

Review of: Clack, T. & Dunkley, M. (eds) (2022). Cultural Heritage in Modern Conflict: past, propaganda, parade. London: Routledge. Hardback, 344pp, 33 bw illustrations; ISBN 9781032200804.

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“Cultural Heritage in Modern Conflict: past, propaganda and parade” edited by Timothy Clack and Mark Dunkley is part of Routledge’s Advances in Defence Studies series, and to that end it states that it is *“the first volume to look at culture and heritage through a defence and security lens”*, and will be of interest to both researchers and professional military personnel *“seeking to understand ... how to navigate their way through current and future conflict contexts”*. The volume comprises an introduction by the editors, and then four sections each with between three and four chapters. These sections focus on the past on parade, as propaganda, as peacekeeper, and on the practice of its protection.

Many, though not all, of the contributors are connected to or working with the UK military and/or with the US military. This means it is a single-perspective book in the sense that it is written from the standpoint of the West, and, with a few exceptions, more specifically from that of the UK military. It is important to note this very narrow lens in order to manage expectations of the book. This book is not vanguard research, and, with the exception of the excellent chapter by ETIENNE BERGÈS on Myanmar, it is a kind of summary of approaches and a reiteration of ideas, somewhat simplified, so if you are an academic or cultural heritage professional, the most useful thing you will get from this book is how the UK and US military think when it comes to cultural heritage protection. The chapters themselves are a very mixed bag, ranging from interesting and informative to banal and quite baffling, even concerning in the evident bias/lack of objectivity of some.

The Introduction, by the book’s editors, sub-titled *“Culture, heritage, conflict”* is, once you get past the rather clichéd opening section that references, naturally, the second world war D-Day Normandy landings, a useful basic introduction to cultural heritage in conflict and the development of its protection from the viewpoint of the UK military. The chapter looks briefly, for example, at *“intelligent heritage”*, by which is meant how heritage has become part of the preparatory cycle in the UK and how two distinct types of intelligence have been produced: Cultural Heritage Intelligence (CHINT) and Cultural Property Intelligence (CPINT), even though in reality there is

much overlap. It looks at the defence of heritage, including summarising the international legal instruments, principally the Hague Convention, Blue shield, etc. It also mentions the calls for a Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework but, as the authors point out, the moral complexity of using force to protect heritage remains under-theorised. Instead, there continues to be the rather simplified notion of the subordination of heritage to human life within what is called the *“defence posture”*. This cannot even get close to providing ways of dealing with the destruction of heritage as part of the destruction of humans, so although the issue of cultural genocide is mentioned, there is no mention, let alone discussion, of cultural destruction being a precursor to or part of the annihilation of people. Nor is this issue brought together with the ability of heritage destruction to provoke violent conflict, mentioned elsewhere in the Introduction.

It attempts to address the issue of how the misuse of local heritage by the military can cause local antagonism, and then, by way of an example, acknowledges that the damage done to the site of Babylon by mostly US and Polish forces during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, was *“perhaps the most notorious example in modern times”*, but then disingenuously describes the destruction caused by building a military camp right on the site as *“inadvertent”*. Iraq’s cultural heritage suffered extensively during the invasion of 2003 and the subsequent US/Coalition occupation, and has been well-documented, as has the fact that it could have been and should have been avoided, and at least some of this destruction seems to have been a deliberate tactic (EMBERLING & HANSON, 2008; BAKER ET AL., 2009; KATHEM, 2019).

This introductory chapter finishes with a look at a case study to *“demonstrate the utility of a cultural heritage lens in the development of military understanding”*, using what the authors identify as the Chinese government’s *“operationalisation of heritage”* in the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.

