

"The Divided City as Broken Artifact"

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Abstract:

This essay suggests that purposeful destruction of cultural heritage is a product of rational, politically motivated iconoclasm rather than purely ignorant and venal impulses. Divided cities offer a link to larger trends of attack, defense, and recovery relevant to all cultural assets threatened by war or isolated violence; these trends point to systematic and reliable mitigation tools and predictive models. Despite these opportunities for constructive analysis and innovative interventions, built environment professionals have been routinely absent from the allied processes of physical recovery and social rehabilitation. The conservation field in particular seems to be held back by its own rhetoric and an unproductive fixation on facsimile reconstruction in the aftermath of iconoclastic violence.

Introduction

Much has been written about 'wanton' destruction of historic fabric in wartime¹; these indictments patronize with familiar platitudes: senseless losses, ignorant perpetrators, universal values, and so forth. The case of the Bamiyan Buddhas provides a perfect example. Rumor and eventual confirmation of their demolition prompted piteous outcries and gnashing of teeth from all quarters of the cultural establishment. Phillippe de Montebello, director of the Metropolitan Museum, made a last minute offer to avert the "cultural assassination" by purchasing the statues and paying for their removal to New York. In keeping with the American tradition, it was an act only half charitable. Throughout the exchange of these harmless volleys, the more the Taliban was urged to reconsider its actions, the further entrenched and rigid their official position became. Unofficially, avenues of negotiation tied to western sanctions, humanitarian aid, and recognition in the UN General Assembly apparently remained open. This is because, short of winning the respect or sympathy of western governments, their intention was to irritate, offend, and provoke Paris and New York based cultural establishments. It succeeded as thoroughly as they could have possibly planned.

With the statues' ruin, a tidal wave of indignation and hand wringing broke upon the shores of western civilization. Every expert, ambassador, and school child was invited to join the chorus of despair and condemnation massed against the dark forces that would convert beauty and human achievement into a heap of rubble. Unesco chief Koichiro Matsuura called it "a barbarian act" of "mindless aggression to a part of the conscience, history and identity of humankind," noting also that "we are witnesses once again to our own inefficacy."² His statement may have been modest, but it was not apologetic. The civilized world is naturally helpless, he seemed to say, in the face of barbarians and cannot be faulted for its failure to cope with the Taliban's faulty "stewardship".

Naturally, neither religion nor lack of appreciation seem to have had much bearing on the Buddhas of Bamiyan. Dario Gamboni recently pointed out that complex political motives tied to legitimacy and sovereignty provide a convincing rationale for the Taliban's actions, which cannot be reasonably dismissed as unthinking or uninformed.³ To the contrary, Mullah Omar's understanding of the statues'

¹ on 5 April 2001 *The New York Times* reported that the European Union denounced the start of the destruction of the Bamiyan statues as "an act of cultural barbarism and religious intolerance." This statement was disingenuous, misleading or both.

² from the *Associated Press* online report, April 2 2001.

³ from Dario Gamboni's "World Heritage: Shield or Target?" in *Conservation*, The Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter, Volume 16, Number 2, Summer 2001.

significance in the eyes of the “international community” may have been quite complete, judging by the helpless groans and endless lamentations that followed.

Gamboni has correctly asserted that “masterpieces” form an Achilles’ Heel for the western cultural establishment that valorizes, promotes, and commodifies them. “Within Western societies today,” he writes, “attacks against works of art often spring from situations or feelings of exclusion and from the absence of access to legitimate means of expression. On the world level, the real success of the idea of world heritage will depend upon the degree to which the universalism born of European Enlightenment comes to be perceived as truly universal, rather than appearing as a new form of colonialism or the cultural face of economic globalization.”⁴ His cynicism is grounded in an understanding of the long, highly patterned tradition of iconoclasm. The destruction of prized artwork has always been a reliable strategy for antagonizing dominant cultural regimes and refuting global cultural values of any kind, especially those associated with beauty, symbols, enlightenment, and sophistication. It is the dark underside of the meta national and neo colonial ‘world heritage’ paradigm.

