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Building Peace: Tangible Culture and Reconciliation in the Former Yugoslavia

Introduction

That a post-conflict society would seek the restoration of tangible symbols of national identity and heritage destroyed by war is so intuitive that an academic explanation seems almost superfluous. For the critical thinker, however, it begs an important question: is there in fact a legitimate connection between physical and psychological rebuilding? If so, what is the nature of it? Let us begin by assuming that the impact of post-war reconstruction does extend beyond that which is observable by the eye. It remains to be determined if and how that impact specifically relates to the establishment of *peace*. This thesis examines issues of peace through the lens of culture, rather than law and politics. Applying the dynamic of culture to an analysis of peace processes can yield a fresh, less structural understanding of conflict resolution. The development and establishment of peace at the cultural and psychological levels via reconstruction of tangible culture deserves more investigation.

The nature of modern warfare, characterized by sophisticated technology and an unprecedented capacity for destruction, invites us to approach conflict from the framework of tangible culture. War, an age-old, cross-cultural phenomenon, has long been a subject for anthropologists, but the uniqueness of contemporary war and its implications for material culture have largely escaped serious (or at least systematic) attention. By its very definition, war involves the transformation of the physical environment. From this, we can cogently extrapolate that the inverse is true as well; that is, that peace and reconciliation, too, involve changes in the tangible elements of social existence. The goal of this thesis is to prove that post-conflict reconstruction of tangible culture facilitates the healing of figurative, *intangible*

wounds, and to then use this principle as the basis of an analysis of the reconciliation process in the former Yugoslavia.

By assuming a specific focus on tangible (or material) culture, I hope to make the complex concepts behind culture more manageable and the analysis more productive. I draw my working definition of tangible culture from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which, though not an academic institution, is the leading international force for policymaking and action in the defense of culture. Tangible culture refers to “immovables and movables, including monuments or architecture, art or history, archaeological sites, works of art, manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest, as well as scientific collections of all kinds.”¹ In other words, tangible culture encompasses any physical or visual manifestation of culture, by which I very broadly mean the values, beliefs, and traditions upheld by a community of people.

The complexity behind the notion that the surrounding environment has an effect on human psychology is masked by its quietly pervasive presence in elements of popular culture and day-to-day living. Individuals’ implicit affirmation of the connection between the visual and the psychological is evident in their appreciation of things as banal and ubiquitous as interior decoration and stage design. To assert that tangible culture has a meaningful influence on the psychology of individuals and groups simply requires the application of the principles driving “high” culture like studio art to the everyday experience. Nevertheless, to better understand the normative social implications of the aesthetic experience, I will set up a theoretical case for the value of tangible culture in chapter one.

Aesthetic value is the most common value attributed to tangible culture. It is certainly valid and significant in its own right, but is of little utility for the establishment of a link from

¹ UNESCO. Accessed at <http://www.unesco.org>.

tangible culture to peace and reconciliation. Rather, this critical connection draws heavily on the role tangible culture plays in shaping collective identity and orienting the group in a time continuum, a role that accentuates the “triadic relationship between humans, landmarks, and cultural meanings.”² Approaching tangible culture as something “whose beauty or ugliness is more political than aesthetic”³ affirms the relationship between culture and politics. Indeed, the political dimension inherent in material culture derives in large part from its function as a repository of collective memory. Chapter two is devoted to exploring this idea in greater depth, since it is the conceptual basis for tangible culture’s relevance to reconciliation.

Because the modern, globalized world is driven by rapid and profound change, the value of history—a mechanism for organizing the past—has skyrocketed. Silence regarding the past is often equated to the destruction of memory. Everywhere, everyday, people initiate dialogue in an attempt to prevent silence from weakening the vitality of society. But silence is not just auditory; it can be physical as well. The destruction of cultural heritage creates a deafening silence that paralyzes many post-conflict communities in their efforts to come to terms with the past and comprehend their radically altered lives, because people “use the memory landscape to identify as a people who share a past and future defined in national terms.”⁴ They do so out of “a recurring need to test from time to time [their] roots with the past. When all established frames of reference have become fluid, the visual confirmation of the past provides a fixed reference point of inestimable value.”⁵ The reconciliatory value of reconstruction builds on the interrelated concepts of tangible culture, history, memory, identity, and violence—and will become acutely evident in the case study on the former

² Koshar, Rudy. 2000. *From Monuments to Traces*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 13.

³ Koshar, Rudy. 1998. *Germany’s Transient Pasts*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 4.

⁴ Koshar 2000, 11.

⁵ Smith, Peter F. 1977. *The Syntax of Cities*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 45.

Yugoslavia, presented in chapter three. The ongoing experience of reconstruction and reconciliation in the Balkans gives us reason to believe that “cultures are hard to kill. Fire meant to destroy them may steel them instead.”⁶

Contemporary relevance of the topic: 9/11 and the war in Iraq

A recent article in the *New Yorker* offered the following words: “When day broke, the summer dawn could not penetrate the leaden gloom above the city. The smoke had risen to a height of five miles, where it spread like a vast, anvil-shaped cumulonimbus cloud.”⁷

Isolated from its context, this description easily could be of New York City on September 12, 2001. In fact, its subject is Hamburg in the immediate aftermath of Allied air raids that decimated it in 1943. The echoes of the 9/11 terrorist attacks perceptible in this reference to the last major global conflict are unsettling. Just as it has taken fifty years to begin to understand how deeply the civilian residents of Hamburg suffered from the city’s destruction, it may be many years before Americans can start to grasp the true extent of the psychological harm incurred by the loss of the World Trade Center.

The reconstruction of the World Trade Center site represents the first major effort of its kind in the United States. Americans, sheltered on all sides by oceans and friendly neighbors, had never experienced a major foreign attack on its civilian spaces prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, despite the country’s participation in numerous armed conflicts. The unparalleled magnitude and horror of the destruction of the World Trade Center has made this initiation exponentially more difficult. The passionate and often emotionally-charged debate occurring across the nation—among New Yorkers in particular—about the future of the site is a testament to the historic nature of the moment.

⁶ Sells, Michael A. 1996. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and genocide in Bosnia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 154.

⁷ Sebald, W.G. 2002. A natural history of destruction. *The New Yorker* (4 November): 70.

The twin towers had been iconic long before 9/11, but the attacks underscored their symbolic value by drawing it into the public consciousness. To the perpetrators of the attacks, the structures epitomized American material greed and egoism. To the American people, they represented the financial might of their country and, more broadly, the possibilities for progress created by modernity. Their destruction meant the loss of thousands of human lives, and of an irreplaceable cultural symbol. The project to rebuild lower Manhattan does not attempt to replace what had once been. At the very vocal urging of victims' families, local residents, and Americans around the country, the structures that will replace the towers will incorporate memorialization of 9/11 into their very design.

The desire for a memorial is, for many, seeded in a deep fear that their fast-paced lifestyle and culture might let them to forget the tragedy. Many hold that “the significance of the pit will be the degree to which it enshrines the idea, which has been gathering force for years, that memorials are not for the dead, or for the teaching of civic values, but for the healing of victims and society.”⁸ There is some tension between this view and the pragmatic necessity for commercial use of the space. The challenge is to isolate the ways in which both needs share a hopeful, forward-looking perspective, and to translate that into architectural expression.

Iraq, an ancient land that has been witness to innumerable armed conflicts, provides a sharp contrast to the United States. The war currently underway is especially grave in light of the central role of weapons of mass destruction—weapons whose destructive capabilities can affect both human life and the physical environment. Scholars familiar with Iraq's cultural importance have struggled to draw attention to the implications of war for the country's rich material heritage. UNESCO, the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), and the

⁸ Johnson, Kirk. 2003. The very image of loss at Ground Zero. *New York Times* (2 March).

International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) have issued strong cautionary statements. Leading archaeologists and representatives of cultural institutions recently gained audience with State and Defense Department officials to educate them about the cultural value of Iraq's landscape and on key provisions of the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, of which the United States is a signatory. The Pentagon's apparent receptivity to the archaeological community's message indicates an awareness of the highly-sensitive cultural tensions underlying the crisis.

The modern borders of Iraq encompass the area revered as the cradle of human civilization, Mesopotamia. Situated here are ancient places like Ur, which dates back to the third millennium B.C.; it is known as the birthplace of Abraham and for its one-of-a-kind ziggurat. Babylon, too, has immense historical value as the legendary capital of Hammurabi, Nubuchadnezzar, and Alexander the Great, and as the site of the Tower of Babel and the Hanging Gardens. The land is also inextricably tied to the history of Islam. The contemporary legacy of that heritage is a concentration of priceless Islamic art and architecture. Here, "monuments carrying profound cultural and religious significance abound,"⁹ including the tombs of Imam Ali and his son Husein, founders of the Shiite branch of Islam. There are innumerable examples of highly valued tangible culture across the country's landscape—and it is widely presumed that hundreds of thousands of archaeological sites in Iraq have yet to be identified.

The already monumental scope of Iraq's importance as a site of world cultural heritage will only grow with more exploration. If this importance is violated by war, it can be expected that world opinion and, more specifically, the mindset of many in the Middle East will turn against the U.S. In the *New York Times* on 25 February 2003, one expert warned:

⁹ Cotter, Holland. 2003. Oldest human history is at risk. *New York Times* (25 February).

“If any of the holiest Shiite shrines at Karbala, Najaf, or Kadhumain are hit, we can only expect a very angry reaction from Muslims everywhere. It would be like bombing St. Peter’s in Rome.” This analogy is extremely penetrating, though it does imply an artificial polarity between Islamic and Western civilizations. And it is by exoticising the Other, by disassociating Americans from Iraqis, that the war has succeeded in disguising the reality that the people on both sides are heirs of the same civilization.

The first Persian Gulf War of 1991 incurred damage to monuments like the ziggurat of Ur, the brick vault at Ctesiphon, and the Mustansiriya, Baghdad’s thirteenth-century university. Monuments in the capital that escaped damage are once again at serious risk. Among these are many notable tombs, mosques, minarets, and the country’s largest archaeological museum, which is home to some of the world’s rarest examples of Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian art. Because Baghdad is at the highest danger of destruction in the pending conflict, many have already begun to brace themselves for at least some loss of its cultural treasures. Indeed, now that efforts to prevent the war have failed, it is necessary to begin forward-looking international discussion on what a post-war Iraq will look like—quite literally.

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Until the cycle of war is broken, we must continue to try to mitigate its effects and facilitate reconciliation as best we can. There are a great many directions such dialogue can take; this paper explores territory that is comparatively uncharted, and hopes to uncover insights that not only are theoretically sound, but, more importantly, can be applied in real situations of human conflict.

Chapter One: Defining tangible culture and its importance

Alois Riegl and Monument Values

Alois Riegl's study of monuments, first published in 1903, originated from practical purposes—it was part of a legislative proposal for the protection of historic monuments in the Austro-Hungarian Empire—but was groundbreaking for its theoretical content. In specifically addressing monuments, Riegl indirectly, though not unintentionally, spoke to the modern meaning of art and architecture at large.¹⁰ The subject he chose is more specific than the scope of this work, which encompasses all forms of tangible culture, but his underlying logic is extremely useful to the development of a theory of the social value of material culture.

Trained as a historian, Riegl integrated tangible culture with its historical context by analyzing how monument values change across time and cultures. It was this phenomenon of constant change and transformation—so apparent at the turn of the century—that fascinated Riegl. Though he did not define historical epochs according to war or conflict, the implications of his thinking are still relevant for this subject: “Some objects are carelessly discarded and buildings willfully destroyed, while others are being collected or restored. What holds for one may be meaningless for another: some buildings attract interest precisely because they have fallen in ruin, and others require careful maintenance to sustain their meaning.”¹¹ He explains this empirical observation with a distinction between types of monument values that, ultimately, comes to bear on the philosophy behind reconstruction.

Riegl first distinguishes unintentional monuments from intentional monuments. Both have commemorative value, which in the former is determined by the audience; in the latter, by the creators. Riegl directs most of his attention to unintentional monuments, the more

¹⁰ Forster, Kurt W. 1982. Monument/memory and the morality of architecture. *Oppositions* 25 (Fall), 3.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 6.

ubiquitous of the two, and identifies their primary values as historical value and age-value.

Historical value captures more than a particular moment; it represents the essence of development, making the monument irreplaceable:

When we look at an old belfry we must make a similar distinction between our perception of the localized historical memories it contains and our more general awareness of the passage of time, the belfry's survival over time, and the visible traces of age... Modern interest in such an instance is undoubtedly rooted purely in its value as memory, that is, we consider the document an involuntary monument; however, its value as memory does not interfere with the work as such, but springs from our appreciation of the time which has elapsed since it was made and which has burdened it with traces of age... These monuments are nothing more than indispensable catalysts which trigger in the beholder a sense of the life cycle, of the emergence of the particular from the general and its gradual but inevitable dissolution back into the general. This immediate emotional effect depends on neither scholarly knowledge nor historical education for its satisfaction, since it is evoked by mere sensory perception.¹²

The notion of historical value directly corroborates the argument that tangible culture, as a repository of memory, is of great relevance to reconciliation and peace-building. This approach is elaborated in the following chapter.

Unintentional monuments also derive value simply from their age. Indeed, age-value is both the most modern and most common type of commemorative value. Owing to its use of visual cues and emotional appeal, it wields universal impact. In conflict situations, age-value can make a monument highly functional: "It rises above differences of religious persuasion and transcends differences in education and in understanding of art. And in fact, the criteria by which we recognize age-value are as a rule so simple that they can even be appreciated by people with the constant worries of material existence."¹³ Interpreted as an allusion to the impact of armed conflict on monuments, the contemporary relevance of this

¹² Riegl, Alois. 1982. *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its character and origin*. Trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo. *Oppositions* 25 (Fall), 23-24.

¹³ *Ibid*, 33.

statement to the Balkans is uncanny. Most of the tangible culture destroyed in the recent war was in fact of tremendous age-value, recalling the region's far-reaching cultural past. Riegl's assertion of the unifying capacity of age-value further strengthens the idea that tangible culture has a role to play in post-conflict reconciliation.

Riegl's primary concern is the development of principles for monument preservation from the natural processes of decay and ruin. His theory of monument values led him to reject the kind of full restoration that was popular at the end of the nineteenth century. He objected to restoring monuments exactly to their original state on the basis that it would destroy "both its documentary value—making it an unreliable witness to the time of its origin—and its capacity to convey a sense of historical distance, of the time elapse since its creation."¹⁴ Starting with the premise that the "mortality of culture itself...leaves behind a trail of rubble rather than a museum of achievements,"¹⁵ he could not have faith in the value of preservation of monuments, despite his great appreciation of their cultural importance.

