Research Report

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Forum: *Special Conference*
Issue: *The protection of the cultural heritage of minorities*

Position: *Deputy Chair*

Introduction

Although the destruction of cultural heritage has been an issue since the earliest of times, it is now more than ever an huge challenge we have to face, with a great number of languages being endangered and numerous heritage sites/artefacts being destroyed due to wars and terrorist attacks. Each nations cultural heritage is a great part of our national identity and history, and thus needs to be protected and preserved.

Definition of Key Terms

Culture
"The way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time." (Cambridge Dictionary)

Cultural Heritage
"Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. ("What is cultural heritage", Culture in Development)

Material Culture
Cultural property, such as, but not limited to, heritage sites, art and aesthetic artefacts.

Intangible Culture
Non-physical, non-material aspects, for instance traditions, belief systems, customs and practices or languages.

Illicit traffic
"The import, export or transfer of ownership of property contrary to the provisions of the domestic legal norms of the jurisdiction in which the import, export, or transfer occurred and/or any applicable international legal norms". ("Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property." UNESCO.org)

Looting
The act of stealing artefacts from a place, mainly in periods of war or riot.

Minorities
a racial, ethnic, religious, or social subdivision of a society that is subordinate to the dominant group in political, financial, or social power without regard to the size of these groups. (dictionary.com)

General Overview

The protection of the cultural heritage of minorities has never been as pressing an issue as today. To begin with, a separation needs to be made between material and intangible culture. The term "material culture" refers mainly to cultural property, such as, but not limited to, heritage sites, art and aesthetic artefacts. On the other hand, "intangible culture" conceives non-physical, non-material aspects, for instance traditions, belief systems, customs and practices or languages.

Material Culture
The destruction of material cultural heritage is usually either a direct consequence of war or armed conflict, or caused by various ideological – driven actions. Destruction of cultural heritage during war periods can be linked to one (or more) of the following causes: war causalities, profit seeking actions and/or ideological driven actions. Armed conflicts and wars expose artefacts to great danger. It is a fact that when war causalities such as attacks and bombings take place, the main concern of a state is the protection of civilians. Naturally, material properties are not of equal importance as human lives, and therefore their protection is not a priority, and they are left exposed to danger of corruption, damage and complete destruction. A few examples of destruction of heritage due to war causalities during WWII are the Royal Castle in Warsaw or St. Michael's church in Coventry. Profit seeking actions of heritage destruction are very common not only during times of conflict, and it includes various crimes, from illicit trading of antiques, to terrorist organisation attacks to monuments of great cultural value. A great example of the latter are the ISIS attacks, that take place both in the Middle East and in Europe. Ideological driven actions that result in the destruction of cultural heritage can be linked to both of the categories analysed above. The main example of such motives for cultural destruction today link back to terrorist groups, that destroy monuments that counter their ideologies. Overall, there are 46 World Heritage Sites listed in the "World Heritage Sites in Danger" list, with the countries being more affected by this phenomenon being Middle East nations, Syria and Iraq.

Intangible Culture
Equally – if not more – important than material culture, comes intangible culture, aka traditions, belief systems and above all, languages. Languages are an area of debate, as most of the times, there is no clear distinction between a language and a dialect, and can be easily politicised. The SIL International annually publishes the Ethnologue, the most commonly utilised record of languages. The criteria for the characterisation of a language as endangered, according to SIL International are the number of speakers, their age and whether new generations are fluent/acquiring fluency. These guidelines have been expanded by UNESCO, according to which the criteria for the identification of an endangered language are the 9 following:

1. Absolute number of speakers
2. Proportion of speakers within the total population
3. Availability of materials for language education and literacy
4. Response to new domains and literacy
5. Type and quality of documentation
6. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use
7. Shifts in domains of language use
8. Community member's attitudes towards their own language
9. International language transmission.

According to UNESCO's Atlas of World's Languages in Danger, 230 languages have disappeared since 1950, and about 2,500 are endangered in todays world. The Enthologue lists more than 7,000 languages at risk.

Endangered languages are many times linked to ethnic conflict, colonial legacies or economic development. Furthermore, common causes of heritage loss are mass communication, the destruction of habitats for indigenous populations, migration, natural disasters, war, conflicts or political repression. Also, indigenous populations remain vulnerable to loss of intangible heritage due to geographic isolation, extremely small population numbers and thus not spread of the languages/traditions, as well as due to lack of ways to record a language, belief system etc., and lack of access to representation channels (ex. media). The development of the internet, the non-suitable promotion of endangered languages through education are also factors that can contribute to the extinction of intangible culture.