This agenda is clearly distinct from anything that could be accurately described as ‘wanton’ or unthinking. Furthermore, to characterize the perpetrators as barbaric or irrational is to preempt any thoughtful, systemic response and thereby leave the world exposed to subsequent blindsided attacks of a similar nature. It has been amply demonstrated in the literature that finely wrought, legalistic protections typically have no bearing, or a negative impact, on the resources they are engineered to protect; the highly questionable effectiveness of the Hague Convention 1954 and the World Heritage Convention 1972 provide good examples of this unfortunate paradox. It seems likely that expert deliberations in Paris and Kabul may have accelerated and catalyzed the destruction of the Buddhas by making plain the conceptual gap between cultural investment in the eyes of the Taliban and the European institutions appointed to monitor their assets.

These principles have validity independent of scale. Whether the iconoclast’s target is the Rokeby Venus, the Buddhas of Bamiyan, or the Manhattan skyline, the same dynamics of vulnerability, resentment, and antagonism apply and may be used to both contextualize the violence and rationalize the motives lying behind it. Within this dialogue of relative cultural values, no holds are barred: art, architecture, and ‘civility’ are scrutinized alongside health, social privilege, and access to fundamental resources⁵. In the case of cities subjected to wholesale attack, the purposeful destruction of historic structures is commonly part of a larger political program asserting competitive, and historically subordinated, values and priorities. Regardless of the merits of the values being asserted, it is important for concerned professionals to recognize the ways traditional cultural suppositions are leveraged and manipulated by the perpetrators for the purposes of social engineering and revision of the visible historic record. Without this recognition, false assumptions can lead mitigation efforts hopelessly astray and result in the misappropriation of foreign funds aimed at revitalization.

Globalization and the iconoclastic program

A further word might be useful to clarify the relationship between ongoing processes of cultural globalization and the aims of those disenfranchised political fringe groups that employ iconoclasm as a subversive tool. The dramatic post World War II shift from continental to globalized trade, accelerated by the enormous strength advantage enjoyed by the United States at the close of the war and concurrent breakthroughs in communication technology, initiated a process of cultural homogenization that continues full tilt to the present day. Exposed to Americans’ vastly superior material standard of living but unable to access the resources needed to mimic it, the members of many less wealthy cultural communities have been left with a curious mixture of frustration as cultural consumers and humiliation as cultural producers. This mixture is key to understanding the persistence and strength of the iconoclastic program.

⁴ from Dario Gamboni’s *The Destruction of Art*, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 116

⁵ For instance, at the time when the Bamiyan Buddhas were destroyed and the foreign aid for protection of cultural heritage had been rejected by the Taliban, the average male life expectancy was 43 years almost half the United States average, the infant mortality rate was 4th worst in the world, the maternal mortality rate was 2nd worst in the world, and 70% of the total population was malnourished. Had these facts been seen as a threat to Afghanistan’s cultural heritage, as they should have been, the UN delegation might have forwarded different proposals and a de facto standoff, in which the statues were sacrificed in protest, might have been avoided.

One aspect of the tension created by cultural homogenization is isolation: the sense that a widening gulf separates subordinate cultures from those who define and promote the most broadly accepted cultural values. This gulf is reinforced with a range of misleading dichotomies opposing the civilized with the barbaric, the international with the local sphere of cultural significance, and the knowing with the ignorant⁶. The major cultural institutions do little to discredit or critique these hierarchical interpretations even though they profess an egalitarian interest in artistic genius both near and far. This largesse seems to extend only as far as those cultures whose prioritization of material culture is compatible with the western standard. It is notable that the isolation in question is the product of the larger process of dissolving national, economic, and political boundaries; that is, while he has unprecedented access to ideas and impressions that are alien, the typical member of a subordinate cultural tradition is alienated from the generative cultural processes that belong to him.