It is important to realize that Riegl does not take on the much more politically charged issue of destruction by war, focusing instead on natural processes. Clearly, the implications of deliberate destruction are very different from and more complicated than those of simple decay. He does acknowledge that "every artifact...should be allowed to live itself out with no more interference than necessary to prevent its premature demise... Any untimely and deliberate destruction strikes one as arbitrary, be it the result of human or natural force, because of its especial violence,"¹⁶ but then goes on to suggest that "seen from a distance, the effect of human destruction, which appears so violent and disturbing at close range, can be experienced as the orderly and necessary workings of nature itself. As such, even a violent

¹⁴ Forster, 9.

¹⁵ Ibid, 15.

¹⁶ Riegl, 32, 35.

human intervention in the natural life of a monument may over time strike us as evocative...”¹⁷ I would argue that because the impact of destroyed tangible culture cannot by definition be experienced from a distance by a population directly affected by war, Riegl’s position against reconstruction does not apply. Indeed, Riegl’s basic principle that the commemorative value of monuments reflects “an interest inclusive of the smallest deeds and events of even the most remote peoples, who, despite insurmountable differences in character, allow us to recognize ourselves in each and every one of them”¹⁸ affirms the merits of post-war reconstruction. The ethnic groups of the Balkans are remote from one another not geographically, but metaphorically. Respect for the value of each group’s material heritage, demonstrated through a commitment to reconstruction, can help bridge ethnic and religious differences still alive in the region in spite of the formally agreed upon peace.

Tangible Culture: Heritage, Diversity, and Identity

Cultural diversity, now broadly institutionalized in international law as a universal good, cannot be separated from cultural heritage and tangible culture. While heritage does include intangible components—such as oral traditions and ethical and philosophic notions—it is extremely dependent on tangible, lasting elements for manifestation and, more importantly, perpetuation. Cultural heritage is a relatively nascent concept from the post-World War II period: “[W]ith the accession by new nations to independence, there emerged a new concept, that of cultural heritage, seen initially as the traditional manifestation of a masterpiece or a monument, reflecting the continuity and identity of a particular people.”¹⁹ Heritage—by definition a shared experience—captures how closely tangible culture is related

¹⁷ Ibid, 35.

¹⁸ Ibid, 26.

¹⁹ UNESCO.

http://portal.unesco.org/culture/ev.php?URL_ID=1475&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201&reload=1023285091.

to collective identity, a subject that has been extensively studied in light of contemporary armed conflicts. In international appreciation of cultural heritage, we see how the modern era is paradoxically characterized by a rise in the importance of both nationalism and pluralism.

Tangible culture, whether intentional or unintentional, serves the purposes of a community in some way. Just as the environment shapes individuals' self-understanding, it molds the identity of their aggregate. Raymond Williams eloquently describes this aspect of tangible culture:

Such work can serve societal purposes, of the deepest kind: not as food, or as shelter, or as tools, but as “recognitions” (both new and confirming marks) of people and kinds of people in places and kinds of place, and indeed often as more than this, as “recognitions” of a physical species in a practically shared physical universe, with its marvelously diverse interactions of senses, forces, potentials. So deep a human interest—in the renewed and renewable means of recognition, self-recognition and identity—can be practiced over a very wide range, from the most collective to the most individual forms... What matters is the evidence, in many thousands of processes and objects, of constant human practice in this real dimension, necessarily overlapping and interacting with other kinds of practice but never simply reducible to them.²⁰

In this scheme, tangible culture acts as a shared framing device by providing distinct physical markers of the group's existence. Even though each object or structure may have a range of more specific meanings, their shared essence is the representation of collective identity. Projected to the larger context of cities and landscapes, this principle elucidates how thoroughly tangible culture pervades social existence: “Towns and cities should confer identity on their inhabitants. They do this by their uniqueness, and the stronger that individuality, the more it attests to a powerful community character. At the same time it facilitates belongingness. However sophisticated urban man becomes there is a deep-rooted

²⁰ Williams, Raymond. 1981. *Culture*. London: Fontana, 128-129. It is important to note that while his subject is art as it is traditionally defined, his analysis applies successfully to the broader category of tangible culture.

need within him to belong to his unique and only place...”²¹ The sum of tangible objects of artistic, historical, or otherwise cultural value creates an intangible sense of identity of self and group.

Collective cultural identity requires a measure of continuity across time and finds it in sources like tangible culture, which most effectively ensures permanence. Yet its concreteness does not make it static, for it is subject to change by natural and human forces. And given the importance of tangible culture to identity, such change is inevitably rich with symbolism: “Thus modern man sees a bit of himself in a monument, and he will react to every intervention as he would to one on himself.”²² In the most extreme circumstance of deliberate and complete destruction, the community suffers a severe disruption of continuity. After all, material expressions of culture “give flesh and blood to the past—they are its continuing incarnation, and when they are demolished associated memories soon follow them into oblivion.”²³ The concept of tangible culture as a repository of memory is a closely related extension of the theory of collective identity, and will be explored in chapter two as the critical link of this paper’s argument. For now, suffice it to say that by investing value in cultural heritage, the value of diversity and pluralism—without which peace would not be sustainable—is also affirmed.

*Tangible culture and armed conflict:
From antiquity to World War II and beyond*

Tangible culture has been a continual victim of armed conflict since the wars of antiquity. The consistency of this kind of destruction across the long history of armed conflict makes clear the “innermost principle of every war, which is to aim for as wholesale an

²¹ Smith, 50.

²² Riegl, 32.

²³ Smith, 47.

annihilation of the enemy, with his dwellings, his history, and his natural environment, as can possibly be achieved.”²⁴ In particular, the last two centuries are notable for the greatest concentration of damage to cultural property. Scholars are now beginning to investigate an explanation for this pattern, posing some very provocative questions: “Was [it] entirely because of a lack of heavy machinery for their destruction, or did people also feel a commitment not only to the distant past, the ancestors, or to future generations, but also to the stones and graves themselves which have perhaps always been surrounded by a special aura as well as folklore, both demanding respect for these sites?”²⁵ Changes in the human capacity for destruction have fundamentally altered the physical impact of war, just as changes in the relationship between human beings and the environment have altered the context in which material culture derives meaning.

Among the earliest recorded destruction of heritage was the destruction of Athens in 480 BCE by the Persians, itself an act of revenge for the destruction of the Persian city of Sardis by the Athenians in 498 BCE. The temples of the Acropolis, most notably the Parthenon, were brought to ruin. And although the Parthenon was later rebuilt, it was again destroyed in 1678 in the siege of Athens by the Venetians. Used by the Turks as a powder magazine, it took but one Venetian bomb to incur comprehensive damage. Today, as it stands in partial ruin, the Parthenon is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant cultural sites in the world.

Alexander the Great sought revenge for this catastrophic event through the destruction of Persepolis, capital of the Persian empire, in 330 BCE. An Athenian citizen incited the destruction of the city’s famed royal palace by telling Alexander that “it would be [his]

²⁴ Sebald, 70.

²⁵ Holtorf, Cornelius J. 1998. *Monumental past: The life-histories of megalithic monuments in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany)*. Ph.D. diss., University of Wales Lampeta.

greatest achievement in Asia to...set fire to the royal palace, allowing women's hands to destroy in an instant what had been the pride of the Persians... Someone, as expected, shouted to lead off the procession and light torches, exhorting them to punish the crimes committed against the Greek sanctuaries."²⁶ With great fanfare, the sacred palace was torched in what was the most destructive act perpetrated in the attack on the city. It is said that when Alexander returned to the city years later, he regretted his act upon seeing the palace's ruins.

The ancient world saw another of history's most lamentable losses of heritage with the burning of the Library of Alexandria by Julius Caesar in 48 BCE. The library was founded two centuries earlier, in 283 BCE, as a place for scholarly pursuits in the style of the Lyceum of Aristotle in Athens. It is thought to have at one time held more than half a million documents from throughout the region. The library suffered two subsequent attacks, the second of which also occurred in the context of war, in the 640 AD capture of Alexandria by the Moslem Caliph Omar.

The destruction of the Library of Alexandria is oddly prescient in its similarity to the destruction of the library at Louvain, France, in the Second World War. Indeed, World War II marked an unprecedented scale of the destruction of tangible culture in armed conflict. The leap from antiquity to the twentieth century is characterized most by the evolution of technology, which thoroughly altered—and continues to alter—the nature of warfare. Entire cities across Europe were devastated; here, we will look at just a few notable examples.

St. Petersburg, Russia, is famed for enduring the ruthless siege of German forces, which lasted a remarkable nine hundred days. The siege was not driven purely by military objectives; it demonstrated an astute understanding of the potentially tremendous impact of

²⁶ http://www.livius.org/aj-al/alexander/alexander_t12.html. This account by Diodorus of Sicily is one of two known accounts of Alexander's decision to burn the palace; the other was by Arrian.

the city's destruction on the moral of the Russian people. There is evidence that the Germans possessed detailed maps of the city's elegant composition, with specific cultural sites marked as targets for air bombing. St. Isaac's Cathedral, the third largest dome structure in Europe, and the Church on Spilt Blood, a remarkable historicist structure modeled after St. Basil's in Moscow in commemoration of the assassination of Tsar Alexander I, are two of the city's most important structures and were virtually destroyed by heavy bombardment. Many other symbolic sites in the city, long revered as the cultural capital of Russia, suffered profoundly.

London was an equally visible target of German air raids. There is documented evidence that it was Hitler's intent to fully annihilate the city. In turn, the British Royal Air Force released nearly one million tons of bombs on one hundred and thirty one towns and cities in German territory.²⁷ Recent scholarship has finally focused attention on the fact that the bulk of civilian damage incurred during WWII was borne by Germany, which is struggling to emerge from being branded solely as the aggressor of the war. After the war there were 31.1 cubic meters of rubble for every resident in Cologne; 42.8 in Dresden.²⁸ And in the summer of 1943, British and American air forces jointly led an operation that targeted Hamburg with the explicit objective of leveling it (fig. 1). It is quite clear that the British government grasped the fundamental, age-old concept driving this military strategy: that it would be a fatal assault on enemy morale and, furthermore, would boost critically weakened domestic morale. It was precisely this strategy that had been turned on them by their enemies in what constituted a classic cycle of violence upon material culture.

Despite the lessons of the Second World War and the establishment of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Tangible Culture in Armed Conflict, respect for cultural

²⁷ Sebald, 67.

²⁸ Ibid.

property in times of armed conflict has not yet been normalized. In recent and ongoing conflicts around the globe, destruction of tangible culture continues to be applied as a strategy of war. One example is the internal conflict in Afghanistan that raged for decades preceding the U.S. invasion in 2001. The Taliban regime had long attracted global attention for the extreme violence it directed against the Afghani people; only recently has the world learned of the violence it inflicted upon their cultural heritage. The tumultuous years of 1992-1995 saw the virtual destruction of Kabul. Combat left the Kabul Museum, home to many of the country's cultural and archaeological treasures, structurally devastated and a large part of its collection destroyed or looted. In 1999, the Taliban issued an edict proclaiming protection for all historic and cultural artifacts. In March 2001, however, it proceeded to dynamite the giant Bamiyan Buddhas in the face of global outrage and protest. International action was impeded by the fact that Afghanistan was not party to any of the relevant UNESCO conventions and its many valuable sites were not included on the World Heritage List.

Lastly, it is important to note that the impact of armed conflict on tangible culture has many layers. War can result in indirect yet considerable damage to tangible culture through, for example, the disruption of archaeological work. In 1972, a team of French restorers working on the Baphuon temple in Cambodia were forced to flee the country upon the advance of the Khmer Rouge. They were in the midst of the dissembling the temple for eventual reassembling (a process called anastylosis), but in the melee of the war lost their records detailing the structure's composition. The temple, a magnificent sandstone structure built in the eleventh century, lay in pieces for decades. As reported in the New York Times on 1 January 2003, it has only been in recent years that archaeologists have been able to

return to the site to complete the project. A similar situation is highly possible in Iraq, where extensive archaeological work has been abandoned due to the threat of military conflict.

Legal Protection of Tangible Culture in Armed Conflict

Riegl conceptually deconstructs the appreciation of material culture, but for most people and nations it is simply an intuitive sense. Yet as is evidenced by the long and ongoing record of destroying tangible culture as a target of war, this intuition has not been fully translated into effective legal protection. Efforts in the twentieth century to develop international standards for treatment of cultural property in war are indicative of the broader trend towards more sophisticated regulation of war conduct. Riegl, writing even before the most important of these efforts unfolded, sensed that “laws have always protected intentional monuments from human destruction and this indicates how close commemorative values are to present-day values.”²⁹

One of the precursors to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Tangible Culture in Armed Conflict was the Roerich Pact and the Banner of Peace Movement. Archaeologist Nicholas Roerich, having witnessed the vast cultural devastation incurred by World War I and the Russian Revolution, spearheaded an international effort for cultural preservation in armed conflict that grew rapidly during the 1930s and ultimately yielded the Roerich Pact, which was signed by twenty-one nations in 1935 in a White House ceremony. The Pact, known as The Red Cross of Culture, asserts that the value of tangible culture is such that it deserves neutrality and protection from deliberate destruction in war as well as peace. The Banner of Peace was a symbol displayed at culturally and historically important sites to indicate their neutrality to military forces (fig. 2). The Roerich motto of “Peace Through Culture” is in many ways the general theme of this paper.

²⁹ Riegl, 38.

The Hague Convention for the Protection of Tangible Culture in Armed Conflict

The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Tangible Culture in Armed Conflict is the central body of international law for this paper. It is the first international agreement to focus exclusively on the defense of cultural heritage. Agreements that preceded it—The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the Washington Pact of 1935, and the Roerich Pact—establish respect for material culture as a factor of military conduct, but the awesome physical devastation incurred by the Second World War made necessary a more comprehensive and forceful agreement.

Germany is increasingly recognized as having suffered the most extreme and abominable damage to tangible culture during World War II. Pictures of Dresden and Hamburg, ghostly and bombed-out, are among the most poignant images from the period. The British strategy of military attacks on civilian populations was controversial from its inception, even on the Allied side. The fact that it was executed out of military desperation in 1941, when Germany was at the zenith of its territorial victories, was not an adequate justification. This was implied in the very establishment of the 1954 Hague Convention—though ultimately, a conditional waiver of obligations in instances of military necessity was incorporated in article four and elaborated in further detail in the Second Protocol.

The Hague Convention, with 103 States Parties as of 9 April 2002, extends protection to movable and immovable archaeological sites, works of art, manuscripts, books, monuments of architecture, art, or history, as well as other objects of artistic, historical, or archaeological interest.³⁰ The Convention obligates States Parties to take active measures to minimize the

³⁰ UNESCO. 1954. *Hague Convention for the Protection of Tangible Culture in Armed Conflict*. Accessed at <http://www.unesco.org>.

impact of armed conflict on cultural heritage during hostilities of an international or non-international character:

The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect cultural property situated within their own territory as well as within the territory of other High Contracting Parties by refraining from any use of the property and its immediate surroundings or of the appliances in use for its protection for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict; and by refraining from any act of hostility directed against such property.³¹

States must, for example, appoint personnel within the military responsible for promoting defense of cultural property and establish special refuges where important items can be safely housed. The Convention also mandates that States “prepare in time of peace for the safeguarding of cultural property situated within their own territory against the foreseeable effects of an armed conflict.”³² Preventative measures include marking important monuments and structures with a specially designed emblem, the blue shield (fig. 3), and the recording of specially protected examples of tangible culture in the International Register of Cultural Property under Special Protection. Together, these mechanisms institutionalize protection for tangible culture from armed conflict.

