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Culture, Heritage and Identity¹

Series of lectures on Cultural Heritage in the 21st Century - Opportunities and Challenges

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¹ The presentation is based on the following literature: Albert, Marie-Theres, Bernecker, Roland, Rudolf, Britta (eds.), *Understanding Heritage, Perspectives in Heritage Studies*, Berlin, Boston 2012; Albert, Marie-Theres, Ringbeck, Birgitta, *40 Years World Heritage Convention. Popularizing the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage*, Berlin, Boston 2015; Albert, Marie-Theres (ed.) *Perceptions of Sustainability in Heritage Studies*, Berlin, Boston 2015; Albert, Marie-Theres, Bandarin, Francesco, Pereira Roders, Ana (eds) *Going Beyond. Perceptions of Sustainability in Heritage Studies No 2*, Cham/Switzerland

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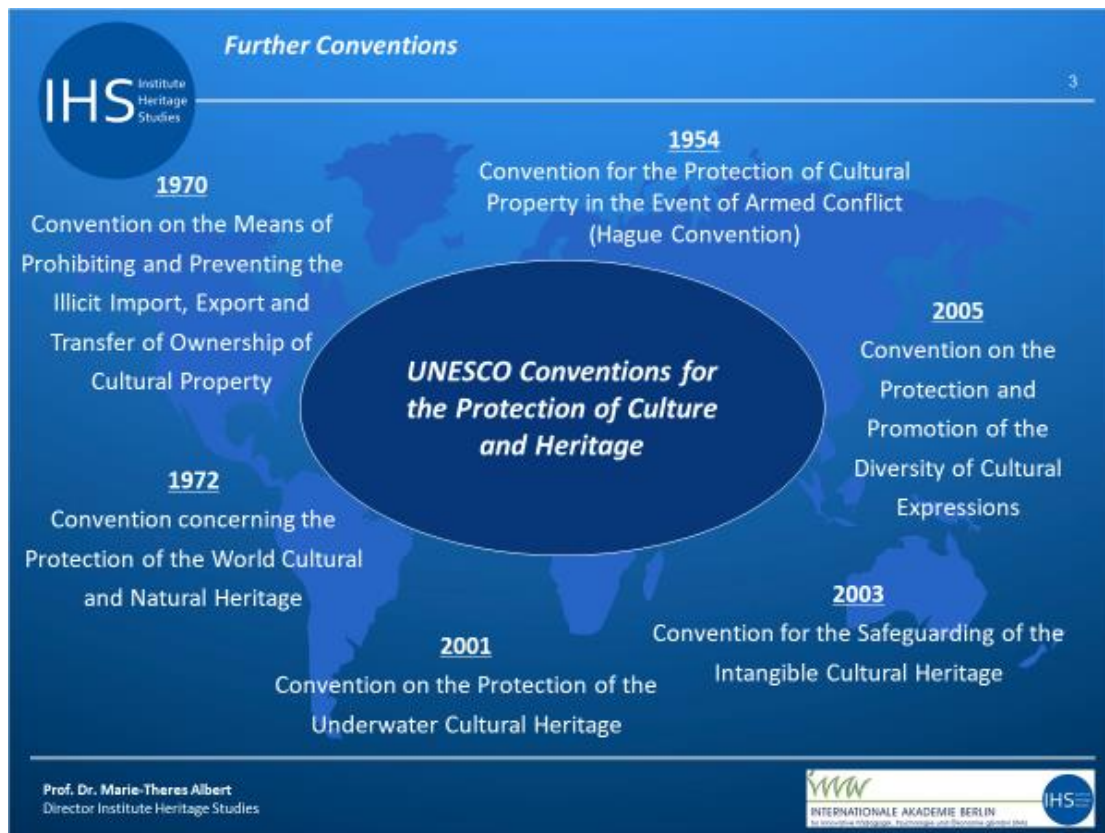
Introduction

The protection, collection, and development of natural and cultural assets, as well as their presentation and dissemination for all social strata, are important tasks for present and future generations. This, in short, is stated in the preamble of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in November 1972.