The notion of a tug of war between civilized and barbaric forces favored by western cultural institutions is politically incendiary and intellectually irresponsible. It is obvious that their mistake is not in ignoring portions of the globe peripheral to Europe, though this remains a prevalent issue, but rather in failing to recognize the complex interplay of locally determined cultural values with social stability. This misleading framework should be replaced by a more precise understanding of the interplay between dominant and subordinate cultural narratives. Meanwhile, the continuing assertion of a criterion for cultural achievement—the specious concept of “universal human value” that supercedes traditional local values or coincides with them at best by accident, lays the groundwork for a forceful and ongoing counter critique. The critique will continue to impact movable and immovable cultural assets in negative ways.

Threatened by the imposition of foreign values and the prospect of involuntary assimilation, iconoclasts since the French Revolution have exercised an option common to all outmoded combatants: conversion of the enemy’s strengths into liabilities through subversion of ‘unimpeachable’ values. The incentives and motivations related to this basic program are clear, consistent, and patterned. They include attention seeking generally tied to the promotion of a political cause, the desire to debunk the sanctity of an image in order to deprive it of psychological power, and the desire to undermine the perceived immunity of a powerful State by damaging the symbols of that power⁷.

These acts of destruction have an intensely public quality because the popular perception of vulnerability is understood by the perpetrators to be more effective than the material loss of the targeted objects and places alone. More specifically, many instances of iconoclasm embody a critique of ‘high’ art as luxury, art subsidies as economic waste detrimental to the interests of the underprivileged, and public monuments as psychologically oppressive symbols of authority.

In the case of iconoclastic violence directed towards whole cities, it is commonly the case that antipathy is linked to a belief that the urban environment fosters corruption, lassitude, and decadence. Whether or not these ‘anti urban’ biases are objectively supportable, they contribute to a model favoring the rational interpretation of object oriented violence. A self-conscious tendency to conflate monumental objects—the World Trade Centers providing an excellent example—with the economic or political systems that support and foster them underlies the iconoclastic enterprise. This tendency may be exacerbated by the decentralized and bureaucratic nature of the post modern state, where systems and seats of power are increasingly dispersed and indistinguishable.

In this fluid environment, where ultimate institutional targets are few and strictly guarded, highly symbolic public space and architecture—even when they become divorced from the real stations of power and authority, as with the World Trade Center and the Old Bridge in Mostar—become convenient emblems for otherwise faceless value systems perceived by the iconoclast to be oppressive.

To the degree that all public institutions rely on a public trust and all cities rely in a sense of collective security, this merging of signifier and signified in the iconoclastic program is useful and reasonable from

⁶ Gamboni does an excellent job of bringing these ideas to a point in his refutation of the traditional characterization of political iconoclasm as anachronism or archaism; he calls these classifications wishful thinking grounded in “socio economic assumptions about humanity’s unidirectional and irreversible progress, as well as a way, like the ‘vandalism’ concept, to repress the thing by locating it elsewhere, in time—the past—as in space—Barbarism.” *The Destruction of Art*, p. 49.

⁷ A simplification of the conclusions reached by Gamboni and Freedberg.

a strategic perspective. In any case, it is the consistency of the pattern more than its utility that is the concern of this essay.

The subset of divided cities

To the degree that healthy cities function as an integrated whole, divided cities can be viewed as an artifact split, or broken. This metaphor is directly related to the well known etymology of 'iconoclasm'. Because physically divided cities are generally characterized by prolonged episodes of violence centered on the historic urban core, or at least on highly emblematic spaces and structures, they provide a useful measuring rod for the extent to which the targeting of cultural assets conforms to a pattern. Comparative field based research undertaken in Beirut, Belfast, Nicosia, Mostar, and Jerusalem, to be published in autumn 2002, suggests that clear patterns do exist. These findings are consistent with Gamboni's work in the realm of painting and sculpture and are in line with the related literature regarding losses incurred during conventional wars. Our research also goes further to suggest that divided cities constitute a special subset of all segregated cities and that their morphologies can be subjected to meaningful generalizations.