Article five stipulates application of respect for cultural property to occupied territories: “Any High Contracting Party in occupation of the whole or part of the territory of another High Contracting Party shall as far as possible support the competent national authorities of the occupied country in safeguarding and preserving its cultural property.”³³ This is especially relevant to the war in the former Yugoslavia, where the fight for territorial control was marked by destruction of heritage on all sides.

³¹ Hague Convention, article 4.

³² Hague Convention, article 3.

³³ Hague Convention, article 5.

The Protocol to the Convention prohibits the export of tangible culture from occupied territory and also requires the return of such property to the State from which it was removed. Appropriation of cultural property as reparation for war is expressly forbidden.³⁴ The extensive theft of cultural property that occurred during World War II remains to be fully resolved even today. There are numerous cases still pending in courts in the U.S. and abroad, some of which have been very promising. In 2000, Russian courts finally heard claims on artwork stolen by the Nazis (e.g. from Jewish victims of the Holocaust) that eventually wound up in the former Soviet Union. And in 1995, the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg revealed that it had had in its possession since the war a large number of important paintings plundered from Germany and long thought lost. Although the dispute over ownership is ongoing, the admission marked Russia's willingness to engage in serious dialogue about the controversial issues involved. Russia's cooperation with art restitution efforts has been acknowledged by the U.S., which recently returned the Smolensk archives, a large cache of Soviet files taken by Nazi troops in 1941 and recovered by American forces at the conclusion of the war.³⁵

It is not surprising that many states still have not committed to the principles of the Hague Convention. Austria, for instance, tried to block a lawsuit by an American citizen whose family owned six paintings by Gustav Klimt, now hanging in Austrian museums, before fleeing the Nazis in 1942.³⁶ Similarly, Spain and Hungary have refused to return important paintings stolen by the Nazis to American citizens laying claim to them. These obstacles, compounded by continued deliberate destruction of tangible culture in conflicts

³⁴ UNESCO. Accessed at <http://www.unesco.org>.

³⁵ Lauder, Ronald. 2002. The cultural spoils of war. *The New York Times* (26 December).

³⁶ Fortunately, as reported in the *New York Times* on 26 December 2002, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that Austria was not in fact immune from a claim in American courts because the interests of justice involved outweigh the inconvenience to the foreign country.

during the 1980s and 1990s, spurred the adoption of the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention in 1999. This protocol sets forth enhanced protection for tangible culture and expressly recognizes cultural heritage that is “of the greatest importance for humanity,” is already under special domestic protection, and is not used for military purposes. It specifies sanctions to be imposed for violations of the Convention and, in chapter four, establishes detailed conditions for individual criminal responsibility and prosecution. Lastly, it created an intergovernmental committee to oversee implementation of the Convention and both Protocols. This committee supplements the monitoring work also conducted by the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), established in 1996 as the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross.

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The theory of the value of tangible culture to individual and social psychology, of which Alois Riegl was a primary architect, is the first link in the connection between material culture and reconciliation. With each subsequent one, I hope to make this seemingly distant and unusual connection more apparent and persuasive. Next, we will continue to explore the capacity of tangible culture to perpetuate collective identity and memory as we look at historical examples of its role in conflict situations. We are gradually integrating a subtle, yet incredibly salient, political dimension into the discussion.

Chapter Two: Tangible culture as representation of memory

Tangible culture and history

The cognitive process continually refers to information stored in the mind to decipher visual images. When the eye perceives an object, it draws from the mind's accumulation of past experiences to interpret it. Tangible culture is thus a physical integration of past and present knowledge. To verbalize this concept, I favor Rudy Koshar's term, memory landscape, borrowed from the German language.³⁷ The idea that the physical environment has "mnemonic qualities"³⁸ is rather intuitive. It is not uncommon for an ordinary visual cue or physical place to trigger or revive a past memory into consciousness. Tangible culture, ranging from museums to homes of famed personages to public monuments, derives its value in part as a repository of the people and events of history. Such objects and places are implicitly understood to possess within their physicality important cultural meaning; they are more than just masses of stone, steel, or concrete.

It is the tacitly shared notion that tangible culture is representative of history that drives, among other things, the tourism industry and the preservationist movement. Tourists are motivated to travel great distances by the desire to see various buildings, landmarks, and works of art that are believed to be of inherent historical value. Places and things are common referents of historical facts. The impact of seeing history physically manifested is presumably greater, or at least more real, than the impact of reading about it through text. The historical preservation movement is simply the organized mobilization of this principle. It upholds that an object or place that was involved in an important historical moment can have value so great that it is entitled to protection from both deterioration and destruction, for

³⁷ *Erinnerungslandschaft*, in German.

³⁸ Koshar 2000, 9.

the public has the right to witness, remember, and transmit its history through it.

Governments and civic groups, therefore, are justified and even obligated to preserve and restore what it deems historically important.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the historic and mnemonic power of tangible culture is its manipulation by governments as a tool with which to shape the public mind. It is precisely because tangible culture transmits values indirectly that governments can exploit its power so effectively. Here, the potentially dangerous aspect of the power to preserve and shape tangible culture becomes apparent: it is vulnerable to ill-intentioned politicization. Culture is often perceived as a higher, apolitical realm removed from and transcendent of the messiness of reality. Yet, there is a very literal connection between material culture and history; indeed, the “memory landscape is a rich source of evidence for documenting this indeterminate relationship between culture and politics.”³⁹ Most obviously, tangible culture (particularly in the form of architectural structures and spaces) can enable or obstruct the actual occurrence of actions and events. Of course, it is the metaphorical connection, in which material culture frames those actions and events with meaning, that is more potent and of greatest relevance to memory, identity, and post-war reconciliation.

The tendency is to point to undemocratic regimes as the most obvious examples of the use of material culture as propaganda, while directing little critical attention at similar efforts made within democratic societies. The construction of any monument, such as those that cover the Washington, D.C., cityscape, is an attempt to portray history in a very specific way. The projection of Abraham Lincoln’s figure into marble on a massive scale is little different in principle from the enormous stone statues of V.I. Lenin that towered over Russia’s cities. Both aim to intimidate the population with the omnipresence of the state and to mold a unified

³⁹ Ibid, 287.

public conception of the past in accordance with principles upheld by society in the present. They differ only in how overtly they pursue these objectives.

To understand how the politicization of material culture evidences its historical nature, it is helpful to turn to Nietzsche's categorization of the types of history. Assuming a functional perspective on history, Nietzsche identifies three basic types—monumental, antiquarian, and critical:

If the man who wants to do something great has need of the past at all, he appropriates it by means of monumental history; he, on the other hand, who likes to persist in the familiar and the revered of old, tends the past as an antiquated historian; and only he who is oppressed by a present need, and who wants to throw off this burden at any cost, has need of critical history, that is to say a history that judges and condemns.⁴⁰

Reflecting his emphasis on understanding history's concrete nature and functions, Nietzsche defines it in its relationship to man, not in the abstract. It is in this emphasis on pragmatic history that Nietzsche's ideas intersect with our look at the political manipulation of tangible culture and its impact on history.

Monumental history: Germany and Russia after WWII

Monumental history is the selective glorification of certain facts, events, and personalities of the past and omission of others. Its goal is to infer a causal relationship between the past and future. By idealizing the past, “[the man of the present] learns from it that the greatness that once existed was in any event once possible and may thus be possible again... Monumental history deceives by analogies: with seductive similarities it inspires the courageous to foolhardiness and the inspired to fanaticism.”⁴¹ Idealization is often achieved via tangible culture, or what Nietzsche terms the “monumentalist history of the artists.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1983. *Untimely Meditations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 72.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 69, 71.

⁴² *Ibid*, 71.

Greatness does not have to be utopic; it may be courage or victory against a background of extreme strife or suffering. This is the manner, for instance, in which history was monumentalized after World War II in countries of both the victors and the vanquished.

The Second World War saw a particularly high instance of the deliberate destruction of material culture (as we saw in chapter one) and so provides many examples of the politicization of reconstruction and preservation. Much scholarship on the material culture, history, and memory of this period has focused on Germany, whose post-war division resulted in uniquely complex physical markers of conflicting history and values. In consequence of the “concentration of troubling memories, physical destruction, and renewal,” Germans have become “international leaders in exploring the links between urban form, historical preservation, and national identity.”⁴³ The insights gleaned from the German post-war experience will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

Even before the war, Germans learned first-hand of the impact of tangible culture on the public psyche, as is apparent in the historically-conscious building that occurred upon unification in 1871. This was representative of the growth of historicist architecture throughout Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, the objective of which was less artistic and more “to work within an accepted historical genre, and thereby to express an ideology that had a broader social purpose.”⁴⁴ Accordingly, a slew of grand monuments commemorating past leaders and battles was erected, obliquely “stimulating a sense of continuity but also...forgetting painful moments in the past.”⁴⁵ Clearly, the German leadership was not blind to the value of physical—especially large and prominent—

⁴³ Ladd, Brian. 1997. *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German history in the urban landscape*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 4.

⁴⁴ Koshar 2000, 58.

⁴⁵ Koshar 1998, xiii.

manifestations of the country's history to the nation-building process. It is difficult to methodically measure the precise social impact of the alterations made to the physical landscape, and it would be impossible to back the claim they were alone responsible for national unification, but a compelling parallel does exist between the two trends of change.

After 1945, Germans largely repressed their recent history of Nazism, the Holocaust, defeat, and national division. The communist regime, like others in the Soviet bloc, heavily employed propaganda to indoctrinate the public. Amazingly, it was not until the late 1950s that German historians began to analyze the Nazi period in depth, and not until 1983 that there was an international caucus of historians on the topic.⁴⁶ History in post-war Germany is an example of monumental history not because it glorified the war as something good, but because it selectively omitted problematic aspects of its past in order to present it in a more agreeable light. In other words, idealization of the past is achieved not only by emphasizing positive elements, but by erasing the negative ones as well.

Reunification marked the beginning of another epoch, one in which historical representations of the war matured and confronted the past more truthfully. Post-communist Germany opened national dialogue on the fate of the country's historical monuments, which prompted Germans to reflect on their new collective self-identity. Among the questions that demanded consensus resolution were whether heritage destroyed by the communist government ought to be rebuilt and whether representations of that same government ought then to be destroyed. However, it became quickly apparent that the "commemorative capital"⁴⁷ of material culture included more than intentional monuments—it also encompassed everything from Nazi concentration camps to street signs. This experience

⁴⁶ Hirsch, Herbert. 1995. *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying death to preserve life*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 27.

⁴⁷ Koshar 1998, 5.

highlighted the inadequacy of the focus on deliberate or intended tangible culture in the exploration of its historical meaning. This brief analysis does not do justice to the complexity of how Germany has dealt with its recent past, but the main relevance of this issue is material culture's influence on perceptions of the past.

Russia went through a similar experience of the political manipulation of material culture, concentrated during the Soviet era. The communist regime had an explicitly delineated cultural policy, beginning with Lenin's Plan for Monumental Propaganda of 1918, whose aim was "to transform the entire symbolic landscape"⁴⁸ in such a way that the tsarist past would give way to a vision of a new, utopian, communist future in the minds of the Russian people. The most infamous and visually obvious method employed was the installation of intentional monuments throughout the physical environment. Even the farthest reaches of the Soviet Union saw the erection of statues and busts of Marx and Engels (and, later, of each Soviet leader after his death), for it was believed that "as soon as all monuments to the Revolution's predecessors had gone up on the squares, the old world would crumble 'to its very foundation,' and the future would appear in an aura of slogans and banners."⁴⁹ The cult of monuments that was born at the very outset of the Revolution endured until it met a violent, vengeful demise upon the collapse of the Soviet system.

The manipulation of the past was also achieved on a larger scale. Gorky Park, the All-Union Exhibition of the Achievements of the People's Economy, and Stalin's Seven Sisters in Moscow are among the most prominent Soviet attempts to monumentalize its past. Gorky Park, inaugurated in 1929, was the model for the plethora of Parks of Culture and Rest that sprung up throughout the country. Its triumphal arch, orderly walkways, towering statues,

⁴⁸ Koshar 2000, 89.

⁴⁹ Brodsky, Boris. 1987. The Psychology of Urban Design in the 1920s and 1930s. *DAPA* (Summer), 77.

and lively music suggested “an image of paradise—existing not somewhere in the heavens but here in the city, around the corner, or at the exit to an underground metro station... It conveyed the sense of the present changing unaided into the future, of its own accord...”⁵⁰ As an awe-inspiring space, Gorky Park instilled in the public a sense of power and utopia in the present and, of course, into the future.

There is also a wealth of examples of monumental history in the Soviet government’s portrayal of World War II. The fact that it was, and still is, often referred to in Russia as the Great Patriotic War is itself indicative of a very specific—and strategic—interpretation of the war’s historical and social meaning. Interestingly, the Holocaust plays a much smaller role in Russia’s memory of the war than in other countries; what is emphasized is the Soviet people’s triumph over *fascism*, not necessarily over anti-Semitism. It is obvious how such an approach to remembering the war would have been extremely convenient for Stalin, given that he was enacting similarly murderous policies within his own country. Patriotic memories of the war not only de-emphasized the suffering Stalin imposed on the Russian people; they even helped legitimate it. The net effect was an improved national self-image, which then served to entrench the regime.

Antiquarian history: Post-World War II Avignon

Like monumental history, antiquarian history idealizes the past; it differs, though, in that it does not do so with a specific purpose for the future. In fact, the past is so ideal that there is little room for improvement and should simply be perpetuated. Antiquarian history may be described as reactionary, as it is highly unfavorable to change. Strict preservation of the past effectively stifles creativity: “Everything old and past that enters one’s field of vision at all is in the end blandly taken to be equally worth of reverence, while everything that does

⁵⁰ Ibid, 84.

not approach this antiquity with reverence, that is to say everything new and evolving, is rejected and persecuted.”⁵¹ This is the primary danger of antiquarian history: though it cannot drive life as monumental history does, it can still indirectly control the course of the future by obstructing change.

In the wake of the Second World War, the old, historic city of Avignon in France embarked upon a project of urban renewal. Its dilapidated condition presented a sharp contrast to its historical stature as an important religious center. The debilitating impact of the war did not destroy the pride Avignonnais had for their city, and so they committed themselves to its renewal. The most important target for renewal was the quarter of the city known as the Balance, once the location of the Papal residence. Therefore, the “entire quarter was associated with the city’s past growth and glory”⁵²—that is, until the French Revolution, when it began to lose its exclusivity and structurally deteriorate.

