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How may heritage be used to defuse religious or ethnic tensions in the Mediterranean region and should it be used in this way?

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Abstract

'Hot heritage' is a term that relates to heritage that excites affective responses from communities, groups or individuals, indicating that the topic commemorated is still 'hot'.¹ This article is a brief discussion of the effectiveness of heritage as a defusing element between groups that suffer religious or ethnic tensions. In order to explore this notion, this article uses two case studies from the Mediterranean; Thessaloniki and Bosnia-Herzegovina. For the purposes of this article, the term heritage pertains to monuments such as buildings or structures.

Introduction

When discussing how monumental heritage sites can be used to defuse religious or ethnic tensions, there is always the possibility of the creation of dissonance as emotions and memories are revived, particularly if the events are relatively recent, both in terms of chronology and cultural memory. As a result, the tensions between countries, populations, ethnicities and religious groups, may be fuelled as the issues are just too provocative. Sites where these potential issues are especially acute are called dissonant or 'hot' heritage sites. There are some scholars that believe the use of 'hot heritage' and 'hot interpretation' can be used by heritage managers due to its potentially positive role within society.²

Within this paper, an outline of the origins and ideology of 'hot interpretation' shall be discussed, then two examples of hot heritage sites from the Balkan region will be analysed; Thessaloniki and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The examples outlined will pertain to religious and ethnic tensions; in Thessaloniki, the main groups are Muslims, Jews

¹ Uzzell 1989: 33.

² Uzzell 1989; Dolff-Bonekämper 2008; Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008.

and Orthodox Christians and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the main groups are Bosnian Serbs and Croats, who are predominantly Christian, and Bosniac Muslims. Finally, the use of heritage at existing sites within the defusion of ethnic and religious tensions will be examined.

'Hot Interpretation'

The term 'hot interpretation' was first used by David Uzzell and relates to heritage that excites affective responses from communities, groups or individuals—indicating that the topic commemorated is still 'hot'.³ In his article, Uzzell argues that the cool objectivity highly valued in the approach to information by society should be questioned, in terms of whether it is achievable or desirable.⁴

Whether we like it or not, when presented with information or choices which challenge our personal interests, rarely do we stand by as disinterested observers.⁵

It is from this perspective that Uzzell attempts to promote the use of hot interpretation within the management of heritage and, in his view, ultimately an honest representation of the more shameful events of our past.⁶ Tilden's fourth principle of interpretation was that 'the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation'.⁷ In Uzzell's view, Tilden may well have written that there is a need for hot interpretation and he remarks that although interpretation should be interesting and enjoyable, it may also be 'shocking, moving and provide a cathartic experience'.⁸

Dolff-Bonekämper also considers the standard of a monument's capacity to cause dispute or discord as an inherent quality and not a failing.⁹ To classify this standard, Dolff-Bonekämper uses the term 'Streitwert', which may be translated as 'discord value' and has suggested that the use of this category may provide 'an opportunity to

³ Uzzell 1989: 33.

⁴ Uzzell 1989: 33.

⁵ Uzzell 1989: 33.

⁶ Uzzell 1989: 46.

⁷ Tilden 1977: 9.

⁸ Uzzell 1989: 46.

⁹ Dolff-Bonekämper 2008: 137.

consider places of recent historical significance and, possibly, to take action to conserve them from an early stage'.¹⁰ Dolff-Bonekämper suggests that recent items of history, such as the Berlin Wall, or other remnants of dictatorship or civil conflict that are often the subject of fierce argument, may be lost in the heat of the conflict by proactive destruction or neglect; but if they are classified as having 'Streitwert' they may be preserved and the category may change to 'having historical value' as time goes by.¹¹

In Uzzell and Ballantyne's view, 'hot interpretation accepts that we are subject to a full repertoire of emotional responses', and the reason that heritage resonates so strongly for us is, because 'it not only relates to our past but it is an important part of our present and future'.¹² They also propose that 'wherever we find conflict between people there ought to be a role for hot interpretation and, arguably, the interpretation will be incomplete without this element'¹³. In Uzzell and Ballantyne's paper, the agenda of hot interpretation within heritage has two functions. Firstly, its touristic function is to have an affective dimension of interpretation that will give a more sufficient meaning and significance of the heritage of the people and events.¹⁴ The second function is to provide community development by being used proactively and politically.¹⁵

