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Lifecycles of cultural heritage in conflict

Destruction, reconstruction and representation in Syria and Iraq

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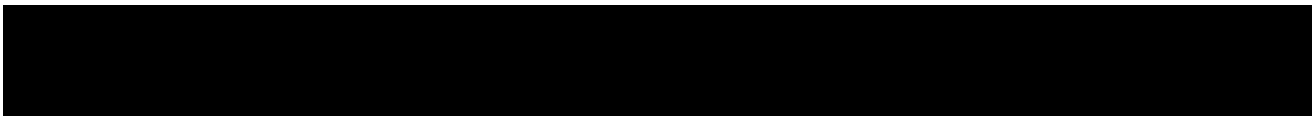
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Summary



SUMMARY

LIFECYCLES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CONFLICT

Destruction, Reconstruction and Representation in Syria and Iraq

This thesis comprises of seven chapters, an introduction and conclusion. Four chapters have been published as articles in peer-reviewed journals and a book chapter. The Introduction provides the perimeters of this research. The research questions and aims are elaborated in a particular section to establish an overview of what this thesis seeks to answer and investigate. As elaborated in the Introduction, this research relies on a multi-disciplinary approach and utilises a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, online and on-site interviews with cultural heritage experts and local displaced people, in addition to the participant observation of attitudes towards processes related to cultural heritage destruction and reconstruction. This research combines empirical and theoretical perspectives to understand the different viewpoints of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and preservation of cultural heritage sites damaged or destroyed by armed conflict. The investigation of this research seeks to enhance international cooperation and cross-disciplinary fertilisation through close contacts to ongoing related research projects. This research expands the use of methods, tools and disciplines, discussed in the Introduction, to achieve the research goals and answer the research questions. These methods have already been developed by various disciplines such as archaeology, heritage and memory studies, media, conflict and identity and sociology of art. The Introduction critically reviews literature that discussed the lifecycle of heritage, by shedding light on the attitudes towards cultural heritage sites in conflict at the intersection of identity and memory. This thesis traces individual voices in processes related to heritage in conflict and aims to understand how individual memories are negotiated into post-war heritage reconstruction and preservation. Each chapter discusses the notion of cultural heritage and its interconnection with creation of national identities and the public collective memories of the concerned societies.

Chapter I provides the reader with the different definitions of heritage, cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, movable and immovable, and cultural property. Types of risks that have the potential to threaten cultural heritage sites and facilities are elaborated in this chapter. Chapter I focuses, in particular, on the consequences of human modernity, as modern armed conflicts are the major threat in which heritage is either destroyed or damaged. Later on, this

chapter seeks to explain the relationship between cultural heritage and city centres in developing countries and how this phenomenon has been dealt with in the postcolonial period in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region. The first chapter goes on to explore how urban planning, along with how urbanisation affected cultural heritage sites and how conflict has played a key role in the destruction of cultural heritage sites, such as the Buddhas of Bamiyan and *al-Aqsa* Mosque in Jerusalem. Chapter I investigates the different typologies of the heritage values in a way that highlights the development of the understanding of heritage values through time.

Chapter II, published in the edited volume of '*The World Community and the Arab Spring*' (2019), eds. Çakmak and Özçelik, explores the different enduring efforts, responses and actions towards destroying, preserving, and reconstructing cultural heritage sites in Syria and Iraq on national, regional and international levels. The second chapter provides the reader with a general overview of the endeavours of the international community in protecting what the Arab Spring movements have resulted in the cultural field. Chapter II highlights how this research addresses issues which have been neglected or overlooked by previous studies in the field of cultural heritage destruction and reconstruction. Moreover, this chapter signifies the importance of international collaboration between the United Nations responsible entity of culture, i.e., UNESCO and its partner organizations, such as ICOMOS, ICCROM, etc. Chapter II analyses the extent that the international community's efforts have been successful in protecting cultural heritage sites from damage and destruction. This chapter indicates the importance of utilising of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Blogs, YouTube, etc., in process related to cultural heritage preservation and raising the local communities' awareness about the significance heritage on public spaces, memories and national identity.

Chapter III discusses what lessons can be learnt from the past by shedding light on different previous experiences of heritage reconstruction of war-torn historic cities, such as Berlin, Beirut and Hama. The third chapter examines the relationship among heritage, memory and the rise of political authoritarian regimes, i.e., the rise of Nazism during the interwar period (1918-1939), the establishment of Ba'athism in the Middle East, and how ideas like pan-Arabism and nationalism have been utilized by the Ba'athist of Syria and Iraq since 1963. Chapter III studies how the Nazi regime had increasing interests in exploiting Germany's heritage to create a cult of the leader's personality, enhance the ruling party legitimacy and support their radical political agenda. This chapter explores how post Second World War Berlin (East and West) has been rebuilt, and what factors played a role in rebuilding Berlin's

monuments. Chapter III discusses several post-conflict heritage reconstructions in the Middle East and specifically in Syria and Lebanon during different historical periods (Ottoman period, French Mandate over Syria and Lebanon and post-civil war Lebanon and post Muslim Brotherhood uprising in Syria's 1980s.).