Of the three variants of urban improvement—renewal (the complete destruction of what is currently in existence), renovation (partial preservation of what is currently in existence), and restoration (the rehabilitation of what is currently in existence with no alteration in design)—renewal was the original plan.⁵³ Yet many residents thought the cultural cost of renewal to exceed the potential economic benefit: “Conservative Avignonnais, though they desired economic revitalization, shunned the idea of an industrialized city, stressing its tradition as a center for peasants, artisans and vacationers.”⁵⁴ To them, the original physical design of the Balance was invaluable because it embodied the history and identity of the city’s population. Fortunately, because the city lacked the funds for full

⁵¹ Nietzsche, 74.

⁵² Heckart, Beverly. 1989. The cities of Avignon and Worms as expressions of European community. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (July): 7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 467.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 466.

renewal, a compromise was reached to partially preserve the quarter in the hope that this would sufficiently “satisfy the psychological need of Avignon’s residents for a stable urban image.”⁵⁵ Ultimately, all economic considerations were overridden and the Balance was deemed a protected area by the French government. Even though changes were made to structures deemed value-less, the city was faithful to the overall image of the quarter and to “the idea of historic preservation as a means of preserving continuity between the old and the new France.”⁵⁶ Avignon’s urban renewal policy is not a perfect example of antiquarian history because it did allow for some change; however, the strong resistance to it exemplifies the antiquarian view of the past.

Critical history: Revolutionary France and Russia

Critical history is most closely associated with the history of revolutions, for revolutions by definition seek a definitive break from the past.⁵⁷ To achieve such a break, it is necessary not only to invent a new vision of the future, but also to alter perceptions of the past. Revolutionary forces seek to prove that “every past...is worthy to be condemned—for that is the nature of human things: human violence and weakness have always played a mighty role in them.”⁵⁸ Forgetting the past begins, ironically, with remembering it; critical history “wants to be clear as to how unjust the existence of anything—a privilege, a caste, a dynasty, for example—is, and how greatly this thing deserves to perish.”⁵⁹ Though the essence of the destruction wrought by a revolution is intangible (e.g., a change of power or the power structure), destruction is most prominent and, as will be argued, most powerful as

⁵⁵ Ibid, 471.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 473.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that critical history is not utilized only by revolutionary movements; it is constantly observed when states deliberately try to “forget” unpleasant or inconvenient events, even on a small scale.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, 76.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

tangible, visual expression. The two examples here indicate that “revolutionaries, like other kinds of leaders and political figures, know that surfaces and facades are very important, that it is essential to point the way to reality before one can begin the journey. They know that signs and symbols—and the very act of revising them—are able to mobilize certain sentiments of devotion and loyalty, and to evoke political and social dreams.”⁶⁰ The physical erasure of the past is a metaphorical compliment to (and catalyst of) the psychological erasure of the past in people’s minds.

Most historians point to the French Revolution as the watershed moment of the modern history of the West. The successful initiation of democracy depended upon the translation of radically new philosophical principles into actual social thought. A critical component of revolutionary strategy to this end was the replacement of monarchical imagery with imagery of the Republic: “The prevailing desire was to create a Republic throughout the State both in fact and in appearance—not only in legal form but also in ritual and symbolism... [T]he people’s party that supported the Republic was as keen on imagery as on ideology and...it had just as much impact on one as on the other. It wanted to see the Republic, not just have it.”⁶¹ The abstract idea of a Republic was given concrete expression that contextualized and popularized it among the masses. All throughout the country, but especially in the cities, the Republic was tangibly represented in paintings, caricatures, monuments, sculptures, and even graffiti, implicitly underscoring the interdependency of tangible and intangible forces in revolution.

⁶⁰ Stites, Richard. 1984. Iconoclastic currents in the Russian Revolution: Destroying and preserving the past. In *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2.

⁶¹ Agulhon. 1981. *Marianne into battle: Republican imagery and symbolism in France, 1789-1880*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 62, 88.

The state took the lead in the generation of symbols for the nascent Republic. Upon the creation of the First Republic in 1792, it officially disavowed imagery of the monarchy and instead sanctioned democratic imagery that had been developing unofficially for years.⁶² It was implicitly understood that monarchical imagery could not simply be destroyed—it had to be replaced with something representative of the new system:

Imagery played an important role in the political conflicts of the nineteenth century. Changing the State and the principles upon which it rested meant abolishing its symbols and therefore being obliged to invent new ones. Knocking down a statue commits one to replacing it for—like nature—political fervour abhors a vacuum. Throughout the struggles, the visual representation of the political ideal was constantly both a tool and a stake.⁶³

Statues representing liberty—a woman wearing a Phrygian cap⁶⁴ and leaning on a pike—were erected throughout Paris. For example, in Place de la Revolution (formerly Place Louis XV and now Place de la Concorde), “Liberty” took the place of the statue of Louis XV. A second statue, which replaced equestrian statue of Louis XV, was erected in the Place des Piques (formerly Place Louis-le-Grand and now Place Vendôme).⁶⁵ These sites were deliberate choices rich with symbolic meaning, for leaders understood that “a revolutionary monument must be such not only by virtue of what it represents (Liberty or the Republic, in this instance) but also by virtue of the place in which it represents it.”⁶⁶ Places formerly associated with kings were explicitly transformed into representations of republican ideas, with the ultimate goal of transforming the entire landscape.

It was later, under the Third Republic (1870-1940), that visual representations of the Republic sprung up in the greatest numbers. Statues, busts, and paintings using republican

⁶² Ibid, 17-18.

⁶³ Ibid, 186.

⁶⁴ The Phrygian cap as a symbol of liberty refers to the Roman era, when it represented freedom granted to a slave.

⁶⁵ Agulhon. 1981. *Marianne into battle: Republican imagery and symbolism in France, 1789-1880*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 22.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 4.

imagery adorned public buildings in cities throughout France. Though this trend was primarily an urban one, mobile versions were created for frequent use in festivals and ceremonies in the countryside. Eventually, of course, “the fervour died down and the décor crumbled away. But the memory was deeply ingrained. By replacing the statues of kings with statues of Liberty...the Republic had demonstrated its ambition to introduce change not only in the major political ideas and institutions but also in rituals, within the framework of everyday life and, in a word, in folklore.”⁶⁷ By integrating the principles of the Revolution into the environment, revolutionary forces popularized ideas that originated among the elite and solidified profound change in the fabric of French society. With the rejection of monarchical imagery came the rejection of the principles that inspired it.

A critical perspective on history is at the core of Marxist theory itself, as is concretely evident in the physical landscape of the Soviet Union. In addition to the construction of a new cult of monuments, the selective destruction of already existing markings of the Romanov dynasty was an integral part of communist Russia’s cultural policy:

The replacement of illusory history with true history was to be effected by putting up monuments of plywood and plaster of Paris, as the old granite and bronze monuments were being torn down.... This turned history into prehistory, and culture into protoculture. In like fashion, the Revolution was reinterpreted, not as the summit of history, but as its starting point.⁶⁸

The most obvious target was the Romanov eagles and coat-of-arms, which were taken down, defaced, or even blown out with dynamite.⁶⁹ Manifestations of bourgeois life were handled ruthlessly: country estates and churches were either razed or taken over and put to new purposes, like headquarters for youth clubs, storage spaces, or swimming pools. This

⁶⁷ Ibid, 37.

⁶⁸ Brodsky, 77.

⁶⁹ Stites, 8.

transformation was officially rationalized as functional in nature, yet was, more importantly, a symbolic transition to communism.

Selective preservation was also at work, for in spite of their ideological opposition to the bourgeoisie, revolutionaries still identified intrinsic value in certain notable places and objects, such as the Hermitage Palace and its collection of art, the Church on Spilt Blood, and the Kazan Cathedral of St. Petersburg, the city most closely identified with the imperial tradition. The eclectic assemblage of structures in and around the Kremlin in Moscow was also preserved at the firm directive of Lenin himself. The preservation of these places was cleverly framed within communist ideology: they had value in their capacity to act as reminders to the Russian people of the slavery and oppression of the pre-communist era. They were “monuments of cultural politics as much as the buildings themselves were monuments of the national community.”⁷⁰ The historic value of material culture was destroyed in some instances and protected in others, depending on how it served revolutionary purposes—but was consistently acknowledged throughout communist cultural policy, however idiosyncratic that policy may have been.

Soviet Russia engaged another wave of critical history after the death of Stalin, when Nikita Khrushchev condemned his predecessor and initiated the entire rewriting of the era. This marked a tremendous shift in the direction of Soviet policy and of interpretations of communism itself. When Stalin tried to secure himself a monumental position in Soviet history by blanketing the country with visual representations of himself, he likely never imagined that the malleability of history would so easily be turned against him: “The act of toppling historical personalities from their pedestals and replacing them with others, themselves figures from the past, contributed to the apocalyptic sentiments that usually

⁷⁰ Koshar 1998, 335.

accompany a change in historical structure.”⁷¹ Ironically, the visual representations of Stalin that began as monumental history were brought down in a wave of critical history, proving true Nietzsche’s claim that “art can be slain by art.”⁷²

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Historicide—forcing history into conformity with a particular ideology—has most frequently and, arguably, most effectively been executed with tangible culture as the intermediary. The very fact that so much political effort has been expended to shape the memory landscape in so many different societies convincingly evidences the claim that tangible culture is indeed a repository of history to both individuals and communities. The manner in which cityscapes and landscapes were mediated communicated to people how they ought to remember history: “the past was threatened, it accelerated, it was expanding, it represented hope for the future, it was to be overcome, it should be repressed, it should be revived.”⁷³ Tangible culture, in these examples, molded memories of the past by monumentalizing, antiquating, or criticizing them. Here, we will take a closer look at the relationship between tangible culture and memory, which builds upon that between tangible culture and history—and provides the next major step towards a discussion of peace and reconciliation.

Collective Memory

In order to explore the relationship between tangible culture and memory, it is necessary to first grasp the notion of collective memory. Any discussion of collective memory naturally begins with the theories of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who introduced the term and framed it for academic study. Ironically, he had been largely

⁷¹ Brodsky, 77.

⁷² Nietzsche, 72.

⁷³ Koshar 1998, 336.

forgotten until the recent upsurge in academic and popular interest in memory.⁷⁴ A disciple of Emile Durkheim, Halbwachs believed deeply in the inseparability of the individual and society at all levels of existence. He approached society as an integrated system consisting of various parts which, when examined objectively in relation to one another, make the total system comprehensible. In this schema, social facts are defined as coercive in their influence over the individual, making conformity requisite for identification with a group. With this theoretical premise, Halbwachs set out to explain the phenomenon of memory in social, or collective, terms.

Halbwachs reasoned that if an individual's memory is shaped by social influences (after all, people are not born with memory), then the aggregate of those individual memories must represent a shared, cohesive body that can be organized along several lines. However, collective memory is more than just the sum of individual memories; it comes into being in a dynamic process. The past is not preserved, as historians might have us believe, but rather is constantly being reconstructed. There is no objective past existing independently of recollections of it; it exists only as it is remembered, specifically, by social groups. In fact, "it is not sufficient, in effect, to show that individuals always use social frameworks when they remember. It is necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the group or groups."⁷⁵ It is through participation or membership in groups that individuals are able to acquire, contextualize, and preserve their memories at all. There exist an infinite number of such groups within every society, each with a unique thread connecting its members. In the contemporary world, the most fundamental groups are organized by race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and class.

⁷⁴ Holtorf.

⁷⁵ Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 40.

By treating memory as a social phenomenon, Halbwachs rejects the notion of memory as something given and instead treats it as a social construct. One again sees traces of Durkheim in the assertion that memory is actively produced and ultimately exerts a coercive influence over the individual. The aim of socialization itself is to establish norms of behavior in accordance with the ideological principles of a given society. Collective memory, which can be shaped and constructed around different conceptions of reality, is one of the most effective tools of socialization:

Collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society.⁷⁶

The historical examples of the politicization of memory provided earlier in this chapter clearly evidence this contention. If society shapes memory, and society is shaped in large part by politics, then “the shifting sands of politics and power are the foundations upon which the collective memory is constructed or reconstructed.”⁷⁷

Part of collective memory’s function is the demarcation of what is and is not socially legitimate. Memory can help explain the notion of deviance (which so intrigued Durkheim): if members of a social group do not share a conception of the past, it is extremely difficult for them to interpret and understand the present in common. Collective memory is, then, the foundation for group cohesion: “Collective memory especially is the very warp and weft of the tapestry of history that makes up society. Unravel and jettison a thread from that tapestry

⁷⁶ Ibid, 40.

⁷⁷ Hirsch, 32.

and society itself may become undone at the seams.”⁷⁸ Connerton uses the example of the generation gap, in which members of different age groups have trouble relating to one another because their past experiences are so divergent.⁷⁹ A more specific and extreme example of the divisive, destructive impact of clashing collective memories will be presented in the next chapter’s case study of ethnic conflict in the Balkans.

The relevance of collective memory to real social circumstances is illuminated by a look at the relationship between memory and visual perception. The separation between introspection and perception of things external cannot be sustained if the individual is held to be an inherently social creature. When one perceives an external object, he or she does not just see it—he or she mentally categorizes and interprets it according to conventions learned from society. As cognitive theorists have shown, the process of visual perception is a basic tie between the external world and the mind. Thus, there can be no perception without (collective) memory. And at the same time, there can be no memory without perception and, more specifically, without the image.⁸⁰

Lieux de mémoire

Pierre Nora takes Halbwach’s concept of collective memory further by examining how it is actually manifested, which ultimately leads him to a theory of *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory. Nora defines true memory as “social and unviolated...unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing,” and modern memory as “nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces.”⁸¹ The pivotal distinction is the

⁷⁸ Amadiume, Ifi and Abdullahi An-Nai’im. 2000. *The Politics of Memory: truth, healing, and social justice*. London: Zed Books, 21.

⁷⁹ Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3.

⁸⁰ Halbwachs, 168-170.

⁸¹ Nora, Pierre. 1989. Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire. *Representations*. Volume 0, Issue 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring): 8.

spontaneity characteristic of true memory and entirely lacking in modern memory, which is polluted by deliberateness and artificiality. Indeed, it is the assumption of deliberateness in history and in remembering—the notion that “without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away”⁸²—that is the basis for *lieux de mémoire*.