As is well-known, the OBOR is a major initiative to develop a trade and infrastructure network that connects Asia with Europe and Africa, based on the concept of the historic Silk Road, and utilising all the political and cultural heritage that underpins that as a means of legitimising the OBOR. The influence of cultural heritage and its use has been used both positively, as demonstrated by China’s close relations with Cambodia and its significant contributions to conservation works at Angkor Wat, and negatively, most notably in the repression of the Uyghurs. This has been la-

belled as cultural genocide, and there is concern that it may lead to full genocide (FINNEGAN, 2020; SMITH FINLAY, 2020), carried out by the Chinese government as a part of controlling this region. The chapter goes on to argue that when viewed through the lens of CHINT, the Chinese government has exploited cultural heritage to assert authority; that *“unequivocally, the strategic incorporation of cultural heritage into the delivery of the OBOR initiative has extended Beijing’s political influence”*.

China, however, is not alone in this, and the use of cultural heritage in such a way is not new, but this is where the narrow lens and troubling lack of scholarly objectivity of the book is evident. The introduction sets the tone of a kind of lip service to the inherently political nature of heritage while at the same time failing to acknowledge not only the extent of the often nefarious use of cultural heritage for political means, but that such uses are not something confined to *“the enemy”*.

This issue is also seen DUNKLEY & CLACK’s chapter on *“The Russian weaponization of cultural heritage”*. They assess the extent to which Russia is *“exploiting cultural heritage across the different defence postures, and within hybrid and subthreshold operations, to achieve military and political advantage”*; in other words, the weaponization of cultural heritage, whether that be via its deliberate targeting or for less overtly violent means of propaganda. The chapter briefly examines Russian cultural policy objectives noting the identification of preservation of the cultural and historical heritage of the people of Russia as national priorities and the linking of Russian culture and heritage to Russia’s national security. It also examines how Russia has treated cultural heritage, particularly of the Tartar minority, in Crimea since its annexation. This has been extremely dubious, ranging from appropriation to outright destruction and looting, for example the Khan’s Palace of Bakhchissaraj, one of the most famous Muslim palaces in the region, is being restored in such a way as to erase much of its past. Likewise, during the invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian cultural heritage has been deliberately targeted in one way or another (MUNAWAR & SYMONDS, 2023).

Russia’s treatment of cultural heritage in Syria, however, has been more positive, but once again as a tool to justify intervention and continued presence in the country. Likewise Russia and Iran signed an agreement in 2017 to facilitate cooperation, training and research in archaeology and monument conservation.

The chapter’s main argument is that within Russia, culture and geopolitics are being used to

reinforce one another, with an increased weaponization of culture as part of the long term strategy to not only preserve and promote the cultural heritage and identity of Russia, but to extend its influence and sovereignty. While the chapter is an interesting summary of the situation in relation to Russia’s approach to and political use of cultural heritage as a form of soft power and extending its international influence, it is, of course, far from alone in this. As noted at the beginning of the review, this book is very much from a singular point of view with little meaningful introspection of either US or UK policies. Arguably what Russia is doing is just a more aggressive form of what the US, the UK and associated allies have been doing for many years, and arguably the invasion of Iraq and the treatment of Iraqi cultural heritage following the 2003 invasion, may have set something of a precedent.

Not that there haven’t been attempts to improve how the US and UK military deal with cultural heritage since 2003. In part one is LAURIE RUSH’s *“Cultural property protection in the 21st century: the privilege of working with the most deployed division”*. Despite the rather clichéd jingoism of the subtitle, it is evident this is not a positive. She opens with the unmitigated disaster that was the US invasion of Iraq and subsequent damage and destruction caused to Iraqi cultural heritage and how this came about in part due to the refusal of the US military to listen to advice offered by US archaeologists and others. Although this has subsequently driven NATO to develop a cultural property protection programme, with an agreement signed in 2019 between the Smithsonian Institution and the US Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (CAPOC) to launch a *“monuments officer program for the 21st century”*, there seems to have been little further development. There is mention of how a cultural property protection programme should work at institutional level but notes that when human terrain mapping emerged as a counterinsurgency intelligence tool in the early 2000s, no one thought to include any form of cultural property geospatial data layer with predictable dire consequences in Afghanistan as US troops failed, for example, to take on board the underground system of water provision (karez), to consider the importance of major religious festivals, or to respect burial grounds and other such sacred space, which then, entirely predictably, caused major problems. In Afghanistan, a study into the consequences of NATO parking on cemeteries and other such disrespectful behaviour towards local sacred places