The cities we have examined were all the unfortunate victims of intra state, inter ethnic conflicts that provide due to their protracted and inconclusive nature more insights related to motive, prerequisite, and social impact than a Warsaw, Dresden, or Coventry. They are also useful within the cultural heritage discourse since the centrality of group identity, national narrative, and religious affiliation to the conflict meant that traditional, symbolic elements of the urban fabric assumed a greater military strategic value than they might have in the context of conventional inter state warfare. That is to say that divided cities allow us to look at the liabilities associated with cultural assets in relative isolation and across a relatively wide, diverse spectrum of scenarios.

Our research suggests that patterns evident in divided cities are inseparable from global trends: the breakdown of federated, multi national States, the crisis of group identification in areas where ethnicity had been suppressed, and the inexorable weakening of place specific culture as it is supplanted and displaced by homogenized, meta national values and the borrowed aspirations that attend them. To turn again to Bamiyan, it is clear that the homogenized norms of conservation and 'universalized' interpretations of stewardship were, under conditions of extreme social and political instability at the local level, violently overturned in an effort to remind foreign onlookers that alternate readings of the same objects exist and deserve some form of legitimacy.

It appears that the 'international community' was slow and recalcitrant in recognizing the potential for competing, and sometimes contradictory, uses of cultural heritage in Afghanistan; only one way of reading the Buddhas was admissible as masterworks of undisputed art historical value and how crass for the Taliban to suggest, even disingenuously, that they still hold associative values tied to the historically conflicted ideological and political systems that created them!

Though the lamentable fact remains that universalists will most likely win the culture war⁸, they certainly lost the Battle of Bamiyan, and many less publicized engagements with the iconoclast legions. It is best to study these kinds of defeats carefully in order to avoid similar losses.

Thankfully, there is a positive and constructive side to this line of argumentation regarding iconoclasm and the growing sensitivity of historic urban areas within the context of civil war. If all of these place specific reflections reveal a patterned problem rather than the recklessness of untutored criminals then a framework for patterned response must exist to anticipate future episodes of violence or minimize the harms that follow from them. From this analytical perspective, divided cities offer a link to larger trends of attack, defense, and recovery applicable to all cultural assets vulnerable to purposeful destruction.

The remainder of the essay will examine these patterns, both destructive and constructive. For reasons that will be briefly discussed below, built environment professionals have routinely ignored this type of

⁸ This amounts to a war of attrition. As the major public and private cultural heritage institutions continue to pluck out their favorite blooms for the bouquet of "world heritage", shrinking material resources are funneled into a handful of projects worldwide while the remainder of the cultural inheritance languishes in relative obscurity the belles that were not invited to the ball. As governments continue to relinquish their role as caretakers to the private sectors, this process of highly arbitrary and selective valorization will be further undermined by the introduction of market based imperatives.

analysis and, in so doing, forfeited a potentially useful role the mitigation of negative secondary impacts of destruction.

Divided cities: plots and sub-plots

While most cities act as a magnet for artistic, financial, and intellectual activity, this very concentration of wealth and cosmopolitan behavior can also convert the urban arena into a cultural battleground when communal vulnerabilities are exacerbated. In these cases the city can be interpreted as a political stage, citadel, icon, idol, treasury, emblem, and incubator of both tolerance and prejudice all at the same time. It has already been noted that the state of contemporary warfare has rapidly devolved from a high stakes competition between rival nations for territory or influence to a cacophony of fratricidal struggles between rival ethnic groups over the remnants of empire and multi national states. As the scale of conflict narrows and the willingness of superpower nations to intercede wanes, the likelihood of violence in historic and heterogeneous cities will increase proportionately.

Cities with prominent administrative, religious, or political status are most susceptible to iconoclastic violence. Since cultural heritage is inevitably associated with a somewhat specific tradition, epoch, group, or political system, its enemies multiply as the social and political bonds sanctifying those associations weaken. When the provocation of residents in historic cities becomes beneficial to sectarian political entrepreneurs, physical fabric is frequently caught in the crossfire or targeted for purposes of demoralization.