With this Convention the international community has created a tool to protect directly and in a sustainable way its tangible and intangible heritage in the short, middle and long run. Apart from that, with protecting material assets, the Convention indirectly also protects cultural identities. This is where the concepts of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Diversity come into play. Heritage is protected on account of heritage form-

ing identities and transforming them at the same time. And due to this, namely due to this immanent attribute, the heritage of mankind has become an irreplaceable resource for humanity.



Dimensions of Culture and Identity

Cultures are created by man and similarly, they are destroyed by man. This concerns the material and immaterial culture and their cultural expressions as well as the arts and their cultural institutions. Cultures are integrated units of mankind, technology and society which have been formed in historical processes and which equally develop further in precisely those said processes. In this sense, the concept for the protection of cultural heritage exhibits a double dimension.

On one hand, cultural heritage is a representation of the immaterial elements of cultures. It consists of those elements of the history of cultures, which are handed down from generation to generation. In other words, cultural heritage is a representation of the

culture's spiritual and intangible heritage, its traditions, values, and norms. On the other hand, cultural heritage comprises the material elements of cultures. Cultural heritage are monuments, statues, documents, or other tangible assets. Heritage in general is commonly defined as a "portion allotted to a specified person, group, etc" or a "Property consisting of land etc. that devolved on the heir at law as opposed to an executor". Furthermore we can also find definitions like "A gift which constitutes a proper possession." and "Inherited circumstances or benefits."

It is both elements of the heritage of mankind, which forms the background of experiences to which societies refer in constructing their present. It is both, the material and immaterial heritage which shapes the collective identity of the cultures and the nations of the world. At the same time, this collective heritage of mankind creates the basis for the formation of respective individual identities. However, concerning the formation of identities, we have to look at history. Identity includes the production of material assets as well as intangible traditions.

Even though it is both material and immaterial heritage which constitute the collective identity of peoples, it had been mostly the material elements of heritage which were brought to our attention by the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. If we reflect on cultural heritage and its protection, we still mostly focus on material heritage.

This one-sided view of cultural heritage and its significance is definitely outdated. In the meantime conventions have been adopted for the safeguarding of intangible heritage (2003) and the promotion of cultural diversity (2005). Furthermore no monument, no historic structure, and no historic site will by itself guide experiences or form identities. Cultural assets – whether they are authentic and of "universal value", to stay with the definitions of the UNESCO, or not – will only become significant for the formation of identities, if they are declared to be of *outstanding universal value* (ouv). Only then the products of the past will endow current identities with meanings.

Which elements of culture will be granted with the status of cultural heritage, worthy of protection, does consequently not depend on the past. It is always the contemporary society which defines its history. It is the aims, values and judgements of the present, which motivate and guide reflections on one's own past. Consequently, cultural heritage