Chapter IV, published in '*EX Novo Journal of Archaeology*' (2017), seeks to answer the questions opened by international community's reactions to the destruction of worldwide renowned sites in Syria and Iraq, such as Palmyra, Aleppo, Nimrud and Nineveh. The fourth chapter explores the different stakeholders who claim the property of contested heritages, what their interests in, for instance, Palmyra are, and how and to what extent each stakeholder values and perceives the World Heritage Site. For instance, what are the motives of each part of Syria's conflict, including non-state radical actors, i.e., *Daesh*, in controlling cultural heritage sites? This chapter discusses how the destruction of Palmyra's cultural heritage – during Syria's conflict (2011 – 2017) – has been represented in the Western media reports and academia, and how the destruction affected Palmyra and the reconstruction plans. Chapter IV seeks to answer why the minaret of Aleppo's Umayyad Mosque – destroyed in April 2012 – or the ancient gates of Nimrud and Nineveh in Iraq - destroyed in 2014 and 2015 -, which also suffered at the hands of *Daesh*, have not been swiftly reconstructed, similar to Palmyra's arch of triumph? This question triggers larger questions regarding the parameters of heritage reconstruction as practice; is it not through the process of decay and loss that monuments are incorporated into the archaeological record? Furthermore, this chapter aims to understand how damage and/or destruction can be deemed as another phase in the life-history of a monument. This chapter discusses the issues that need to be considered when attempts are made to restore monuments in a place of ongoing conflict, such as the perimeter of Palmyra.

Chapter V, published in '*ICOMOS University Forum*' (2018), investigates how many schemes have been devised to assist with the post-conflict reconstruction of internationally well-known cultural heritage sites. The fifth chapter takes a different approach and explores how archaeology and heritage can help those Syrians and Iraqis who have fled the conflict and are now living in exile. Is it possible, for example, to re-purpose archaeological remains that were appropriated to serve nationalist causes in the European past, i.e., can the collections held within European museums be used to foster a sense of cultural identity and pride among the victims of warfare in the Middle East? Can these collections - which were assembled by former colonial powers - change the attitudes of contemporary Europeans toward displaced peoples and incoming refugees? Chapter V goes on to investigate how displaced people approach the

legacy of their ancestors and consider whether they value the negative memories caused by the destruction of the minaret of the Great Umayyad mosque of Aleppo, and al-Nuri mosque of Mosul and its famous leaning minaret. This chapter examines enduring efforts to implement a top-down approach to the reconstruction of archaeological and heritage sites after the end of the war, such as the replica project of Palmyra's arch of Triumph. Chapter V argues that such an approach must be opposed and concurrently replaced by the bottom-up approach wherein decisions and action can be generated from the wider society. This, for example, can be attempted through the application of public archaeology and consultation with displaced populations to decide whether or not to reconstruct their heritage. The Fifth chapter weighs on the possibility of applying this bottom-up approach in post-conflict recovery plans. Chapter V discusses how the inclusion of the individual and collective memories of local people in the reconstruction processes can re-imagine archaeology as an inclusive and healing discourse.

Chapter VI, published in the *'Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies'* of the University of London (2019), provides the reader with the arguments and statements of scholars, institutes, and non-governmental bodies on the semantics and impacts of the continuous destruction of heritage on Syrian identity and collective memory. This chapter clarifies how the ongoing destruction of cultural heritage in Syria is writing new episodes of the Syrian collective memory and how the inclusion of wartime memories in post-war heritage reconstruction could help the healing process. This future process of heritage-making could demonstrate how heritage is in a constant process of transformation which may ultimately participate in rebuilding the nation's identity in the aftermath of war. When seen in this way, the destruction and loss of heritage sites is not endangering Syria's heritage—it may, in fact, be seen as creating the future heritage of post-war Syria. In my view, the recent intentionally destructive actions have started a process of *'heritagizing'* the present, which will eventually itself become part of the Syrian collective memory. This process has the capacity to make a strong contribution to the rebuilding of national identity in the aftermath of the war.

Chapter VII emphasises the importance of bottom-up approaches in post-conflict reconstruction plans and the need to recognize and implement the meaning-making activities of local communities that are connected to damaged tangible heritages of Aleppo and Mosul. This chapter explores how local people in conflict zones value their heritage and how they perceive the language of forgetting and remembering in the context of post-civil-war settings. Chapter VII draws back on empirical data that was collected via a survey of semi-directed questions with local and displaced people from Syria and Iraq in addition to in-depth interviews

with international experts who are based in different Universities and from different disciplines, e.g., archaeology, political sciences, architecture and heritage specialists. This chapter provides the reader with a theoretical perspective of the concept of heritage reconstruction, what is acceptable or unacceptable reconstruction, are there any justifications for reconstruction or arguments against such post-conflict practices? The seventh chapter goes beyond and examines how heritage in post-conflict contexts is understood and what meanings and values are imbedded in processes and practices related to post-conflict reconstruction. Chapter VII stresses on the involvement of the local people and, highlights the role of human agency in the post-war reconstruction of the Syrian and Iraqi heritage. The voices of displaced people are so often forgotten in the narratives of globalization and post-war heritage reconstructions. Therefore, exploring the authentic voices and testimonies of displaced Syrians and Iraqis can be used to revive the forgotten and unexplored narratives of the 21st century's biggest cultural catastrophes.

This thesis ends with concluding remarks regarding the post-conflict reconstruction of cultural heritage. The conclusion stresses on how post-conflict heritage reconstruction may provide profound insights into how the future heritage can be imagined and moulded, in post-conflict times. Heritage reconstruction in the aftermath of conflicts should be understood as an innovative and healing process, and not just as a replication of what has been destroyed or damaged, or repeating procedures taken in other post-war damaged cities, i.e., Beirut or Berlin. These final remarks highlight the capacity that post-conflict heritage has to speak the language of healing and inclusivity. By emphasising the role of heritage in de-constructing the conflict based on mutual cultural values, the non-zero-sum-heritage can become the vehicle that gathers conflicting parties together on one table to help people overcome the war and violence traumas. The non-zero-sum-heritage could eventually heal wounded societies through process related to commemoration and remembrance in post-war contexts.