Overall, Uzzell and Ballantyne argue that hot interpretation can be used positively within communities, but this can only be achieved with the right management.¹⁶ As Bevan suggests, 'construction can be used to cement a violent sundering of the built environment or to weave the fabric of a former life back together'.¹⁷ Uzzell and Ballantyne point out that there are some concerns that hot interpretation will be used for 'cheap shock value' or for the propaganda purposes of regimes using it to incite fear or indoctrinate populations.¹⁸ Tunbridge and Ashworth point out that,

¹⁰ Dolff-Bonekämper 2008: 138.

¹¹ Dolff-Bonekämper 2008: 138.

¹² Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008: 503.

¹³ Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008: 510.

¹⁴ Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008: 510.

¹⁵ Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008: 510.

¹⁶ Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008: 512.

¹⁷ Bevan 2006: 176.

¹⁸ Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008: 513.

Strange and distasteful as it may seem when expressed so baldly, it is clear that aspects of human unpleasantness can become, and can be deliberately used as, a source of entertainment rather than embarrassment.¹⁹

Uzzell and Ballantyne categorically state that they do not advocate the above mentioned uses and they express the need for hot interpretation to be undertaken responsibly if it is to have any value.²⁰ They also acknowledge that,

Hot interpretation, like all interpretation, should present perspectives on the world which encourages visitors to question and explore different understandings, values and viewpoints.²¹

With Uzzell pointing out that people rarely stand by as disinterested observers when something challenges their personal interests, it is clear that when creating a 'hot' display there are several factors the heritage manager must consider with care.²² The cultural sensitivity of the display is extremely important as the site must not be offensive or illegal. The issues that are being dealt with are emotive and the main point of the display is to provoke thought from the visitors, but at the same time it should not demonstrate partiality. Another factor to take into account is not to appear to be neutral or dispassionate about the subject, as this may also cause offence. There are many other factors that should be taken into consideration for each individual site which are beyond the scope of this discussion, but as this short list has shown, the process of creating a hot interpretation of a heritage site is a highly sensitive issue and it must be executed with care and with the view to educate rather than serve as an inflammatory device. After discussing the factors to consider in a hot display, this paper shall now consider how the use of heritage has, or in some cases has not, been used to defuse religious or ethnic tensions in the Mediterranean region, particularly focussing on the Balkan region, with case studies from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Thessaloniki.

¹⁹ Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 114.

²⁰ Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008: 512.

²¹ Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008: 512.

²² Uzzell 1989: 32.

Case Study 1: Thessaloniki

The first case study to be examined will be that of Thessaloniki situated in northern Greece in the region of Macedonia. Thessaloniki is listed as a world heritage site due to its Paleochristian and Byzantine monuments.²³ Thessaloniki is described as 'one of the first bases for the spread of Christianity'²⁴ and its Christian monuments and fine churches 'constitute a diachronic typological series, which had considerable influence in the Byzantine world'.²⁵ The Greeks are very proud of their Byzantine heritage but this city has had another history that has not been presented with the same enthusiasm or fondness as Mark Mazower makes clear in his book 'Salonica: City of Ghosts'.²⁶

In 1430 CE, Thessaloniki fell to Sultan Murad II of the Ottoman Empire; the city did not leave Ottoman-Turkish rule until 1912 CE.²⁷ According to survivor accounts, the siege in 1430 CE led to many of the city's inhabitants being enslaved or killed and the city itself was ruined.²⁸ Although Christianity was not eradicated, it did not flourish under Ottoman rule as many Christian churches were turned into mosques and Muslims were brought to the city in 1432 CE; this led to a steadily expanding Muslim population.²⁹ It was not only Muslims who were brought to the city, as by 1520 CE, more than thirty thousand inhabitants were Jewish.³⁰ The strong Jewish population continued to thrive: by 1912 CE Jews were the largest ethnic group in the city and as Mazower suggests, 'it would be scarcely an exaggeration to say that they had dominated the life of the city for many centuries'.³¹

After the first Balkan War in 1912 CE, most Muslim residents in the city kept their Ottoman citizenship and an 'Ottoman community' was created to represent them. Despite this, the community was very weak politically and it was unable to get local

²³ UNESCO 2009.