led to a 30 % increase in IED attacks. Conversely, where care is taken, less hostility, even greater cooperation is experienced between foreign troops and locals. Rush concludes with the argument that the US is making progress towards the incorporation of cultural protection as an institutionalised element of military operations and training is carried out to involve some of these aspects. The chapter finishes with a quick look at the future, the US DoD's preparation for "near peer" warfare, and the need to include cultural property as a key dimension of multi-domain or full-spectrum warfare, to understand the reasons for its targeting, its values and roles, and to be able to "operationalise its potential role not just in the in the exacerbation of ethnic and other conflict but also in peacebuilding when it is spared and protected".

Ultimately though one is left with the impression that there is something of a dichotomy to the book between the kind of blunt instrument that is the military and the nuanced fluctuating complexities of cultural heritage. Two chapters in particular that deal with the complexities of cultural heritage within conflict are those by DACIA VIEJO ROSE and ETIENNE BERGÈS respectively. The former under part one of the book, "The past on parade", and the second under part three, "The past as peacekeeper".

VIEJO ROSE's chapter "Heritage and the (re)shaping of social identities in conflict cycles" is subtitled "Anchor or quicksand?". In the first part she goes through the change of meaning and approach to cultural heritage, from a physical entity to the recognition of the wider intangible aspects. She also notes a change of emphasis from cultural heritage as a purely physical entity that needs protecting to an emphasis on recognising the diverse modes of expression and cultural significance represented by it. She goes on to reiterate what is now generally understood: that heritage is not neutral but is inherently political and dissonant, and that rather than it being a kind of "anchor" – i.e. something handed down through generations – it is a constructive process of signification constantly in flux.

The second part looks at cultural heritage as a target and instrument of war. In addition to mentioning the usual problems for heritage during conflict, VIEJO ROSE notes the issue of when heritage is instrumentalised and ownership claimed by one side or the other, leaving "no room for the nuances and hybrid alternatives more true to life". She makes the important point that it is in this area that the most work still needs to be done as the current understanding of the complexities of cultural heritage is not reflected in the appreciation of how it fares in armed conflict. In addition,

there is a lack of appreciation of the violent political uses and abuses of heritage that it is subjected to not just during armed conflict but before and after. She attempts a typology of heritage destruction in conflict contexts as a means of understanding the dynamics and motivations of destruction within the specific historical and social context of the conflict in question, and also as a means of unpacking what destruction of cultural heritage during armed conflict actually entails. Beyond the usual measures taken to attempt to protect it, she goes on to think about preventative action and puts forward a more holistic approach to conflict and heritage – to allow for agonism and dissonance as part of understanding heritage, of seeing heritage as "multidirectional".

The chapter also looks at cultural heritage within the conflict cycle, and in reconstruction and recovery and all of its contradictions and complexities, citing Mostar Bridge as an example. She concludes with the argument of needing to see cultural heritage not as a fragile thing, but as a "performative and discursive practice" that can open up the room for exploring its relationship to conflict and violence.

VIEJO ROSE's chapter is complemented by ETIENNE BERGÈS's on "Cultural heritage and peacebuilding in Rakhine State, Myanmar" in the third section of the book. Arguably, if you were to read one chapter in this book, make it this one. Taking his own experience working in Myanmar's "aid and peacekeeping industry", he examines the ongoing situation for the Rohingya, "one of the world's most persecuted ethnic minorities". The conflict has been brutal, identified as genocidal against the Rohingya, and cultural heritage has been targeted and instrumentalised, with the destruction of villages and mosques, "territorial erasure is a defining trait of ethnic persecution in contemporary Myanmar, and it is most salient regarding Rakhine's Muslim heritage".