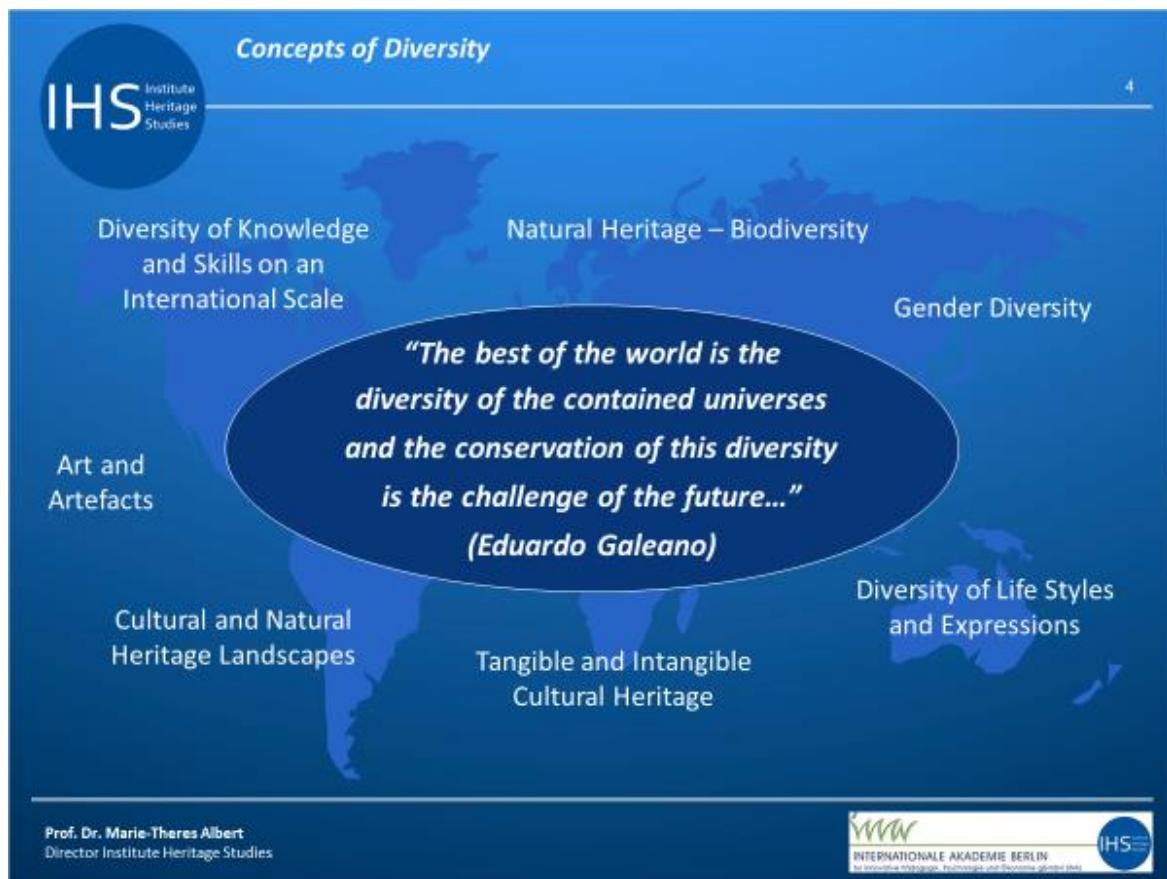
is in a twofold way 'present' in the present. Concerning the intangible aspect, cultural heritage guides people in their lifestyles and in interpreting their everyday lives. From a material perspective, cultural heritage is always a product of a social interpretation of both the present and the past. More precisely: Cultural heritage is the product of a reconstruction of the past, which is determined by the needs of the present.

Cultural heritage, be it that of individuals or of societies be it that of local or of the world community, should simply be protected for the reason that it constitutes the present. And it is the present, forming the ground of experiences, on which projections for the future are based. In so far the protection of heritage aims at constructing and shaping the future. To become aware of these interdependencies, namely the relationships between past, present, and future, is consequently one of the challenges, with which we have to deal with in protecting heritage.

The formation of identities takes place by actively defining values and creating products. At the same time, values and products may not be created without cultural identities. The formation of identities thus always takes place in inter-depending processes of past, present and future. This means that we cannot develop by simply producing values, we need cultural identity as one of the most important prerequisites for any kind of development. Against this background, heritage forms identities by allowing the world's cultures to transfer meanings which they gave to their material and immaterial products from the past to the present to future generations. However, concerning the formation of identities we have to note that we have to understand history as a holistic process. Identity thus includes the production of material assets as well as intangible traditions.