Nora defines *lieux de mémoire* very obliquely, through his broader sociological analysis of history and memory. The closest he comes to a definition is: “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself.”⁸³ Most fundamentally, *lieux* are products of the push-pull tension between memory and history. This relates to their function “to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial...in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs.”⁸⁴ They are able to achieve this effect only because they have the “capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.”⁸⁵

They are “sites” in three basic senses of the word: material, symbolic, and functional. Something that appears purely material (like an archive), symbolic (a moment of silence), or functional (a manual) can appeal to the memory if there is a will to remember. The will to remember is what distinguishes a site of memory from a site of history. With this as the defining principle of *lieux de mémoire*, things that have traditionally been understood to be a repository of memory in fact do not qualify as such because they lack a will to remember (such as an archaeological site). Conversely, things that seem unrelated to memory are actually closely tied to it (such as the abstract notions of generation or lineage). The scope of *lieux de mémoire* is, therefore, quite broad and extends beyond the material. Nora emphasizes

⁸² Ibid, 12.

⁸³ Ibid, 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 19.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

how the categorization of *lieux* can go on infinitely—portable or topographical, monumental or architectural, public or private, dominant or dominated, pure or composite—but most important is the existence of “an invisible thread linking apparently unconnected objects” and “a differentiated network to which all of these separate identities belong, an unconscious organization of collective memory.”⁸⁶ The use of the will to remember as a standard for *lieux de mémoire* emphasizes intent to the detriment of unintended instances of material culture, which unfairly escape Nora’s memory radar. Alois Riegl’s seminal study of the cult of monuments, discussed in chapter one, convincingly defends the value granted to unintended monuments of the past by retrospective cultural memory in the present. And since the majority of monuments fall into the unintentional category, his work is truly instrumental.

Notwithstanding that history and memory are distinct entities, as is affirmed by most scholars of memory, they do interact with and affect one another. Halbwachs, Nora and others do a fine job of developing the theoretical nuances of each, but do not effectively speak to their practical implications. A separation in theory does not perfectly translate into reality, for history and memory (particularly collective memory) do interact in life as it is actually experienced. An extreme manifestation of this interaction is state intervention in the historical record of social groups (examples of which were presented earlier in this chapter), the ultimate aim of which is the erasure or reformulation of the groups’ memory.⁸⁷ Evidence of the connection between history and memory can also be found in instances of resistance to such erasure, that is, in alternative or oppositional history. History can preserve memory as effectively as it can destroy it, a principle familiar to such writers/historians as Elie Wiesel and Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 23.

⁸⁷ Connerton, 14.



Memory is, by definition, always changing in a continuous process of forgetting, remembering, and reinterpreting. It is in a state of “permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived.”⁸⁸ We saw earlier in this chapter just how malleable memory is. The existence of tangible culture supports the persistence of memory; the destruction of it causes memory to take new shape. This is strikingly apparent within the Greco-Roman heritage, which can be characterized by “its emphasis on the individual’s relationship with the physical and cultural environment. The human sense of constant transformation and change put a premium on symbols of stability or permanence in the external world, an emphasis that influenced art, architecture, the formation of cities, and many other developments.”⁸⁹ The link between tangible culture and memory traces back to a complex philosophical—and often spiritual—relationship between time and space in the history of Western thought. But because it has borne out with particular clarity in times of war, a cross-cultural phenomenon, it has universal relevance. Through the phenomenon of memory, the past is actively constructed according to certain social conditions in the present. Memory is not just a storage place for information.

Memory and Material Experience

Because memory is a critical cohesive element within a community, it has the power to legitimate the present. Connerton contends that one of the implications of social memory is that “images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order.”⁹⁰ His use of the language of imagery does not reference visual imagery in particular (his argument targets the

⁸⁸ Nora, 8.

⁸⁹ Koshar 2000, 292.

⁹⁰ Connerton, 3.

bodily practices), but nevertheless does speak meaningfully to the physicality intrinsic to memory. Memory does not—indeed, cannot—exist only within the brain. People frequently materialize their memories, whether by official decree or in the unofficial production of artistic or literary works. Memory is also materialized on a micro level by each individual's actions, words, and narratives. Without all these reminders to ensure the “concretization”⁹¹ of the past, it would be significantly more difficult for memory to be sustained.

Earlier, we looked at examples of how material culture can be made political by the state in its attempt to compel society to remember the past in a manner consistent with official ideology. They corroborate the claim that “in the modern era, history lies before our eyes in the form of its ‘monuments.’”⁹² Thus, we already have many convincing concrete examples of the inseparability of memory and material experience. Furthermore, intuition and personal experience make this argument even more forceful. Human memory always fades, but physical representations of it can persist. In existence today is an infinite number of physical markers of human history that reach as far back as the origins of mankind. In the face of archaeological evidence, it is impossible to deny that material culture nearly always outlasts its creators. Indeed, it is partially because of their durability that human beings continue to create material expressions of themselves and their cultures.

Material culture is so ubiquitous that its influence often goes unnoticed and unchallenged. Although we may rarely overtly acknowledge it, our physical surroundings are critical to our ability to recall the past and frame the present:

The importance of the familiar lies in its attributed symbolism. Environment is perhaps the most effective symbol of experience. However profound an event, memory fades with time. Nevertheless, an experience can retain its sharpness through the medium of an environment which provided the context to that

⁹¹ Hirsch, 25.

⁹² Forster, 2.

experience... The contextual environment serves to reactivate a memory pattern, thus keeping it available for recall... So wherever building forms the background to an experience it assumes a meaning related to that experience. However discreet or undistinguished the architecture, it becomes *a permanent symbol of transient events*.⁹³

Indeed, it is largely because the environment in which one lives day to day is so “familiar” that its influence on the mind is so profound. For all its prevalence and persistence, the environment is profoundly transient. This quality invites an analysis of the extreme precariousness of tangible culture and memory in situations of armed conflict.

Lastly, it is important to clarify the definition of environment; in the preceding quotation, it refers only to architecture, which clearly does not have a monopoly on cultural significance. The definition of tangible culture as any visual manifestation of culture, delineated in chapter one, defines the scope of the term “environment” as it is used in this analysis. As will become clear by the end of this chapter and the next, the visual and physical nature of memory holds a great deal of potential for facilitating and strengthening the process of reconciliation in post-conflict situations.

Memory and Violence

The value of understanding the politicization of memory crystallizes in the phenomenon of violence; specifically, of organized or mass violence. We have already looked at examples of how memory is manipulated to, for instance, build nationalism, effect revolution, or deemphasize a troubling past. Sadly, it is the manipulation of memory to motivate and justify violence that was most commonplace in the twentieth century. Myths constructed around the past are too frequently myths of hatred and strife, and their perpetuation fuels a cycle of violence as memory is transmitted from generation to generation. As we will see, the “politics of memory and the psychology of violence are intimately related

⁹³ Smith, 46.

to each other.”⁹⁴ Of course, memory alone cannot explain violence—a multitude of circumstances and facts must be taken into account—but it does bring to bear meaningful insight on the problem and possible solutions.

Scholarship on genocide has grown as much in breadth as in volume and now employs more approaches than just the political. The vocabulary of psychology and sociology is increasingly employed to analyze the causes, execution, and consequences of genocide. This paper, too, takes the socio-psychological approach in order to connect armed conflict and peace building with tangible culture. The inadequacy of the political approach to violence is most acute with respect to reconciliation, whose success depends overwhelmingly on the active willingness of people themselves to establish peace and less on formal treaties and other acts of state. Realistically, the sustainability of peace for the future is inevitably and deeply influenced by the manner in which people remember and interpret the conflict—by, in other words, collective memory. And as we have just concluded, memory is in turn intimately related to material culture.

Because memory is collective, it can cultivate and instill social values that are the basis for concrete decisions and actions. Given the simple fact that memory affects behavior, the notion of collective memory can be extremely useful in understanding collective action. The individual, as the repository of collective memory, makes his or her choices based in large part upon a particular sense of what is or is not expected of him or her by society. Recalling that the basis of the theory of collective memory is the Durkheimian belief in the inseparability of the individual and society, it is easy to see how memory can inspire group action. After all, though genocide may by definition occur on a mass scale, it first requires individual actors willing to carry it out. How individual morality is influenced by external

⁹⁴ Hirsch, 3.

social forces is one of the most troubling and challenging ethical questions for humanity, and is at the crux of the problem of genocide. Memory is neither an answer to this question nor an explanation for genocide; it is, however, an invaluable analytical tool that can initiate the process of ultimately finding them.

Hirsch argues that the state is able to justify and execute mass violence if the right cultural conditions exist. Cultural conditions are, for the most part, constituted by myths and ideologies, which are expressed through the language of the dominant power and perpetuated through socialization. I concur with this idea, but believe that myth and ideology find expression in more than just language—in, for instance, monuments and other material culture. Once the state is able to exploit collective memory so that the individual buys into its ideology, it can persuade him or her to join acts of mass violence because these acts have been construed as fully justifiable.⁹⁵ The genocide that was perpetrated in the Balkans stands as contemporary verification of this theory.

In the Balkans, we will see how authority incited urbicide, or mass violence against tangible culture. Implicitly affirming that memory is manifested in tangible culture, ethnic groups sought to break down their opponents' memory of the past—and, consequently, their sense of stability and identity—by destroying tangible culture. Most likely unaware of the theoretical underpinnings of their actions, the parties to the conflict intuitively understood that

iconoclasm has a very useful political, educational, and psychological role in times of violence. Smashing hated images and artifacts of the past can serve as a surrogate for, as well as a stimulus to, angry violence against human representatives of the old order. It can help erase reminders of previous holders of power and majesty... Revolutionary iconoclasm [is] a catharsis, a cleansing of the system, and a way to focus intense rage.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid, 128.

⁹⁶ Stites, 2.

In a situation of revolution or armed conflict, rejection of a group and its ideology is most effectively expressed not verbally, but visually, such as through the destruction of physical images and markers of that group. This kind of destruction is more powerful because it is a “menacing signal of further and more ominous violence.”⁹⁷ The intended result is the disruption of the opponents’ ability to sustain and recall their collective memory and, therefore, to maintain their unity.

Some scholars believe that in order to redirect the coercive power of social currents, it is necessary to refocus on the individual dimension of memory and reject the “constrictive, reconstructed memory manipulated by states and individuals to serve political ends.”⁹⁸ For them, it is the power of the individual to exercise will that provides hope for the cessation of violence: “The individual actor, now the repository of personal and social memory, in turn, becomes the transmitter, the eyewitness through whom history is constructed and interpreted.”⁹⁹ Many writers since World War II, in particular autobiographers, have held this position. However, an emphasis on the collective quality of memory is still relevant when post-conflict reconciliation, not genocide prevention, is the subject of discussion, as it is here. Reconciliation is absolute in its requirement of collective support and participation.

Memory and Reconciliation

This chapter has clearly demonstrated the ways in which memory can and has facilitated violence by shaping the perceptions of a society; yet what of its potential to foster peace? Earlier, we examined historical instances in which memory was manipulated to bring people together and cultivate nationalism. Of course, nationalism has very often been the starting point for violence and conflict, but memory can also “serve as the basis of social

⁹⁷ Ibid, 10.

⁹⁸ Hirsch, 96.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 4.

cohesion in a heterogeneous nation.”¹⁰⁰ Being wary of the strong possibility that the cohesion created by memory can be illusory, it is possible then to hypothesize about the potential of memory to create genuine and peaceful communities.

In light of the extensive pattern of genocide in the twentieth century, memory, seen as the panacea for human conflict and violence, is very much in vogue. Governments, schools, and civic groups constantly warn society not to forget, for example, the atrocities of the Holocaust. By resisting the erasure or revision of past mistakes, memory is, ideally, a preventative force. Initially, it seems counter-intuitive that reminding society of past conflict would decrease the chances of its reoccurrence. Memory can indeed become a “yoke,” if the future is based on the model of the past, rather than on past memories.¹⁰¹ Some thinkers, like Thomas Friedman, have pointed to Israel as an example of an excessive and debilitating orientation to the past. In the long run, however, memory has the potential to help society concentrate on improving the future. The complexities involved in maximizing this potential will be explored in the conclusion.

Memory is a highly complex social construct whose role is much more than to act as a reminder. The result of the recent enthusiasm over memory has been the realization that “to never forget” is itself not a solution for present or future problems. Remembering is a means to an end (the end being a better future), not the end itself: “Although simply remembering may be necessary as a start, memory must serve as a foundation upon which to build a humane, just, and peaceful future.”¹⁰² This insight is at the heart of the recommendations offered in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 26.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 33.

¹⁰² Ibid, 35.

Chapter Three: Case Study
Reconstruction as a prospect for peace in the former Yugoslavia

Destruction of tangible culture in the Balkans: 1992-1999

During the last decade of the twentieth century, the Balkans was the site of destruction of cultural heritage so massive in scale that it captured worldwide attention amidst even the horrifying human carnage and bloodshed simultaneously wreaked by war. It would be erroneous to claim that the devastation inflicted upon the region's tangible culture exceeded that inflicted upon its people; it would be equally irresponsible, however, to neglect the critical importance of this dimension of the war's aftermath in considering the viability of and options for peace. Systematic murder and rape and the systematic pillage of tangible culture are both manifestations of ethnic cleansing—"the expulsion of an 'undesirable' population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these."¹⁰³ The term "urbicide" has recently emerged in realization of an increasingly intimate connection between genocide of human life and of human culture.

Attribution of the recent conflicts to ancient hatreds or ethnic tribalism is as dangerous as it is inaccurate in its ignorance of the basic factual history of the region. The Balkan peninsula, owing to its unique geographical position, was the locus of cultural convergence that consistently and fundamentally shaped the nature and composition of the communities that developed there over millennia. The presence of several major civilizations on the same land provided the foundation for a pluralistic, rather than divisive, culture that existed predominantly in peace until the most recent conflict, excepting several nationalistic clashes

¹⁰³ Bell-Fialkoff, Andrew. 1993. A Brief History of Ethnic Cleansing. *Foreign Affairs* (Summer): 1.

during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that largely involved the interests of competing imperial powers.

Ethnic pluralism in the Balkans, a concept that almost rings with absurdity in the wake of a contemporary reality that directly belies it, was visually reflected in and evidenced by the physical appearance of the cities. Whereas the former Yugoslavia may have failed to articulate its multi-ethnic heritage politically, it managed to do so aesthetically: “The history here is reflected in the buildings: Muslim, Christian and Jewish townspeople lived, worked and worshipped side by side... The siting of architecture is an intentional, thoughtful, political act. People who cannot abide the sight of each other will not build the houses and monuments of their religious life in the shadows of those of the others.”¹⁰⁴ To illustrate, in the center of Sarajevo, sometimes referred to as a “small Jerusalem,” in an area of one half of one square kilometer stood a mosque, synagogue, Orthodox church, and Roman Catholic cathedral, all but the last dating back to the sixteenth century. Indeed, “it is this architectural, literary, and human evidence—the monuments, the books, and the people who have treasured them—of a flourishing multiconfessional culture that ethnoreligious militants have sought to efface.”¹⁰⁵ A mass of structures that persisted through centuries abruptly fell during the course of a few short years of war. This strongly suggests that the invisibility (both literal and theoretical) of the Balkans’ pluralistic past is attributable to the aims and strategies of contemporary nationalistic ideologies.