The process of strict ethnic categorisation based on religious identities can be traced back to colonial times when the British used and manipulated such divisions in their own interests.

Since the 1970s, the Rohingya Muslims have been steadily stripped of their rights and as part of this process of segregation, competing historiographies were consolidated. The main cultural heritage focus of this has been the historic Arakan kingdom, in particular the Mrauk-U kingdom. The site of Mrauk-U, which is on the tentative World Heritage list, is claimed by both Buddhists and Muslims, despite evidence that it should be considered as shared heritage, not to the exclusion of one or the other. However, Bergès notes

that this demonstrates how important cultural heritage and history are for the inhabitants of Rakhine state.

Bergès examines the failings of the international peacebuilding community efforts, in particular their inability/unwillingness to take into account local complexities and overarching political interests, and generally ignored local knowledge and concerns, facilitating the Myanmar government to “play the peace game” and adjust the narratives to match international donor requirements without actually supporting post-conflict resolution.

A perceptive and justifiably critical look at how the international peacebuilding community have superficially approached the conflict of Myanmar, the author notes that for any peacebuilding approach to cultural heritage to retain legitimacy, it needs to acknowledge decades of erasure and assimilation, and also to understand that the more recent loss of cultural identity is a key grievance of Rakhine’s different ethnic populations. Furthermore, there is also a need to understand how tangible and intangible heritages are modified in the context of violence and displacement; that the heritage of refugee camps and the material record of communal displacement needs also to be understood. Bergès concludes that cultural heritage is “not a silver bullet towards peacebuilding – rather, it is an underappreciated element of conflict resolution”; that it has the potential to serve as a starting point to better apprehend and discuss ethnic relations and identities both in colonial times and amongst populations recently displaced. He adds further that neutral humanitarianism is not the only version of humanitarianism, and approaches must not disregard the complexity of the Rakhine crisis but be prepared to deal more confrontationally and controversially with complex historical narratives.

Bergès’s paper complements Viejo Rose’s argument in favour of allowing for agonism and dissonance as part of understanding heritage, of seeing heritage as multidirectional. These messy complexities of cultural heritage seem to be a challenge for the military to engage with at any meaningful level, and while one would imagine that if you were to draw a Venn diagram between the two, the overlapping part would be politics (loosely defined), there seems to be a sense in this book of a kind of anti-magnetic resistance to meeting at this very point.

The final chapter in the book is a collection of interviews carried out by the book editors with four senior British army personnel involved in “deployment of key cultural and human security ca-

pabilities”. The understanding, role and use of culture by the British military and the various cultural advisors and other personnel within the military, are all examined. While it is evident that cultural understanding has become more important within the British army (and there is also some reference to it with the US and French armies), it is made brutally clear by one interviewee that this is for purely for exploitation for “defence effect”. The interviewees also talk extensively about “human security”, the importance of it, the role of cultural heritage as part of human security and so forth, and it does touch on this complication of protecting civilians and heritage simultaneously. There is some discussion on the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage, for example of Armenian Christian heritage in Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and on the increasing complexity of conflicts. The chapter, and the book itself, is, however, without any kind of summary or conclusion, and fails to provide any overarching analysis of the interviews, or of the book as a whole. It finishes on the line “Whilst Italy, led by the expertise of the Carabinieri Command, is recognised internationally as the military lead for cultural heritage and property protection”, begging the question of “And...?”

In conclusion, this book will give an insight into UK and US military thinking (or the lack of it in some cases), and has a general smattering of other approaches, but it is not clear what the book set out to achieve. Much of it reads as if it wants to try and reassure that the UK/US military are learning from their mistakes and that cultural and human security are taken seriously within the world of “theatre” and military operations. It is, though, too narrow a lens, and too subjective, and much of it is anything but reassuring.

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