The idea to protect the heritage of mankind derives its importance from the inherent quality of heritage itself. Every item of heritage has the quality to form and uphold identities. The heritage of mankind has thus become itself an irreplaceable resource for humanity. This particular inherent quality of heritage prompted the world community to protect the heritage of mankind in its material, immaterial and its diversity of expressions. Similarly, the world community recognized the different elements to be of equal value. Of course, what is true for cultures as systems is equally true for the most important mediators of cultural experiences: the relationship between past, present and future is

of course significant for the human being as a cultured being. Of course, human experiences are likewise not independent from history. And it is the historical determination of each individual, which constitutes our respective individual, social, national, or cultural identities. For this reason, “identity” is equally a dynamic construct. Culture and identity shape the life expressions and needs of people. And precisely those expressions and needs of the cultures of the world basically constitute the diversity of cultures and the wealth of heritage.



The protection of this heritage is only possible by acknowledging diversity. The protection of heritage presupposes acceptance of other cultures and their expressions. This requires tolerance and openness as another aim of UNESCO and other national and international organizations. The need of acknowledging diversity has also been emphasised by the UNESCO “Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity” of 2001 and, to a certain extent, by the 2005 “Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions”. This is at least how UNESCO Secretary General Koïchiro

Matsuura phrased it on the opening ceremony for the World Heritage Convention's 30th anniversary celebrations in Venice in November 2002. *"The identity of peoples and the cohesion of societies are deeply rooted in the symbolic tissue of the past. Or, in other words, the conditions for peace reside, to a large extent, in each individual's pride in their cultural roots, and the recognition of equal dignity of all cultures."* (Matsuura 2007)

Destruction of Heritage Aims at Destroying Identities

Both tangible and intangible culture and heritage are highly important for the formation of identities. The protection of both is consequently important to safeguard peace. However, in the course of history, this realization came about first by the annihilation of cultures and the destruction of their material and immaterial assets. The destruction of cultural assets has been part of historical processes throughout many social systems and many generations with the aim to establish new political orders. Allow me to give you some striking examples from considerably different eras and cultures. The first example is the Terracotta Army of X'ian.



Terracotta Army of X'an

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„No doubt thousands of statues will still remain to be unearthed at this archaeological site, which was not discovered until 1974. Quin Shihuang (d. 210 B.C.), the first unifier of China is buried, surrounded by the famous terracotta warriors, at the centre of a complex designed to mirror the urban plan off the capital, Xianyang. The small figures are all different; with their horses, chariots and weapons, they are all masterpieces of realism and also of great historical interest.“

Source:
www.unesco.org/nwhc/pages/doc/main/3.htm

**The Destruction of Heritage
Aims at Destroying Identities**




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The Terracotta Army was declared World Heritage in 1987. It was created by the first Chinese emperor Qin Shihuang in X'ian. This emperor went down in history as a cruel tyrant. He was just one of the many despotic rulers who wanted to become immortal by leaving a memorial for themselves. Additionally Qin Shihuang created a replica of his army. Thousands of soldier figures were cast in clay.

Qin Shihuangdi's second son, Qin Er Shi, which took over the reign after his father's death, was not as capable as his father. Only three years after the death of the emperor, already uprisings occurred, and the general of the rebels Xiang Yu destroyed the tomb (207 BC). The pits with the clay soldiers were opened and a large amount of weapons were taken away. The wooden walls, which encased the soldiers, were burnt and many sculptures were destroyed. Qin Er Shi was killed in 206 BC and the end of the fate of the Qin dynasty was sealed. The son wanted to destroy the material legacy of his father, with the aim to prevent an identification of the people with his power and strength. The identification not only concerned the foundation of imperial China, but also the revolutionary technical and material accomplishments.

The Second Example: The Giant Buddhas of Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan:



The Giant Buddhas of Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan

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**The Destruction of Heritage
Aims at Destroying Identities**

„The cultural landscape and archaeological remains of the Bamiyan Valley represent the particular artistic and religious developments from the 1st to the 13th centuries in ancient Bakhtria, integrating various cultural influences into the Gandhara school of Buddhist art. The area contains numerous Buddhist monastic ensembles and sanctuaries, as well as fortified settlements from the Islamic period. The site is also testimony to the tragic destruction of the two standing Buddha statues by the Taliban in March 2001, which shook the world.“

www.unesco.org/nwhc/pages/doc/mainf3.htm

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The reason for the destruction of the Buddhas was the Taliban's Sunni Islamic fundamentalist and doctrinary claim to power which manifested itself with the destruction of the expression of another religious culture. With the unbelievable destruction of these 1,500 year-old statues the Taliban tried to secure their religious belief by annihilating Buddhist cultural heritage. Previous attempts to deliberately desecrate and neglect the site apparently did not have the desired effects in the local population.