For example, in the minds of Israeli Jews Jerusalem is steeped in the mythologized notion of a “promised” land, and Jewish tradition interprets the city as sacred territory rather than a crystalized cultural expression. One author reflects that “The borders of the united city, which were drawn on the basis of military and demographic considerations, took on profound political and symbolic importance after they were set. Like the laws of unification, they too became part of a national myth which 'cannot be questioned.’”⁹ The rigidity of these symbolic interpretations makes Jerusalem an irresistible target for physical destruction; assorted political factions have indulged that temptation with zeal from the moment the British Mandate expired in 1948. Though Tel Aviv is clearly the epicenter for Israeli commerce, education, and contemporary cultural development, it is power sharing in Jerusalem that has eluded the world’s most skilled diplomats and the final status of Jerusalem that blocks the path towards a regional peace settlement. Though drawn from obscure and imprecise sources, this urban myth has proven more durable than the citizens’ desire for peace and stability.

Likewise Beirut and Nicosia became the seats of civil conflict in part because rival governments viewed possession of the cities as a prerequisite for political sovereignty and legitimacy. Combatants seek to control political terrain in order to commandeer the symbols and associations traditionally attached to it, harnessing them to their own political wagons. Again, the natural liability of monumental cultural heritage in the context of inter ethnic violence is obvious. The potency of historic places in the public mind stimulates a desire to destroy or appropriate them in accordance with the political mandate of the aggressor. These patterns are easily identified, but once conditions have degenerated to the point where the occupation or destruction of urban terrain is symbolically connected with broader political ambitions, it is generally too late to urge the antagonists to redirect their artillery. These critical associative leaps from ideology to symbols to the physical environment take place over substantial periods of time and are often linked with longstanding traditions of political identification bound up with ethnicity. The relationship between traditional political culture and social instability is clarified by Crawford in this way:

...cultural grievances became more or less embedded in historical memory, and ethnic or sectarian political entrepreneurs always had episodes of discrimination and privilege to call upon in their efforts to gain support from distinct cultural groups. But in some places, identity politics came to define the logic of the political game, and in other places, it did not. In those places where it did, the odds of violence were higher. And in those places where the logic of identity politics was weaker, the odds of cultural conflict decreased. The incentives and constraints offered by political

⁹ from Meron Benvenisti’s doctoral dissertation: “Administering Conflicts: Local Government in Jerusalem and Belfast” for the JFK School of Government, April 1982, p. 116.

institutions, and the strength of those institutions to follow through, largely determined those odds.¹⁰

Recognizing the inflammatory potential of historic sites and armed with the assumption that cities split only when security, identity, or opportunity are severely eroded, it is clear that effective conservation would seek to mollify social tensions through multi disciplinary collaboration, with due emphasis on the connection between economic development and cultural assets. The merits of this approach rely on acknowledging and engaging the culture development continuum before and after it has been broken or interrupted. It is regrettable that this type of collaboration has rarely been tested because the professional conservation community remains chronically aloof from constructive decision making processes related to urban growth, transition, and long term recovery in high risk areas.

Forfeited professional responsibility

The tendency of conservators and related non governmental organizations to work in isolation, focus on superficial problems, and insist on political settlement as a precondition for full scale involvement places severe limitations on the value and relevance of their contributions in the context of urban violence. In order to address these problems it would be necessary to critique standard professional terminology “site”, “significance”, “protection”, “client”, “danger”, etc. , identify and eradicate imbedded contradictions world heritage belonging to the world until it is in danger, at which point it is the concern of the local government, and so forth , Eurocentric hierarchies related to culturally specific notions of genius, achievement, beauty, etc. and dogmatism the secularization of art, for instance, or the prevalent assumption that democracy, unity, integration, or multiculturalism are inherently positive and desirable social characteristics . The scope of this essay does not allow for detailed assessment of these issues, so it will be assumed for the sake of argument that such obstacles can be surmounted.