The location and nature of the damage to tangible culture during the wars solidly point to the existence of deliberate and calculated policies of heritage destruction. Most of the buildings and monuments destroyed were located in areas outside of—often far outside of—

¹⁰⁴ Riedlmayer, Andras. 1995. *Killing Memory: The Targeting of Bosnia’s Cultural Heritage*. Testimony presented at a hearing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (4 April).

¹⁰⁵ Sells, 4.

the officially declared war zones. It is not insignificant that the outlying countryside was usually under the control of various nationalist groups or armies. Even more directly incriminating is the type of damage incurred; many buildings were bombed or set afire from within or bore the markings of vandalism and graffiti. Furthermore, statements by eyewitnesses, who were people usually in the process of fleeing the scenes they describe, explicitly corroborate the role played by armies in the ruin of so many manifestations of ethnic heritage. In Kosovo alone, forty-seven percent of refugees responding to an NGO survey actually saw Serb forces destroying mosques.¹⁰⁶ Thus, assertions that the destruction of tangible culture was simply collateral damage sustained in the course of normal warfare have no basis, granting that there was indeed a limited amount of unintentional damage resulting from, for instance, NATO's aerial bombardment campaign. Acknowledgement of ethnical cleansing as a motive has important implications for understanding the impact of the damage and identifying the appropriate course of future reconstruction efforts.

Serbian Destruction of Heritage in Bosnia-Herzegovina

The multi-ethnic composition of the Balkan region is particularly manifest in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which at the eve of the war had a population divided almost evenly between Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and Muslim Bosniaks. This reality was inseparable from the identity of the Bosnian people and especially from the expression of that identity in tangible forms:

In order to recognize and understand Bosnian cultural identity, it was always crucially important to realize that composite integration was its essence: the parallel existence of three separate traditions... In the eighties, in Sarajevo and Bosnia, an unusually rich simultaneous existence of cultures and sub-cultures of the most varied kinds evolved. In it, and this needs to be stressed, there was increasing freedom for a new affirmation and valorization of ethno-

¹⁰⁶ Herscher, Andrew and Andras Riedlmayer. 2000. The destruction and reconstruction of architectural Heritage in Kosovo: A Post-War Report. *US/ICOMOS Newsletter* (July-August).

confessional traditions. This vibrant reality was experienced as an integral cultural ambience.¹⁰⁷

During the medieval period, Bosnia was home to churches of three different branches of Christianity: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and an indigenous Bosnian branch. The fifteenth century took a different turn with the establishment of Turkish Ottoman rule and inaugurated five centuries of prolific construction of secular and religious architecture in the Islamic tradition. In 1878, however, the Ottoman era was concluded with the transfer of Bosnia to the auspices of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which meant the permeation of a more European, Viennese style and modernizing ambitions into both existing and new architecture.

A good example of architecture reflecting history is the Bosnian National Library, a Moorish-revival structure that prior to World War I housed the national Parliament and then, during the interwar years, Sarajevo's city hall. This landmark was known as the city's "most emblematic building, an architectural symbol of the bizarre and entangled history,"¹⁰⁸ a building whose "mix of imposing masonry and architectural frivolity captured the city's pre-war personality."¹⁰⁹ From August 25 to 27, 1992, it was shelled by Serb forces positioned in the hills overlooking the city until it caught fire and was reduced to ashes, marking the largest single act of book burning in modern human history.¹¹⁰ Burnt, sooty fragments of paper drifted over the city for days.

Only about ten percent of the Library's two million volumes, which included 155,000 rare books and manuscripts, survived the attack. The collection was notable for its representation of a wide variety of languages and scripts: it physically embodied the richly

¹⁰⁷ Lovrenovic, Ivan. 2001. *Bosnia: A Cultural History*. New York: New York University Press, 209-210.

¹⁰⁸ Lovrenovic, Ivan. 1994. The Hatred of Memory: In Sarajevo, Burned Books and Murdered Pictures. *New York Times* (28 May).

¹⁰⁹ The Bosnian Manuscript Ingathering Project. Accessed at <http://www.kakarigi.net/manu/ingather.htm>. This statement was made in a Reuters report filed by a correspondent who watched the building as it burned.

¹¹⁰ Riedlmayer 1995.

diverse cultural history, character, and spirit of the Bosnian tradition. Masses of the city's exhausted, long-besieged citizens formed a human chain to rescue as many volumes from the flames as they could, exposing themselves to sniper fire in the process. Explaining the crowd's motivation, one participant said, "We managed to save just a very few special books. Everything else burnt down. And a lot of our heritage, lay down there in ashes."¹¹¹ At present, the building is still in ruin and only the walls remain.

Earlier that same year, on May 17, another Serb attack razed Sarajevo's Oriental Institute and its contents, which had constituted the largest collection of Islamic and Jewish manuscripts and Ottoman documents in southeastern Europe.¹¹² A total of 5,263 manuscripts, 200,000 documents, numerous illuminated manuscripts, and several ancient copies of the Qur'an were burned within days.¹¹³ The priceless collection, a majority of which dated back to the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia in the fifteenth century, represented a vast repository of knowledge about Islamic science, history, and medicine.

Another prominent target of Serb attacks in 1992 was the National Museum, whose contents were largely destroyed by purposeful, repeated shelling. That the shelling was deliberate is beyond question. During the attack, Serb gunmen struck the nearby Holiday Inn, where most foreign correspondents in Sarajevo were residing. When one reporter questioned the gunmen about the motivation behind the strike on the hotel, she received an apology and an explanation that it had been completely accidental—they had in fact been aiming for the museum.¹¹⁴ Among the museum's irreplaceable items was the Sarajevo Haggadah, an ancient Jewish prayer book created in the fourteenth century and brought to Bosnia by Jewish

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Johnson, David P. 1998. Scholars Help Bosnia Rebuild Destroyed Libraries. *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (December): 64-65.

¹¹⁴ Riedlmayer 1995.

refugees from the Spanish Inquisition. Fortunately, it was saved during the Serb attack by a team of Bosnian museum employees that included a Muslim, an Orthodox Serb, and a Catholic, a poignant testament to its immense, trans-cultural value.¹¹⁵

Although it is not possible to cleanly separate the religious and ethnic dimensions of either Bosnian culture or the genocide that occurred, the destruction of religious heritage was particularly appalling because of its sheer extent and thoroughness. The Republic Srpska, the part of Bosnia-Herzegovina delineated ethnically Serb by the Dayton Agreement, was strictly purged of physical traces of Islamic heritage; of the roughly one thousand mosques in this region, only one—located in a very rural, inaccessible area—remained in 2001.¹¹⁶ Banja Luka, one of the most historic towns in this area, was taken over by Serb nationalists in April 1992 and not one of the sixteen historic mosques located there was spared.

On the night of May 7, 1993, the celebrated Ferhadija Mosque, built in 1583, was repeatedly dynamited; when the minaret tenaciously refused to fall, troops took to bulldozers and jackhammers to complete its demolition. The spot was summarily turned into a parking lot. Soon thereafter, a similar fate befell Banja Luka's Arnaudija mosque, the Aladza in nearby Foca (known as the Colored Mosque), Trebinje's 500-year-old mosque, and hundreds of others throughout the Bosnian countryside.¹¹⁷ The targeting of mosques played a strategic role in the expulsion of Muslim inhabitants from Serb-held territories.

Bosnian Croats, too, suffered from these tactics, enduring the destruction of over half of the region's Roman Catholic churches, including the Franciscan monastery and church of Plehan and the uniquely-preserved medieval Gothic chapel and shrine at Podmilacje. The effectiveness of the Serb policy of destroying the tangible culture of competing ethnicities is

¹¹⁵ Sells, 2.

¹¹⁶

¹¹⁷ Lovrenovic, 208.

evidenced by the fact that nearly all the half million non-Serbs who lived in the region were killed or displaced between 1992 and 1995.¹¹⁸

Croatian Destruction of Heritage in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Destruction of Muslim heritage in Bosnia-Herzegovina by Serbs was compounded by Croat forces after the parties' alliances shifted in mid-way through the war. This two-fold effort ensured that the damage would be sweeping and profound: "What the Serb artillery missed, the Croat nationalist militia...took care of."¹¹⁹ Early in the war, Serbian President Milosevic and Croatian President Franjo Tudjman had secretly agreed to partition Bosnia into a Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia. Tudjman explicitly delineated Croatian responsibility for the "Europeanization" of the portion of the Bosnian population to be assimilated into Croatia. He did not simply wish to neutralize political aspirations among Bosnian Muslims; he specifically and emphatically viewed Islamic cultural influences as contamination upon what was to be a distinctly European country.¹²⁰

Nowhere in Bosnia is the destruction wrought by Croat extremists—namely, the HVO, or Croatia Defense Council—more apparent than in Mostar, a city that was long regarded as one of the most cosmopolitan in the republic. Pre-war census figures indicate that Mostar's population was twenty percent Bosnian Serb, forty percent Bosniak, and forty percent Bosnian Croat.¹²¹ The city also had one of the highest percentages of mixed-faith marriages in Bosnia.¹²² This rich composition derived not only from its size—Mostar is Herzegovina's largest city and capital, and is the second largest city in Bosnia-Herzegovina (second only to

¹¹⁸ Riedlmayer 1995.

¹¹⁹ Sells, 3.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 95.

¹²¹ Ravn, Bente. Bridge over troubled waters. *SFOR (NATO Stabilization Force) Informer*. Accessed at <http://www.nato.int/sfor/engineers/mostarbridge/introduction/introduc.htm>.

¹²² Kaiser, Colin. Crimes against culture. UNESCO. Accessed at http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000_09/uk/sign2.htm.

Sarajevo)—but also from its unique history of ethnic and religious co-existence, a history that was embodied most prominently in the Stari Most. The etymology of the city’s very name is a testament to the high symbolic value of this bridge in defining its identity: “stari,” meaning old, combined with “most,” or bridge, to yield Mostar.¹²³ The town, which has documented roots dating back to the fifteenth century, grew over the centuries along the Neretva River and the various bridges that connected its banks.

Of these bridges, Stari Most was by far the most influential in both the practical and symbolic lives of Mostar’s inhabitants (fig. 4). Constructed in 1566 during the period of Ottoman rule (which began with the conquest of the fledgling town in the second half of the fifteenth century), the bridge provided the transportation infrastructure needed to catalyze trade and, ultimately, the town’s development from a small medieval settlement into a commercial center. Stari Most did not just facilitate the economic prosperity of the incipient town—it was also the axis around which the cultural dimensions of Mostar aligned. A graceful white stone arch flanked on either side by towers, it was widely regarded as a masterpiece of Turkish architectural technique and style. However, its cultural role was not merely aesthetic. Early on, the core of the Muslim community encompassed both ends of the bridge, but by the twentieth century, there had developed a Croat enclave on the west side of the river and Bosniak and Serb communities on the east. Bridges have long been a symbol of the connection of things once separate. Indeed, Stari Most was a literal and metaphorical joining of this geographical ethnic separation, symbolizing the “ability of a culturally pluralistic society to flourish for almost five centuries, despite the very real tensions among

¹²³ Alternative sources state that “mostar” means “bridge-keeper.” Most importantly, both translations refer back to the prominence of the bridge to the city’s history and identity.

the different religious groups.”¹²⁴ Its importance eventually grew so that it actually became more than just a landmark and symbol—it was the city’s *raison d’être*.¹²⁵

After nine years of construction and 427 years of continuous existence, Stari Most was destroyed in a mere thirty minutes on November 9, 1993, under the intensive and targeted bombardment of Croatian forces. The bridge’s status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site was no deterrent; indeed, international recognition of its value very likely played into the Croats’ motivation in targeting it. One soldier participating in the bombing said in response to a journalist’s inquiry: “It is not enough to cleanse Mostar of the Muslims, the relics must also be destroyed.”¹²⁶ This insight chillingly illuminates the logic behind cultural cleansing.

Given the politicization of material culture in situations of conflict (particularly ethnic conflict), which is strikingly apparent in this example, one can begin to see why its destruction is thought to be a powerful politico-military tactic. It is important to emphasize that although Stari Most was a product of Ottoman influence, it was neither religious nor political in nature: “Secular and sacral heritage became ethnicized: before the war, nobody in Mostar would have said that the Old Bridge was a ‘Muslim’ monument. Its destruction by Croat tanks turned it into one.”¹²⁷ In spite of the bridge’s apolitical origins, and the fact that the contemporary Bosnian Muslim community that endured its demolition is quite secularized, Croat forces perceived and then exploited the link between visible symbols of culture to a group’s identity when it brought down Stari Most. The bridge’s absence implied much more

¹²⁴ Sells, xv.

¹²⁵ Mostar. UNESCO. Accessed at http://www.unesco.org/culture/heritage/tangible/bosnia/html_eng/monument.shtmlhttp://www.unesco.org/culture/heritage/tangible/bosnia/html_eng/monument.shtml.

¹²⁶ Riedlmayer 1995.

¹²⁷ Kaiser, 2.

than a physical severance between the city's Bosniaks and Croats; it created and reflected a psychological chasm that replaced what was once a "common civic identity."¹²⁸

Stari Most was not the only casualty of the Croat assault on the heritage of Mostar's citizenry. The city's historic Ottoman quarter suffered heavy shelling, incurring intense damage to the Tabacica Mosque, built circa 1600. Croat nationalists also attacked Prozor in October 1992, killing and raping residents and destroying mosques, essentially mimicking Serb tactics in eastern Bosnia.¹²⁹ Later, on 23 August 1993, according to the UN High Commission for Refugees, the HVO stormed Stolac—a town it had helped to liberate from the Serbs months earlier—and destroyed four of its beautiful seventeenth-century mosques, for which the town was known.¹³⁰ One of these was the Careva or Carsijska mosque, built in 1519 and thought to be one of the three oldest mosques in all of Bosnia.¹³¹ The army then turned to Pocitelj. After obliterating its renowned sixteenth-century Islamic art and architecture (fig. 5), it installed a large cross on the side of the road entering the town.¹³² Furthermore, the loss of material heritage was not suffered by Bosniaks alone, for Croat forces also targeted several Serbian Orthodox churches throughout the republic. Just outside Mostar, the remarkable monastery of Zitomislic, described as an "ecological and architectural complex,"¹³³ was destroyed.

Serbian Destruction of Albanian Heritage in Kosovo

Serbs have long sought to solidify their initial acquisition of Kosovo from the Ottoman Empire in 1912 by establishing historic claims to the land, claims that relied heavily

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Sells, 96.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 97.

¹³¹ Banac, Ivan. 2002. Games beneath Stolac. *The Bosnia Report* 27-28 (January-May). Accessed at http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/report_format.cfm?articleid=852&reportid=153.

¹³² Sells, 103.