Last but not least, we have to mention the destruction of heritage due to political and ideological interests. And here it can be analysed that the first initiatives for the protection of people's cultural heritage date back to the period after World War II. The war-waging countries did not stop at destroying cultures and their heritage. They obliterated monuments and entire cities to force their respective ideologies and political strategies on people.

The cities of Warsaw and Dresden, third and fourth striking examples.



Warsaw destroyed

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Warsaw destroyed in 1945

Warsaw was destroyed at least twice by German Nazi troops. The first time: late in 1939, in the fascist attack on the country; then again during the Warsaw Uprising between October 1944 and January 1945.

Approximately 80% of the city had been destroyed. Around 700.000 citizens lost their lives.

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Warsaw reconstructed

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Reconstructed Old Town of Warsaw

Historic centre of Warsaw

Category (ii), (vi)
listed since 1980

After the war, a five-year reconstruction campaign by its citizens resulted in today's meticulous restoration of the Old Town, with its churches, palaces and market-place. It is an outstanding example of a near-total reconstruction of a span of history covering the 13th to the 20th century.

Source: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/30>

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However, we have to emphasize that Warsaw's reconstruction between 1945 and 1947 is noted as one of the biggest cultural achievements of the post-war era. To this day, the reconstruction inspires the nation's cultural identity to a high degree. As a result, since 1980, the old town centre of Warsaw is listed as World Cultural Heritage.

Dresden's destruction by allied forces in February 1945 was based on a completely different political ideology. Nevertheless, again, the main objective was to destroy cultural heritage in order to destroy those cultural identities which represented the system.

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Dresden's Destruction

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Destroyed Dresden, 1945

Dresden in ruins


In 1945, Dresden was heavily bombed by the Allied Powers, and a large part of the Old Town was destroyed.

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“During the Second World War, the arms industry was massively expanded. In 1933, Dresden is Germany’s largest city with 642,000 inhabitants. Hitler’s plan was to develop the city as the geographical centre to the *Cultural Centre of Europe*.” Air raids in 1945 nearly the complete city was destroyed. With this a signal was set that material heritage represents power and if a power structure should be destroyed, also material heritage will have to be destroyed. (Gabriele Kalmbach, 2011. Gabriele Kalmbach, 2012.)

It is important to note that Dresden represented German identity mainly in terms of a historically developed social and cultural centre, which experienced from the 17th century on an unbroken industrial, infrastructural and cultural growth and boasted a wealth of magnificent buildings. The population of Dresden was neither less nor more, just as fascist as the rest of the German population, yet the town was bombed in February 1945 by allied forces. Approximately 25% of the city’s area was destroyed and a great number of people killed, which cannot be ascertained precisely to this day.



Dresden's Reconstruction

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Rebuilt Frauenkirche

The Reconstruction of Dresden

After the war, as part of the German Democratic Republic, the destroyed areas were subject to restoration and reconstruction.


In 2004, the Dresden Elbe Valley was listed under criteria (ii), (iii), (iv), (v).

The nomination includes the Frauenkirche, the reconstruction was completed in 2006.

The Dresden Elb Valley was delisted in 2009.

Source: http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/1156.pdf

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But also in this case the reconstruction of the city was of high symbolic value. Particularly the Protestant *Frauenkirche* (Our Lady's Church) which was reconstructed from 1994 to 2005 with the help of international donations became a symbol for reconciliation. In 2004 the UNESCO nominated the Dresden Elbe valley including this unique church as World Heritage. The nomination specifically referred to the city's destruction in the Second World War and its reconstruction.