Other challenges await. For example, the relationship of the historic fabric to communal demoralization is well understood by the military and paramilitary commanders who order its destruction. This cycle of intimidation destruction abandonment dereliction is highly reliable and resembles a downhill tumble into a ditch, leaving the victimized groups in a state of material and psychological disarray. Belfast’s working class ethnic enclaves provide a chilling illustration of the crippling long term impacts of this process; living in almost constant fear of attack, these neighborhoods turn inwards socially and spatially. The result is a deepening legacy of paranoia, racism, and chronic anxiety. One resident of East Belfast’s Catholic Short Strand community, surrounded on all sides by Protestant neighborhoods, described his fear of violence during the summer marching season:

This year is the first year my kids have stayed in the house in ten years. We usually take them to my mother’s, over July 12th. We just move them out completely...But usually I would stay out over the twelfth, just sitting in the front garden, or whatever. And if I went to bed, because I might have to get up early to go to work, I would just lie on top of the bed, just sort of leave your clothes on, that means you can get out quick. Not a good way to live, like, but it’s either that or move out and we’re not moving.¹¹

As far from the business of historic preservation as these issues seem to be, they always accompany inter ethnic conflict since it always incorporates a campaign to redraw the ethnic map of city, region, or nation. Successful repair and revitalization of the physical environment, when it finally takes place, must occur as one component in a larger, coordinated program of social development. While the disintegration and fragmentation of urban communities is commonly accelerated by purposeful destruction of stabilizing landmark structures, the reconstruction of those same structures does not, in itself, guarantee a return to the pre war social condition. What is lost when a bridge falls or a wall is erected is not automatically regained when those physical processes are reversed. Once shattered, the trust and tranquility of a community is long in mending.

While this notion seems self evident and even rudimentary, it is not often reflected in the behavior of the international cultural heritage establishment. One clear example can be drawn from the current reconstruction efforts in Mostar, Bosnia Herzegovina, following the inter ethnic hostilities of 1992 95. In the minds and imaginations of foreign intervenors, it is widely believed that a facsimile

¹⁰ From Beverly Crawford’s “The Causes of Cultural Conflict: Assessing the Evidence” in *The Myth of Ethnic Conflict*, Beverly Crawford and Ronnie D. Lipschutz eds. , p. 3

¹¹ from interview with Belfast resident, September 2001.

reconstruction of the fallen Old Bridge will heal social wounds by physically reuniting former antagonists and literally stitching together a divided city: Croats on the western side and Bosniaks on the eastern side. Unfortunately, few local citizens will find much solace in the realization of this project, underwritten with the special World Bank loan and monitored by Unesco, since the front line, and the true fault line separating Muslim and Catholic communities, was the Austro-Hungarian *Bulevar Narodne Revolucije* lying 200 yards west of and parallel to the Neretva River. Fixation on the Old Bridge as an emblem of recovery is certainly tempting, but useless in relation to the real nature of the social conflict, its actual manifestations, and the process of long-term social reconciliation in Mostar.

It is discouraging to note that Unesco's commitment to a short-sighted policy of object-oriented 'catastrophe reversal' continues with the Bamiyan Buddhas, now slated for possible reconstruction. This unfortunate scheme is a product of the same faulty sense of priorities used to insure the execution of the Old Bridge project in Mostar ahead of other more pressing rebuilding efforts. While various experts characterized the destruction of the statues as a "irreplaceable loss for humanity", the facsimile initiative is apparently gaining momentum. Paul Bucherer, director of the Afghanistan museum in Switzerland, explained that "a computer reconstruction of the figure will be followed by building a one-tenth scale model, to be housed in the Swiss museum. An actual reproduction of the Buddha at the original site will be possible once peace prevails in Afghanistan...It will be a symbol for the Afghans of the liberation from Taleban and al-Qaeda influences, and in addition, it is a national heritage which bridges all the ethnic and religious groups in the country."¹² How the 30-60m needed to fund the project will be raised is not yet clear. What is clear is the power of those magic words—symbol, liberation, al-Qaeda, bridge—to lull policy makers into the thickets of bad logic.