²⁴ UNESCO 2009.

²⁵ UNESCO 2009.

²⁶ Mazower 2004.

²⁷ Mazower 2004: 15.

²⁸ Mazower 2004: 29.

²⁹ Mazower 2004: 33-34.

³⁰ Mazower 2004: 49.

³¹ Mazower 2004: 6.

authorities to protect its members.³² Cemeteries were desecrated, Greek refugees (from the Balkan War) ransacked Muslim shops and broke into houses, and as a result, more than fifteen thousand Muslims left their homes.³³ In 1917 CE, a great fire swept through the city and ‘destroyed the essence of the Ottoman town, and its Jewish core’.³⁴ It led the way for an entirely new city to be created in the image of the Greek state.³⁵

With the outbreak of the Greco-Turkish War in 1919 CE, negotiations that were to end the war in 1922 CE also agreed to a comprehensive exchange of populations; Greece would receive all the Orthodox Christians of the former region of Asia Minor and Turkey would receive the Muslim population of Greece.³⁶ As if to erase any indication that there had ever been Muslims in the city, the municipality decided almost immediately to demolish the city’s minarets and invited building companies to bid for work; on the 24th March 1924 CE, in *Makedonika Nea*, one journalist wrote ‘Nothing, nothing at all must remind us again of the epoch of slavery’.³⁷ The idea of a Byzantine city of excellence fuelled the Greeks in their transformation of the city; the ‘material re-emergence helped Greeks to feel confident the city was theirs, a place of resurrection and of miraculous Orthodox renewal’³⁸. In effecting this transformation, they destroyed any part of Ottoman legacy. As Mazower states, ‘recovering the memory of one past meant forgetting or even destroying another’.³⁹

Today, acknowledging its [Thessaloniki’s] Ottoman legacy still appears to be as unimaginable to most people as when the historian Kostas Moskof first proposed the idea, more than twenty years ago.⁴⁰

As the quote above shows, even today it is difficult for the people of Thessaloniki to accept an Ottoman past; but some Ottoman buildings have recently been restored and tourists can see inside the magnificent fifteenth century Bey Hamam, the largest

³² Mazower 2004: 339.

³³ Mazower 2004: 339.

³⁴ Mazower 2004: 321.

³⁵ Mazower 2004: 321.

³⁶ Mazower 2004: 343.

³⁷ Mazower 2004: 351.

³⁸ Mazower 2004: 467.

³⁹ Mazower 2004: 467.

⁴⁰ Mazower 2004: 472.

Ottoman baths in Greece, or admire the distinguished mansion now used as a local public library in Plateia Romfeï (Mazower 2004: 5).⁴¹ The White Tower is an Ottoman construction and it is the symbol of the city. It contains an exhibition of the city's history and art beginning at its foundation but ending at the Ottoman conquest of 1430.⁴² The city's museums do not contain any information about the Ottoman city that once stood here and the Pasha Haman, which had been in use until 1981, remains in disrepair.⁴³ Mazower suggests that forgetting the Ottoman past of the city was part of Greece's claim to modernity.⁴⁴

The brief history given above demonstrates that the use of hot interpretation within the city of Thessaloniki would be very difficult to facilitate due to the way in which the past and the city has been reconstructed by the Greek nation-state. It is certainly not currently being used in the way Uzzell and Ballantyne recommend, as the Ottoman history and heritage has almost been ignored, although some monuments are now being restored and promoted. It would have been interesting to see what may have happened if Dolff-Bonekmäper's Streitwert value had been placed on Ottoman monuments in 1912: it may have preserved many more than are left today.

An attempt to celebrate the multicultural past of Thessaloniki led to severe public discontent. In 1994 CE, Thessaloniki was nominated for Cultural Capital of Europe and European funds were pouring in for the restoration of its antiquities.⁴⁵ It was decided by the ministry of culture that the Rotonda would be used for concerts and exhibitions. Roman in origin, it had been a Byzantine church before being converted to a mosque in 1591 CE. In 1912 CE, it was returned to Christian use, and the following year was declared a national monument.⁴⁶ In embracing the multicultural celebration, many local commentators said part of the attraction of Thessaloniki was its ethnically mixed past, as it was a way of marking it out, and perhaps proclaiming, its superiority to Athens.⁴⁷ The ministry of culture permitted the church to organize a display of icons at the Rotonda and allowed a prayer service to be held for the

⁴¹ Mazower 2004: 5.