¹³³ Lovrenovic, 209.

on the ability to concretely trace physical elements of Serb presence there. Uniquely convincing were the churches and monasteries that testified to an Orthodox heritage. Thus, the religious dimension of Serbian identity was emphasized and gradually came to constitute its core: “[T]he medieval architecture of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo testified both to the Serbs’ level of civilization and to their past presence in the province.”¹³⁴

Accordingly, a two-fold cultural policy was pursued: the first component mandated the preservation of existing Patriarchate buildings, and the second promoted the prolific construction of new churches. This construction often was deliberately situated on land where, according to medieval documents, a church once stood, so the activity was cleverly couched in terms of *reconstruction*. In this way, Serbs successfully endowed their religious architecture in Kosovo with “a continuous existence on an ideological level as a marker of Serb presence in the province.”¹³⁵ The period of communist rule under Tito halted church construction, but it was resumed in the 1980s, after his death, with revived nationalist vigor.

The Serbs applied the conceptual correlation between tangible culture and territorial claims to Kosovo’s Albanian population. Beginning with the retraction of autonomy in 1989, intensifying after the outbreak of open hostilities in 1998, and concluding with the entrance of NATO in 1999, Serb forces targeted both Albanians and Albanian heritage in their attempts to maintain control over the province. As masses of people were driven from their homes and towns, the physical traces of their lives and ties to the land were simultaneously eradicated. It was a deliberate maneuver to deepen the indignities suffered by the displaced peoples and discourage future attempts at return. Furthermore, it was thought that by erasing visible

¹³⁴ Herscher, Andrew and Andras Riedlmayer. 2001. Monument and crime. *The Bosnia Report* (June-October).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

indications of Albanian heritage, that group's right to the land was somehow fundamentally negated.

With religion at the core of the hostility between Serbs and Albanians, it is no surprise that Albanian religious heritage suffered extensively during the conflict. As the most prominent symbols of Albanian culture, Muslim places of worship were among the most mercilessly pursued targets: 219 mosques were destroyed, wiping out an entire third of all mosques that were counted in Kosovo in 1993.¹³⁶ The worst damage occurred in the northwestern province of Pec, where all thirty-six mosques were either destroyed or vandalized. Among these thirty-six were the fourteenth-century Mosque of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror and the renowned eighteenth-century Red Mosque.

Architecture of a more secular but equally invaluable nature—the ancient, indigenous kullas—did not escape the Serbs' strategy of cultural cleansing. These fortified stone residential towers, unique to Albania, were used to house entire families of thirty or more right up to modern times.¹³⁷ Indeed, they provided the basic framework for the extended kinship system. Although they originated centuries before the introduction of Ottoman influence to the region and do not have Islamic roots, they were closely associated with ancient Albanian culture and heritage and, consequently, were extremely attractive targets. They numbered nearly five hundred before the war; of these, less than ten percent survived. The destruction of kullas created a break in generational continuity that forced a direct and profound change in the way of life of Albanians who resided in them—and, in fact, of all Albanians, owing to the kulla's role as a cultural symbol. An estimated 70,000 homes were

¹³⁶ Riedlmayer 1995.

¹³⁷ Interestingly, it was the widespread practice of blood revenge in Albania in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—also unique to Albania—that initially necessitated the construction of such defensive towers as homes. In recent times, kullas had no military purpose, despite Serb claims that they did and so were destroyed justifiably.

destroyed throughout Albania from 1998 to 1999,¹³⁸ but the ruin brought to the few hundred kullas arguably had a more devastating impact because “the destruction of historic architecture has a unique significance in that it signifies the attempt to target not just the homes and properties of individual members of Kosovo’s Albanian population, but that entire population as a culturally defined entity.”¹³⁹

Albanian Destruction of Serbian Heritage in Kosovo

Ironically, the cultural cleansing pursued by the Serbs was justified on the basis of vandalism of Orthodox churches by Albanians during the 1990s. Not only were these incidents of vandalism sporadic and reportedly exaggerated by Serb media, they were at least partially provoked by the aggressive church construction campaign carried out by the Serbs in spite of ethnic tensions that were already percolating. Serbs responded to the vandalism with destruction exponentially more massive and systematic, as has already been detailed. The cycle of violence against tangible culture continued in the summer of 1999 with the cease-fire and subsequent return of Albanian refugees, who, upon seeing the vast and utter damage done to their heritage, began a wave of so-called revenge attacks against Serb Orthodox architecture. Left in its wake were seventy-six churches, the most renowned of which were the chapel of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the northwest, the monastery of the Holy Trinity located near Musutiste, and the monastery of the Holy Archangels Gabriel and Michael in the village Buzovik, all with roots in the fourteenth century. A total of twenty-five structures were damaged that were also of medieval vintage.

International peacekeeping forces charged with protection of Serb heritage were unable to prevent Albanian attacks in more peripheral areas from which Serb minorities were

¹³⁸ Herscher and Riedlmayer 2001. Data from the United Nations High Commission on Refugees.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

fleeing. It was reported that with heightened UN alert and public appeals by Albanian leaders, the frequency of such attacks dropped.¹⁴⁰ As recently as the summer of 2000, however, several Albanians allegedly bombed the Church of the Holy Prophet Elihaj in a village near Pristina, in an attempt to complete the partial bombing that had been executed a year earlier.¹⁴¹

Destruction of Serbian Heritage throughout the Balkans

Decades before the most recent conflict, during the Second World War, Serbian heritage suffered extensive damage. More than four hundred Serbian Orthodox churches were destroyed during this period; later, their protection and reconstruction was prohibited by the post-war Communist regime that ruled Yugoslavia. The few that were rebuilt were simply targeted again during the 1990s. Looted treasures had been returned to Orthodox dioceses in the 1980s—only to be destroyed by military bombs. The history of Serbian material culture eloquently draws out the cyclical nature of the damage done to material culture during war.

It is important to note that the reliability of much of the information on the destruction of Serbian heritage is questionable. While all parties involved in the conflict were guilty of acting on nationalist extremism, a number of reports produced by Serbs about their heritage include biased remarks in their presentation and analysis of the facts. For instance, one report stated: “The war, *forced upon the Serbian people*, has brought the Serbian Orthodox Church and its faithful in that area to the verge of annihilation.”¹⁴² Also, there were many accusations by Serbs of extensive damage inflicted by NATO’s aerial bombardment campaign in 1999. Serbs claimed that their cultural heritage was

¹⁴⁰ Herscher and Riedlmayer 2000.

¹⁴¹ Kosovo Church Leveled. 2000. *Archaeology Magazine* (1 August). Accessed at <http://www.archaeology.org/magazine.php?page=online/news/kosovo>.

¹⁴² Spiritual Genocide. Accessed at <http://spc.org.yu/Genocid/genocide.html>. Emphasis mine.

on the target list of NATO aggressors, just as the National Library was in 1941 by Hitler's Germany. The difference is that this time the tactics are not the same, because at the turn of this century that wouldn't be popular with the worldwide public opinion... but with 'diluted' demolition and 'missed' hits the same goals are being achieved, and the whole damage so far isn't any smaller comparing to the National Library.¹⁴³

Such accusations were ultimately proved to be unfounded by field work conducted by Andrew Herscher and Andras Riedlmayer of Harvard University in 2000, not long after the NATO campaign. It is from objective, nonpartisan sources like these that documentation of the status of other groups' heritage is primarily drawn.¹⁴⁴ These sources do not address the damage done to Serbian material culture with as much depth as when they speak to the destruction of the heritage of Bosnian and Albanian Muslims. This reflects either a disproportionate distribution of damage or, as Serbs would argue, an institutional bias in the research funded, performed, and then covered in the press. Due to the uncertainty around the multitude of facts put forth during and even after the war, it is essential to maintain a critical perspective.

According to the U.S. National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS),¹⁴⁵ most of the damage done to Serbian heritage was borne by religious sites, though secular heritage, such as the nineteenth-century commercial district and eighteenth-century Tabatchki bridge in Pech, also suffered. Two twelfth-century churches near Kurshumlija, the Church of St. Nikolas and the Church of the Virgin, were damaged by bombs; both were built in contemporary Byzantine style by Stefan Nemanja between 1158 and 1166. In Prizren, Kosovo, the Churches of the Virgin Ljeviska and the Church of the

¹⁴³ Omickus, Marko. Destruction of Cultural Monuments. *Balkan Repository Project*. Accessed at <http://www.balkan-archive.org.yu/politics/kosovo/documents/Omickus0499.html>

¹⁴⁴ Of course, Serbian organizations (especially the Orthodox Church) disagree with this assertion, and criticize assessments done by other governments and civic groups as deliberately incomplete and inaccurate. See *Spiritual Genocide*, 4-5.

¹⁴⁵ As cited in Wiseman, James. 1999. The legacy of medieval Serbia. *Archaeology Magazine* 52 (September/October).

Savior were also damaged, as was the Gratchanitsa monastery, located about six miles south of Prishtina. When the fourteenth-century monastery at Devich was struck, the gallery of medieval painting it held—the largest of its kind in Yugoslavia—was severely damaged, as were important frescoes on the walls of its church.¹⁴⁶

Revision of History

Factual evidence of the mass destruction of material culture during the Balkan conflict provides a context in which the theoretical principles of history, memory, and violence discussed in chapter two become salient and more comprehensible. The Balkan experience shows us that state-sponsored revision of history through mediation of the physical environment is alive and well. Efforts were made on all sides to generate monumental, antiquarian, and critical history. By destroying representations of other ethnicities, nationalists tried to alter the historical record of a particular locale. And by erecting representations of their own heritage instead, they sought to evidence the superiority of their physical might and, more importantly, their culture. The war on cultural heritage has affected the psychological disposition of communities and individuals inundated most directly not by political goings-on, but by real changes in the immediate conditions of their existence. The destruction of tangible culture has not only undermined each ethnicity's unique heritage; it has undermined a collective history of shared, interethnic living, with grave implications for prospects for reconciliation. Evidence of this conclusion can be found in the continued displacement of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The aim of the destruction of material culture in the Balkans is very transparent. There was virtually no military justification for the harm done to churches, mosques, libraries, museums, monuments, and other such structures. It did indirectly achieve a military aim in

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 5.

forcing the departure of ethnic minorities from territories held by opposing armies through fear. Yet violence targeted at people themselves would have alone been sufficient in achieving territorial gain. The additional violence inflicted upon material culture is a frightening testament to the depth of each group's commitment to ethnic cleansing. The goal was not simply to displace or kill the enemy; it was to eradicate the enemy's entire culture and existence from the historical record and collective memory.

Denial

Traces of denial were apparent long before the war concluded and each side began to point the finger of blame. The depth with which nationalists on all sides believed in the legitimacy of their genocidal actions blinded them to the reality that they were even executing genocide. For example, Croat President Tudjman's plan of "Europeanization" in Bosnia was but a "euphemism, like 'ethnic cleansing,' for the annihilation of Slavic Muslim people and culture and the creation of pure Christian states on the rubble of the once multi-religious Bosnia."¹⁴⁷ Croat leaders have described the destruction of cultural property caused by their forces as collateral damage, yet physical evidence attests to an odd pattern of ruined Islamic properties situated alongside Croat structures still perfectly intact.¹⁴⁸ Similar justifications have also been used by the other parties, who are equally eager to avoid accountability for actions that are illegal under international law. And since "reconstruction will be hampered until the sensitive but fundamental issue of accountability has been resolved,"¹⁴⁹ denial is among the gravest of the many obstacles to reconciliation in the region.

¹⁴⁷ Sells, 97.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 96.

¹⁴⁹ Rebuilding Srebrenica. Accessed at http://advocacy.net/autoupdate.com/cpage_view/srebrenica_01b_18_86.html.

Even more disturbing than the parties' denial of accountability for the destruction of cultural property is their denial that the destruction ever happened. For instance, after the infamous attack on Zvornik, the newly installed Serbian mayor declared: "There never were any mosques in Zvornik."¹⁵⁰ Pursuing a more subtle strategy of erasure, Croat authorities organized a conference titled "Historical Development of Croat Pocerje" after the destruction of evidence of that town's extensive Islamic heritage.¹⁵¹ Having explored in chapter two the profound implications of the manipulation of memory by the state, this tendency towards erasure can be read as an indication of the status of the reconciliation process in the Balkans. It suggests the persistence of nationalistic sentiments and deep resistance to the multiethnic state endorsed by the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Limitations of the Dayton Peace Agreement

Signed on 11 December 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement laid out the conditions for peace and a detailed plan for its implementation. It contained specific provisions for the demilitarization of the parties to the conflict and for the eventual replacement of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) by NATO's Implementation Force (IFOR), which did in fact occur at the end of 2002. Yet as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees learned through its involvement on the ground, the accord did not devise an adequate strategy for the civilian end of implementation, specifically as regards the right of refugees and displaced persons to freely return to their homes (Annex VII of the agreement):

The military provisions of the agreement were successfully implemented and there have been no clashes between the military forces of either side since the agreement was signed. On the civilian side, however, the agreement left the nationalist leaders in power on both sides, undermining, among other things, prospects for reconciliation amongst the different ethnic groups and the possibility for displaced people and refugees to return to the areas from which

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 4.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 104.

they were “ethnically cleansed” during the war. With its limited provisions for policing, *reconstruction and reconciliation*, High Commissioner Ogata pointed out in 1997 that the agreement left humanitarian actors like UNHCR “to grapple with essentially political issues.”¹⁵²

By leaving it to the perpetrators of the conflict to voluntarily create the safe environment necessary for resettlement, the Dayton Agreement made an egregious error, the consequences of which are most apparent in low number of refugees and displaced persons who have returned to their original pre-war homes. Despite intense efforts by UNHCR to encourage people to do so, approximately one million people remain displaced.¹⁵³ In 2000, the UNHCR reported “minimal progress in rebuilding genuinely multi-ethnic societies in either Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina.”¹⁵⁴

The post-war experience in the former Yugoslavia evidences with great clarity the limitations of a purely militaristic approach to peace-building. It underscores that peace is not necessarily synonymous with reconciliation. Resettlement, both a precursor to and barometer of reconciliation, cannot occur in the absence of efforts by civil society. Most immediately, such efforts must be directed at the establishment of public order and rule of law. A long-term perspective, though, indicates the critical importance of the reconstruction of the physical landscape: “Restoration of heritage is closely linked to the return of refugees, and to the preservation of authentic forms of the [Balkan] spirit.”¹⁵⁵

Reconstruction is not merely an economically driven process; it is a process imbued with great symbolic value. This is acknowledged in the language of the UNHCR, which frequently references the multifaceted “process of return, reconstruction, and

¹⁵² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2000. *The State of the World's Refugees: Fifty years of humanitarian action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 229-230. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2002. 2002: The Year in Review. *Refugees Magazine*:10.

¹⁵⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2000, 231.