These two recent examples underscore the complexity of successful conservation in the wake of human disasters. They also highlight the danger of recovery schemes that fixate on the abstract value of physical monuments to the exclusion of investment in vital institutions and infrastructure. Placing faith in such undertakings is more than wasteful and regrettable; it can result in more harm than good. These facsimile projects reveal an unwillingness to acknowledge and engage the deeper meanings and implications of inter-ethnic strife. They ignore the difficulty and the promise of a long uphill climb towards social recovery in the interest of positive public relations for the implementing agencies. The over-simplification of the conflict and its remedies can appear insulting to local residents who will never fully recover from their trauma, and who can easily envision ways to spend millions of dollars that are concrete, not symbolic. When asked for her thoughts regarding the reconstruction of the Old Bridge, one young Mostar resident said that while she loved the Bridge, she would rather have a factory so that people could resume a normal life¹³. For her, symbols would follow jobs, and esteem should be rebuilt before historic structures.

In the realm of ethnically divided cities, the absent professional is everywhere in evidence; violence, partition, and recovery proceed without the benefit of coordinated design, planning, or conservation strategies:

- q Nicosia remains shattered, its buffer zone only surveyed this year after 28 years of total abandonment and neglect. Forgotten by foreign professionals, frozen in place by third-party interventions, monitored by two armies and the United Nations, scarred by blighting and dereliction on both sides of the interface, the capital of Cyprus remains crippled both physically and functionally.
- q In Jerusalem, deprivation in the eastern neighborhoods contrasts ever more sharply with suburbanization in the west. Scars of the former Armistice Line remain visible, while landscaping projects along the skirt of the walled city have not succeeded in erasing the memory of partition. New lines—in the form of roads, trenches, and checkpoints—are etched between Jews and Palestinians in the occupied West Bank every day.
- q Likewise, "peaceline" construction continues at a brisk pace in Belfast, where communities still petition for new barricades in addition to horizontal and vertical extensions to existing walls. No city-wide physical security planning complements these micro-engineered remedies, and no peaceline has yet been removed.

¹² from the BBC World Service online, 30 January 2002.

¹³ interview with Lelja Muslibegovic, Mostar, July 2001.

- q Beirut has left post war reconstruction in the hands of private developers, whose attentions focus solely on the elite financial district.
- q Mostar continues to stumble through its eighth year of piecemeal rehabilitation as the local economy withers.

How can built environment professionals, and conservators in particular, find a more meaningful role in these cycles where their skills are so urgently needed? How can they overcome the obstacles inherent in their training and institutional culture to participate in a constructive, appropriate way? Meron Benvenisti may provide a clue when he notes that the efforts of most professionals in arena of inter ethnic conflict are “ineffective because of the complex relationship between real and perceived environments” and complains that they all seek conflict resolution: “the partisan seeks to eliminate conflict by winning it; the professional, by improving real environment; and the resolver, by a compromise. The endemic and organic nature of the conflict render all their efforts futile, because communal conflicts have no ultimate solution.”¹⁴ If this assertion is correct, it illuminates a possible path forward where success is measured in incremental improvements to psychological wellbeing rather than in the restitution of contested symbols.

Conclusions

The perils of the iconoclastic project, felt in the context of inter ethnic war and isolated acts of violence perpetrated globally, call for a re examination of the effectiveness of foreign professionals dedicated to the protection of important cultural assets. Forging a better role for the built environment professional requires a broad based acknowledgement of the complexity of the cultural narratives central to inter ethnic conflict. There is rarely a singular, unified cultural identity to be rejuvenated; it is not sufficient, nor always desirable, to reconstruct broken symbols or reunite broken cities.

The conservation specialist in particular must be prepared to embrace spatial and symbolic contradictions embedded in the contested urban landscape:

- q physical memories both dark and light;
- q cultural properties functioning as both assets and liabilities with respect to their steward communities;
- q sites that must be treated as both symbol and commodity;
- q a hierarchy of recovery needs that favors food and work over repair of historic places, and
- q physical evidence that suggests both a symbolic imperative for, and the limitations of peaceful coexistence.