Consequences of the destruction of cultural heritage
Irina Bokova, the UNESCO Director-General, at the World Economic Forum on the 17th of January 2017, said the following words: "The destruction of heritage is a destruction of identities". Whether we're talking about material or intangible culture, movable or immovable heritage, it is a fact that with it's destruction a part of history goes away with it. Our cultural heritage is like vessels of knowledge, and therefore when a part of it is extinguished, so are historical, political and cultural forms of knowledge. It is therefore our duty to do anything we can to protect our heritage, and so drastic measures need to be taken.

Major Parties Involved

Iraq
The Islamic State has destroyed numerous churches, mosques etc., mostly between June 2014 and February 2015. The group has looted artefacts from many temples. A great example here is the footage ISIS disclosed on the 26th of February 2015, which shows the destruction of artefacts in the Mosul Museum, most of which were originals.

Syria
Also dealing with ISIS, Syria has been the centre of many terrorist attacks that have led to the destruction of many artefacts that hold great significance fro the cultural heritage of the state.

Libya and Yemen
Both counties are countries with ongoing wars, so naturally their heritage is in danger. Furthermore, Libya has also been a target of the ISIS group, although the damage of artefacts has been significantly lesser than the previous countries mentioned.

UNESCO
UNESCO was established in 1946, and since then it has been the main UN body that deals with cultural heritage issues globally. In co-operation with other organisation it is running operations concerning the protection of heritage sites in multiple countries around the world.

World Heritage Committee
The World Heritage Committee was established in 1976. Its main purpose is ensuring the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. Furthermore it is responsible for the World Heritage Fund and the funding delivered to states for the protection of their monuments and sites.

International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)
Established in 1965 as a sub-organisation of UNESCO, ICOMOS acts towards the protection and maintenance of historical heritage.

International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)
It was established in 1959 and it has 110 Member States. Its aim is the preservation and restoration of multiple heritage sites.

Timeline of Events

1922	The International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation is created.
1925	Establishment of the International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation (IIIC)
1939-1945	World War II: Disruption of the work of the ICIC and IIIC as well as destruction and/or looting of a massive number of artefacts.
1946	UNESCO's constitution comes into force and the organisation starts operating
1947	UNESCO's first project on education (Marbial Valley, Haiti)
1954	Adoption of the Hague convention
1965	Proclamation of September 8th as the International Literacy Day by UNESCO
1970	Adoption of the convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage
1976	Establishment of the World Heritage Comittee
1992-1995	Destruction of the National Library in Sarajevo due to territorial disputes
1996	UNESCO publishes the first atlas of world's languages in danger
2000	The Ethnologue is launched by SIL International, providing a database on world linguistics and tradition
2001	Adoption of UNESCOs Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity
2001	Destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afganistan
2003	Adoption of The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
2015	Destruction of Mosul Museum
2015	ISIL occupation of Palmyra in Syria and 5 other cultural heritage sites

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

On the aspect of intangible heritage, UNESCO has played a great role in preserving and protecting cultural heritage. Specifically, the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity interpreted UNESCO's mandate as preserving linguistic diversity so as for the main purpose of the organization to be achieved. Another important UNESCO document concerning and outlining strategies to combat the issue of heritage destruction is The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of October 17th, 2003. The above documents have been the base of the Endangered Languages Programme (ELP), which work towards "supporting communities, experts and government members by producing, coordinating and disseminating tools for monitoring, advocacy, and assessment for language status and trends.

When it comes to material heritage, again it is UNESCO that is mainly working towards maintaining cultural heritage. Their most important documents are the "UNESCO declaration concerning the International Destruction of Cultural Heritage" and the "Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflicts". The former was adopted in 2003 after the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan and the latter, also known as the Hague Convention, on the 14th of May 1954. Both underline measures that should be taken so as to protect the cultural heritage both in times of conflict and peacetime. Furthermore, the treaty of the Hague Convention is responsible for imposing sanctions against members that violate it. Apart from the above documents and actions, there have been attempts by individual organizations such as Blue Shield or the World Monument Fund, to cooperate with governments and induce measures that will protect heritage.

Possible Solutions

Legal legislations and strong security measures need to be taken and/or be reconsidered, so as to further ensure the restriction of damage on cultural heritage sites. Also, on the issue of language preservation, we need to take into account that national education systems are those that mainly promote lingual proficiency. Therefore, language promotion could possibly happen though school systems. Another idea would be the usage of technology so as to preserve and spread intangible culture.