The Dresden Elbe Valley was inscribed in the World Heritage List in 2004. The inscription was justified with the outstandingly picturesque and beautiful cultural landscape including the integrity of the valley. The site was delisted in 2009 because of plans to build a bridge which would have affected the aspects of the site's integrity and thus the reasons for its inscription. It can be illustrated here, more than in any other context of World Heritage Nominations, how important community involvement is as the reflection of local interest and national disinterest in a World Heritage Site.


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Dresden Elb Valley


View of the Cultural Landscape Dresden and justification for its inscription



Current view on the historic city centre of Dresden


Source: Grüne Liga, Netzwerk Ökologischer Bewegungen, <http://www.welterbe-erhalten.de/pict/foto/09.jpg>, DOA 04.02.08

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For Germans or other nationals living in Germany, the former World Heritage Site Dresden Elbe Valley is a striking example for a lack of constructive community involvement and communication. When the citizens were asked in a referendum whether they wanted the Bridge “Waldschlösschenbrücke” or not, they were not even informed about the World Heritage status and its respective conditions. And of course they decided to have a bridge.


How could the citizens of Dresden have known that their vote for the construction of the “Waldschlösschenbrücke” would threaten the Dresden Elbe Valley landscape? They didn’t know anything about the UNESCO criteria nor did they have any idea about the UNESCO concept of integrity. Only now, with the Dresden Elbe Valley being delisted after it had been on the World Heritage in danger list for 2 years, have the citizens been adequately informed and involved. Before, they had no idea this category, despite the opinion polls and surveys which have been carried out.



Dresden Elb Valley

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View of the Cultural Landscape Dresden and justification for its inscription



Construction site of the Waldschloesschen Bridge in the
Dresden Elbe Valley, Germany

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/onkel_thoms/6986070628/

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The destruction of cultures by the political systems of the subsequent generations is a constituent component of the historical process of mankind. It continues to the present. The destruction of tangible and intangible cultural assets aims at destroying identities. And this is precisely the underlying and never-changing intention of all those who destroy. From a historical perspective, people tried to achieve the aim of destroying identities, not just by simply destroying tangible and intangible cultural assets. The destruction of identities aimed at the establishment of new systems. And with this purpose systems even went as far as systematically denying whole populations the right to live. This was the case in antiquity, it was decidedly the strategy of colonialism and it continues to the present day, to the here and now.

From a contemporary and historical perspective, securing and exercising power frequently involves to drastically sever the roots of people. This occurs across the whole world and independently of the respective political system. This happens always along the same lines: The most important material and immaterial expressions of a given hu-

man culture and cultural identity are destroyed, desecrated and devalued in order to create space for new power structures.



Long Walk Home

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A scene from the movie "Long Walk Home" (2002)

Between 1910 and 1970, official policy in Australia allowed to take away half-blood Aborigine children from their families and to incarcerate them 'for their own good' in training schools. They were educated as servants for white families.

Source: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0252444/#comment>

Contempt of Cultural Identity – Aborigines in Australia



A scene from the movie "Long Walk Home" (2002)

Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0252444/mediaindex>

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The destruction of identities aims at the establishment of new systems. And with this purpose systems even went as far as systematically denying whole populations the right to live. Again, we need to turn to very dark sides of history. It needs to be said, systems have generally used all means to achieve their aims indiscriminately, even until today. Whereas destroyed material assets were frequently reconstructed, the annihilation of whole peoples, as it was practiced especially by fascism, colonialism and imperialism, had a lasting effect.

Herero and Namaqua Genocide in South-West Africa

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Surviving Herero (1907)

Herero in chains during the 1904 rebellion in the German colony South-West Africa, before the Herero Genocide (1904-07).

After WW1 the territory was ruled by South Africa. Namibia, as it is called today, became independent in 1990.



