was destroyed during the Arab Spring revolutionary movement that reached Libya in 2011 as well as during the subsequent War of Dignity or the so-called Libyan Civil War (2014–2020). In her chapter, Valdeolmillos provides an insightful comparison of the cultural heritage management policies during two phases (2018–2022) and (post 2022). Chapter Eight offers an analysis of risks and their drivers emerging in the aftermath of conflict and how those may impact the integrity and authenticity of cultural heritage.

Chapter 10 by Hans Gutbrod explores the politics of post-2003 heritage reconstruction in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. Gutbrod reflects on the ethics of political commemoration in analysing the symbolic governmental failure in reconstructing Freedom Square in Tbilisi. Chapter Ten examines that despite enduring wars, coups, assassination attempts, inadequate basic services, crime and corruption, the heritage reconstruction in post-2003 conflict is frequently praised as a triumph. Gutbrod emphasizes that the government's efforts to restore the symbolic significance of places such as Tbilisi's Freedom Square have been hindered by mistakes. This chapter concludes with insights actively engaging with a participatory and inclusive approach to rebuilding the symbolic heritage of Freedom Square.

In Chapter 11, Linda van der Pol reports on how Ukrainian heritage workers and academics have started protecting and even reconstructing heritage during the Russia-Ukraine war (2022–ongoing). Their engagement with heritage is future-oriented, to keep Ukrainian culture alive in the face of Russian expansionism. The postscript by van der Pol is in the

form of an ethnographic vignette of her last visit to Lviv, Kyiv and Odesa. She shares the personal stories of different professionals and describes how local initiatives serve to enact resilience.

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