The inadequacy of reductive narratives and non complex interpretations should be likewise accepted from the outset, along with the prospect of a long, frustrating, and incremental path back towards pre war conditions. The suggestion that symbolic structures in themselves might provide a bridge between conflict and reconciliation, or between rival ethnic factions living in close proximity to one another, demonstrates impatience and misunderstanding. Historic monuments, whether standing, ruined, or rebuilt, are markers of the moment that created them. Only a healthy society can infuse them with new, positive associations. The success of such an infusion depends upon the dedicated labors of architects and conservators along with many others working together to provide a bundle of developmental staples to the client community; a rich physical environment is one, vital but itself insufficient, component of this set.

If these essentials are successfully delivered, the conservator will have contributed to a process of recovery with benefits drawing from, but extending well beyond, the physical domain. All parts will have contributed to a re negotiation of the traditional urban contract: collective security and opportunity in return for individual energy and tolerance.

¹⁴ Benvenisti dissertation, p. 10.

Illustrations and captions:

Six illustrations for optional use are attached:

- , 01DC-BrtGLdeco.jpg : A typical war-damaged building in central Beirut which was not included in the private redevelopment initiative coordinated by Solidere. For many important and structurally viable buildings outside this privileged zone, no attention or investment has been forthcoming since the end of urban hostilities circa 1995.
- , 02DC-Belfburntrow.jpg : A row of brick terrace-style townhouses abandoned due to inter-ethnic violence and intimidation. These houses were unfortunate enough to not only become blighted by the interface between Catholics and Protestants, but actually to become the “peaceline” itself. No long-term or city-wide plan for increased security or threat reduction has been implemented.
- , 03DC-MoBridge8-01.jpg : the remnant of Mostar’s Old Bridge, with foundation repairs ongoing. The facsimile reconstruction, supported with World Bank credit, is slated for completion in late 2002.
- , 04DC-NicPAPHOSG.jpg : the Paphos Gate, one of three historic portals in Nicosia’s medieval walls, is traversed by the Green Line and fortified by barrels and barbed wire. These installations, appearing ad hoc and temporary, have been in place and untouched since the Turkish invasion in 1974.
- , 05DC-Jarabsjaffa1948.jpg : Archival photos from Jerusalem, showing Arab citizens near the Armistice Line as it intersects with Jaffa Gate at the extreme west of the Old City.
- , 06DC-Jnewgate1964.jpg : The New Gate in Jerusalem’s Old City as it appeared during the period of physical partition, 1948-1967. No coherent design or planning informed the partition process nor its aftermath in the wake of the Six Day War. The city remains scarred and the old lines of demarcation, though no longer impassable, remain firmly fixed in the minds of Jerusalemites.
- , 07DCBelfFallkids+burned.jpg : Archival photo of Catholic children “burned out” of their houses in North Belfast. This type of violence and intimidation has been continuous since the start of the Troubles in North Ireland around 1969. Through the many cycles of physical and architectural destruction, no comprehensive urban plan for prevention or mediation has been devised or requested by the municipality.

author biographical statements

Esther Charlesworth is a practicing architect and urban designer affiliated with the City of Melbourne. She has been actively involved in reconstruction strategies in Bosnia and Lebanon over the last 5 years and completed her Master Thesis at Harvard University (1995) on a comparative analysis of post-war cities (Warsaw, Hanoi, Beirut and Mostar). Ms. Charlesworth is currently involved with field work in Mostar, Nicosia, and Kabul, and she serves as an assistant professor of urban design at the American University in Beirut and is completing her doctoral dissertation at the Post-War Reconstruction and Development Unit at the University of York.

Jon Calame is a founding Partner and Operations Officer for Minerva Partners, Inc., a non-profit architectural conservation consulting group. Previously, he served as partnerships manager for the World Monuments Fund in New York, where he managed the Wilson Challenge Program for Conserving Our Heritage and provided oversight for conservation field projects in Panamá and Mostar. This work in Mostar involved collaboration with the World Bank and the Municipality of Mostar towards a comprehensive rehabilitation scheme for neighborhoods and individual monuments in the war-torn city. Mr. Calame holds a bachelor's degree in art history from Yale (1991) and a master's degree in historic preservation from Columbia University's School of Architecture (1995).