World Map of Colonies at the End of the Second World War in 1945.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonialism>

**The Destruction of Cultural Identities
Aims at Establishing New Systems**

Berlin City Palace

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City Palace (Stadtschloss) in Berlin, Germany

The Berlin City Palace was situated in central Berlin. It was originally built in 1443 as a winter residence for the rulers of Brandenburg, then Prussia and finally it became the seat of the German Emperors.

After the First World War, it was converted into a museum and its interior was destroyed during the Second World War.

The Palace was completely demolished on the 7.9.1950



Demolition after the War


Last but not least, the destruction of heritage due to political and ideological interests has to be mentioned. And here I'd like to mention another striking example of destruction and reconstruction in the 20th century, Berlin City Palace. The Berlin City Palace shows the fault lines of German history and political power during the German division during the Cold War. Compared to the above-mentioned examples, the Hohenzollern City Palace in Berlin may be a trifle; however, it illustrates well the political interests that were involved. On the basis of the City Palace we may not only show the political and ideological understanding of the former GDR and its approach to history and heritage, but also that of today's German government.

The Palace was completely demolished on 7.9.1950. One of the reasons for the demolition was that the decadence ascribed to the Hohenzollern did not match with the Socialist image of a society of workers and farmers as it was propagated by the GDR. Therefore the material traces of Germany's monarchist history and heritage needed to be destroyed in order to lay the foundations for a new ideology. And as it has been mentioned before, the new ideology of the GDR socialism was supposedly to be implemented "without history" and thus "untainted" by the past.

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The Palace of the Republic


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In 1950, the communists in East Germany demolished the City Palace as a symbol of "Prussian militarism". In its stead, they erected the Palace of the Republic, a modern socialist realist building.

After the German reunification, the Palace was found to be contaminated by asbestos. Despite local opposition, in 2003, the German parliament decided to demolish the Palace of the Republic and reconstruct the City Palace.

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In its stead the Palace of the Republic - and also unofficially known as Erich's Lamp Shop - was erected, a building which reflected the political ideology of the GDR. The concept for its use consisted in satisfying real and imagined needs for entertainment, communication, and an administration, which was close to the people. So much for history; but how about the present? Let us return to the Berlin City Palace or respectively to the Palace of the Republic,



The demolition of the Palace of the Republic was completed in 2008 and the Palace of the Republic is now completely destroyed. The goal is to resurrect the former Hohenzollern Palace, of which at place, no stone is left. If you listen closely to the undertones in the arguments for this demolition and the planned reconstruction of the former City Palace or at least its facade, it is again about history and it is again about political ideologies. In March 2020 the reconstruction of the palace has nearly been finished and - to express it sarcastically – it seems that the German population is satisfied with the restoration of the material attestation of former power.

Conclusion

Seen from a historical perspective, to secure and to exercise power always went hand in hand with severing the roots of people. This happened irrespective of geographical location and political system. Those hungry for power have always followed the same strategy: The most important tangible and intangible expressions of a given human culture and identity were destroyed, desecrated, or defaced in order to pave the ground and to establish the framework for the introduction of new power structures. The destruction of heritage aims at the destruction of identities, and the latter gives the new rulers enough space to establish their new ideologies without any burdens from the past.




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Destroyed Heritage

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The destroyed Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, Iraq




Mosque before bombing in 2006



Mosque after bombing in 2006

The destroyed Umayyad Mosque in Aleppo, Syria





Mosque in 2009



Destroyed Mosque in 2016

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Thus, with the adoption and the application of the “World Heritage Convention”, the “Intangible Heritage Convention” and the “Convention on Cultural Diversity”, UNESCO has

not only created the possibility to recognize the heritage of mankind in retrospect and with a perspective for the future, but it also created a framework to understand the destructive and constructive potentials of mankind's historical process explicitly.

Thank you for your interest!

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Contrast, (CC BY 3.0 DE); 18.4) Mosque in 2016,



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[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Great_Mosque_of_Aleppo_\(1395100610143169195452\).jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Great_Mosque_of_Aleppo_(1395100610143169195452).jpg), Tasnim News Agency, (CC BY 4.0)