¹⁵⁵ Banac, 3.

reconciliation.”¹⁵⁶ It is just as important to rebuild churches, mosques, and museums as it is to rebuild homes, schools, and infrastructure. In fact, some go so far as to regard the former as “more important than any debate about development, investment, cantonization or constituent status.”¹⁵⁷ And given that the scope of the work of humanitarian agencies like UNHCR is generally limited to rebuilding of an economic nature, UNESCO and bodies of its kind are integral to the process of post-war reconstruction.

Reconstruction Efforts

Nearly a decade has passed since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. With technical and monetary assistance from individual nations, UNESCO, and other non-profit organizations, reconstruction has since gotten well under way. The extent of the atrocities that unfolded during the conflict has also progressively come to light, due in no small part to the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Under the microscope of international scrutiny, local and international actors have cultivated dialogue on and civic engagement in the related processes of reconstruction and reconciliation.

Among the most promising developments was the reopening in 2002 of a Sarajevo museum showcasing religious artifacts of multiple faiths. For most, the museum opening “herald[ed] a rebirth of ethnic harmony.” One Serb visitor optimistically remarked: “This means the continuation of a joint life, a general reconciliation without which there can be no progress for any people.”¹⁵⁸ The church structure that houses the museum is itself a testament to religious diversity, its wooden altar door decorated with ornaments in the Islamic style and carved with Jewish stars of David and Christian crosses. Dating back to the early fifth or

¹⁵⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2000, 233.

¹⁵⁷ Banac, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Sito-Sucic, Daria. 2002. Tolerance battles suspicion among Bosnia’s Serbs. *Bosnia Report* (January-May): 1.

sixth century, it is thought to be the only preserved old town church remaining in the Balkans and is a particularly fitting site for the museum.¹⁵⁹

Another reconstruction success story is unfolding in Mostar, where a UNESCO-led project that began in 1997 to resurrect the town's famous bridge nears completion. The project also involves the rebuilding of eleven buildings alongside the bridge. The symbolic nature of the effort, which is supported by Serbs, Muslims, and Croats alike, has been strongly emphasized. As Rusmir Ciscic, head of the project, remarked to *BBC News* on 7 June 2001: "We do not want [the bridge] only to link two sides of a river like bridges usually do. We want to link peoples in Mostar, which after the conflict remained one of the most destroyed cities in Europe." By virtually all accounts, the bridge's reconstruction has met this objective with great success.

Most recently, on 8 March 2003, the *New York Times* reported that a panel of Bosnian and international judges settled a lawsuit surrounding the massacre at Srebrenica on 11 July 1995, in which 7,000 Muslims were massacred by Serb forces in spite of its designation a "safe area" by the U.N. Security Council. It is widely considered the worse atrocity Europe has seen since World War II. The ruling required Bosnia's semiautonomous Serb Republic to pay an excess of two million dollars towards the construction of a memorial at a graveyard where the victims' remains, once identified, are to be buried. Insufficient funds have been the primary obstacle keeping the identification and burial process from moving forward during the eight years since the massacre. The victims' families, who filed the suit, are hopeful that the ruling will allow them to achieve some closure. For them, the ruling is also more than just monetary compensation; it is a symbolic expression of Serb culpability.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

It is no surprise that the two Serbs serving on the panel of judges voted against the decision. Their dissention suggests that not all voices in the conversation about reconciliation and the region's future are optimistic. Serb officials have been most vocal in their resistance to the idea of a multiethnic Bosnia and continue to deny accusations of human rights violations made by their victims as well as by international authorities. As recently as last year, they released a report contesting that there had been a massacre at Srebrenica. The Serb people renounced extremism when they ousted Milosevic in 2000, but the Serbian Republic of Bosnia continues to be a bastion for ethnic nationalism. In Banja Luka, the largest Serb-held city in Bosnia, the Islamic community was denied permission to rebuild the Ferhadija mosque, which had been destroyed by Serb forces in 1993.¹⁶⁰ The mayor justified the decision on the grounds that such a move "would be perceived by the Serb people as the darkest humiliation, it would open old wounds and have broad consequences."¹⁶¹ Serbs regard the mosque's presence as a symbol of their oppression under Ottoman rule, not as a characteristic of the multiethnic society Bosnia is supposed to be.

There has been similar resistance from the Croat side to reconstruction. Efforts by Bosniak returnees in Stolac to rebuild the Careva mosque destroyed by Croats in 1993 have been zealously blocked by the Bishop of Mostar and local Croatian authorities. After acquiring a federal permit for reconstruction, Muslim residents of the city had begun to clear the destruction and gather fragments of the mosque scattered around the city when the Bishop moved to obstruct their plan on weakly documented grounds that the mosque may have originally been built on the site of a church. If "reconstruction of the Careva mosque is a test of Christian tolerance," then the fanaticism with which Catholic and municipal leaders have

¹⁶⁰ See page 55.

¹⁶¹ Bosnian Serb mayor stays firm: No mosques. 1998. *The Minnesota Daily Online*: 16 April. Accessed at http://www.mndaily.com/daily/1998/04/16/world_nation/wn4.ap.

approached the issue is extremely worrisome; it amounts to a repudiation of “the establishment of human rights, the search for coexistence, [and] the restitution for the victims of ethnic cleansing.”¹⁶² Just as the most notable elements of Serb nationalism are associated with the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church has been a bulwark of Croat repudiation of ethnic reconciliation. This has very visibly played out in the debate over reconstruction of religious sites.

∞

This case study provides a factual context in which the concepts explored in chapter two—memory, identity, and violence—come to life. Now that we have established the importance of rebuilding tangible culture in the aftermath of war, it still remains for us to discuss the complexities and challenges inherent in such a task.

¹⁶² Banac, 2.

Conclusion

The Relevance of Memory to Religious Groups

Collective memory is the basis of this thesis' assertion that societies remember past conflicts as a group, with material culture as a key intermediary. The application of this argument to the Balkans is a contemporary extrapolation of Halbwachs' specific discussion of religious collective memory. He begins with the assertion that "to appreciate a religious movement or religious progress exactly, people must recall, at least in rough outline, the point from which they took their departure long ago."¹⁶³ Religion depends so much upon its historical origins that religious memory—more so than most other types of memory—strives to fix the past against time. This tends to make religious communities endogamous in their remembrance of the past and, therefore, resistant to change:

What is peculiar to the memory of religious groups is that, while the memories of other groups permeate each other mutually and tend to correspond, the memory of religious groups claims to be fixed once and for all. It either obliges others to adapt themselves to its dominant representations, or it systematically ignores them; contrasting its own permanence with the instability of others, it relegates them to an inferior rank.¹⁶⁴

An essential function of religion is to provide a sense of the eternal and immutable by keeping the memory of the religion's ancient period free from the diluting influence of subsequent memories. This can easily lead to heightened differences and conflict between disparate religious communities.

However, in the immediate aftermath of violent conflict, it is exponentially more difficult to exclude the relevance of new memories. Perhaps if religious traditions in post-conflict situations accommodated, rather than resisted, recent memories and realities, they

¹⁶³ Halbwachs, 85.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 91-92.

could better ensure peace and reconciliation into the future. Religion is on the one hand conceptual, but on the other hand, “there is no religious thought that...is not at the same time composed of a series of concrete recollections, of images or events or persons that can be located in space and time.”¹⁶⁵ This indirectly speaks to the importance of material culture for religion. Thus, the reconstruction of material culture could further the incorporation of recent memories into religious faith and, as will be discussed more specifically in the next section, further coexistence in a multi-faith society. Halbwachs states:

The past cannot be reborn, but we can fathom what it was like, and we are most successful if we have at our command well-established landmarks... although religious memory attempts to isolate itself from temporal society, it obeys the same laws as every collective memory: it does not preserve the past but reconstructs it with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts, and traditions left behind by that past, and with the aid moreover of recent psychological and social data, that is to say, with the present.¹⁶⁶

Though he was not referring to “landmarks” as they are understood in this paper, the relevance of his statement for our purposes is still piercing.

The Reconciliatory Value of Reconstruction

Just as religious symbols, mythology, and iconography can be effectively exploited to incite conflict, as we saw in the Balkans, they can be used to rebuild ethnic identities within shared communities. The impact of reconstruction on collective memory would, with time, grow in importance and authenticity as it is “transposed into a teaching, a notion, or a symbol and takes on a meaning. It becomes an element of the society’s system of ideas.”¹⁶⁷

Admittedly, this is not without challenge or complexity; the memories of the recent past that are marked by reconstruction of religious and cultural sites are often contentious. Halbwachs asks: “Is it not much more difficult in certain respects to transform the image of the past that

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 179.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 103, 119.

¹⁶⁷ Halbwachs, 188.

is also—at least virtually—in the present, since society always carries within its thought the frameworks of memory? After all, the present, if we consider the area of collective thought that it occupies, weighs very little in comparison to the past.”¹⁶⁸

Tangible culture has many layers, both physical and symbolic, that come into play in reconstruction. In the Balkans, reconstruction has often meant the construction of material culture of the victor. Pocitelj, where a Catholic church is reportedly to be built on the ruins of a mosque destroyed by the HVO, is an excellent example.¹⁶⁹ This type of reconstruction exploits the principle that “new graves or monuments are not built in an empty and untouched landscape, but in one which already contains meaningful sites from the past. Later monuments often relate to earlier monuments in their neighbourhood and take them as reference points for messages about continuity or change of social identity.”¹⁷⁰ More importantly, however, it still affirms the fundamental connection between landscape and social psychology, a connection that can effectively facilitate reconciliation as well as conflict: “To live is to create. To create or protect culture is an act of living... In the act of creating culture, the overlapping boundaries and claims of different languages, religious, and traditions can find a space in which otherwise competing worlds are on common ground.”¹⁷¹ If all parties can acknowledge their responsibility for the destruction of tangible culture during the war and collectively endorse the reconstruction of those sites to their pre-war form, the process of reconciliation would be concretely affirmed.

¹⁶⁸ Halbwachs, 183.

¹⁶⁹ Sells, 104.

¹⁷⁰ Holtorf, “Material Culture Narratives.”

¹⁷¹ Sells, 153.

Reconstructed cultural sites must not be motivated by a desire to erase the literal and metaphorical destruction incurred by the war. A reconstructed landscape cannot mask the occurrence of past conflict and the persistence of real tensions:

Every landmark is a testament of history... They are indices of truth, an essence and a reality that offer any people, however impoverished, a value in itself, a value that, especially when rooted in anguish and sacrifice, may dictate a resolve for redemption and strategies for social regeneration. To act in any way that denigrates the lessons, the imperatives of that truth, for demagogic or opportunistic reasons, is to pollute a people's source and declare a new round of exterior control of a people's heritage.¹⁷²

Reconstruction efforts ought to explicitly reference these tensions—and the willingness of each party to overcome them. Nationalistic aims must be renounced in favor of a commitment to a pluralistic society.

Reconstruction takes on the challenge of balancing two equally important tasks: representing a divisive past and expressing hope for a reconciled future. It must avoid the trap of rewriting the past in order to achieve the latter. The difficulty of this responsibility is the thesis of Nietzsche's essay, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," which provocatively asks how we can know at what point we ought to forget the past:

Cheerfulness, the good conscience, the joyful deed, confidence in the future—all of them depend, in the case of the individual as of a nation, on the existence of a line dividing the bright and discernible from the unilluminable and dark; on one's being just as able to forget at the right time as to remember at the right time; on the possession of a powerful instinct for sensing when it is necessary to feel historically and when unhistorically... *[T]he unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture.*¹⁷³

Nietzsche cautions that while it is crucial to remember the past, it is possible to have an excess of history, which is harmful to the livings' ability to forge a future. Reconstruction efforts can help post-conflict communities in the Balkans identify between the past and future.

¹⁷² Hirsch, 32.

¹⁷³ Nietzsche, 63. Italics in original.

Lessons Learned from the German Experience

For reconstruction to effectively foster reconciliation, scholars, politicians, and citizens must engage in open dialogue about its value and ideal form. The German reconstruction experience after World War II showed the dangers of avoiding this dialogue. Though legendary for its speed, German reconstruction was more an effort to deny the history of destruction than to reconcile it with a peaceful future. Reconstruction was “tantamount to a second liquidation, in successive phases, of the nation’s past” and forged the “creation of a new, faceless reality, pointing the population exclusively toward the future and enjoining on it silence about the past.”¹⁷⁴ Without evidence of physical destruction, it was easier to deny that enemy attacks had caused any moral destruction. In the *New York Times* on 18 January 2003, Peter Schneider asks: “Do we not walk like sleepwalkers through our rebuilt cities, convinced that the evil we ourselves caused and then suffered ourselves, was nothing but a bad dream?”

It has only been in the past few years that German writers and historians have begun to openly address the impact of the war on their country’s civilian population. Paralyzed for nearly half a century by a moral inability to name themselves as victims, Germans are now realizing the consequences of their silence as they struggle to reconcile with their past. W.G. Sebald’s recent work movingly describes the scale of civilian suffering and, more importantly, confronts the taboo surrounding it in German literature. It is a brave attempt to deconstruct what Sebald refers to as “individual and collective amnesia.”¹⁷⁵ A translation of one of his recent essays, published in *The New Yorker* on 4 November 2002, draws out the cross-cultural salience of his thoughts. It is in response to Sebald that Schneider writes that “recollection of suffering both endured and culpably inflicted in no sense arouses desires for revenge and

¹⁷⁴ Sebald, 68.

¹⁷⁵ Sebald, 68.

revanchism in the children and grandchildren of the generation of the perpetrators. Rather it opens their eyes to and enhances their understanding of the destruction that the Nazi Germans brought upon other nations.” He contends that it is because this recollection is so delayed that it can achieve a positive effect. However, we do not have to wait fifty years to apply the hard-won lessons of the German experience to the Balkans.

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It sometimes seems that the rather non-traditional ideals and recommendations of this thesis have little chance of taking hold in the thoroughly traditional world of policymaking, especially as the world’s attention shifts away from ethnic conflicts to the war on terror. Knowing this, I have strived to make clear the salience of the ideas put forth in this thesis beyond the case study by developing a cohesive theoretical foundation whose supporting historical examples and final implications cut across cultures and time. The situation in the Balkans proves how putting the theory into practice can help produce the very effect that policymakers seek in post-conflict situations: genuine, lasting reconciliation and stable societies that embrace the rule of law and respect basic rights.

Iraq’s ubiquitous place in the media headlines has crowded out the Balkans, which has largely fallen from the public consciousness. While regrettable, this development does not diminish the cogency or relevance of the main idea: that tangible culture—specifically, its protection in armed conflict and reconstruction when and where protection fails—is an important component in the reconciliation and peace-building processes. After all, terrorism and the conflicts it both breeds and breeds *in* are inseparable from issues of culture. The ever expanding body of scholarly work on terrorism and, more broadly, on modern armed conflict ought to include tangible culture as a legitimate and deeply illuminating analytical lens.

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