⁴² Mazower 2004: 472.

⁴³ Mazower 2004: 472.

⁴⁴ Mazower 2004: 474.

⁴⁵ Mazower 2004: 470.

⁴⁶ Mazower 2004: 470.

⁴⁷ Mazower 2004: 471.

exhibition's opening but the following Sunday a crowd of organised demonstrators, led by local church leaders, gathered to pray again.⁴⁸ The crowd began to chant slogans, 'Not a synagogue, nor a mosque but a Greek church' and it seemed they equated control of the building by the ministry of culture with the return of the Jews and Muslims to a Christian place of worship.⁴⁹ The crowd did not like the idea of the city being labelled with a multicultural past, and one of the ring leaders said:

They tell us Thessaloniki is a multi-historical city. If they mean that many conquerors have passed through here, then I agree. But the Orthodox character of the city never altered (Mazower 2004: 471).⁵⁰

Case Study 2: Bosnia-Herzegovina

The former Yugoslavia appears to provide the clearest illustration in modern time of heritage as a military target in Europe; its destruction used as a deliberate instrument of disinheritance and disassociation of cultural/ethnic groups from their established space.⁵¹ The aftermath of this destruction of heritage and culture has led to dissonance around sites, particularly where buildings, such as mosques, have been rebuilt. Bevan has stated, this dissonance can be caused because 'rebuilding can be as symbolic as the destruction that necessitates it'.⁵²

The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established in the aftermath of the First World War, following the breakdown of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the final demise of the Ottoman Empire.⁵³ The short lifespan of the first Yugoslavia was ended by the Second World War and the country turned into a communist reconstruction of the (party) state. The whole architecture of the country was recast to give republic status to Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia.⁵⁴ With the weakening of communism at the end of the Cold War nationalist and separatist groups were on the rise and the President of

⁴⁸ Mazower 2004: 470.

⁴⁹ Mazower 2004: 471.

⁵⁰ Mazower 2004: 471.

⁵¹ Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 146.

⁵² Bevan 2006: 176.

⁵³ Vejvoda 1996: 10.

⁵⁴ Vejvoda 1996: 11.

Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, campaigned for a unitary state. When addressing a million Serbs, he spoke of their 'final return' to the sacred places of Serbdom, but warned that in the future 'armed struggles' could not be ruled out and it was this attitude that partly led to the Yugoslav Wars.⁵⁵

The wars during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia began in 1991 and ended in 1995 CE. This case study shall focus on the Bosnian War in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1992 CE, Bosnia-Herzegovina was recognised as a sovereign state internationally. The fears of the people who hoped for a peaceful, multi-ethnic and multi-religious Bosnian state, which included Bosnian Serbs and Croats who were predominantly Christian and Bosniac Muslims, were justified as the Bosnian Serbs proclaimed a Serb Republic.⁵⁶ By November of 1992 CE, one and a half million people were refugees, and there were reports of detention camps, mass rape, torture, maiming, the systematic elimination of the Muslim intelligentsia, and the destruction of Islamic cultural artefacts from mosques to books— among the most iconic the Mostar bridge (Stari Most), which was bombed and destroyed by Croatian hostility.⁵⁷ The number of victims (casualties and missing persons) had risen by the end of 1994 CE to 200,000 and there were more than 500,000 people displaced; war crimes were committed on a scale unknown in Europe since 1945 CE.⁵⁸

The reconstruction of buildings and monuments has taken place in many areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bosnia's national identity continues to be confirmed with an appearance of a cosmopolitan tolerance.⁵⁹ As Bevan goes on to explain, the government reinforces this idea with banknotes and stamps depicting archaeological artefacts from the medieval Bosnian past and the National Museum has been reopened with new displays stressing the long roots of all the communities in the country.⁶⁰ So it appears that celebrating and highlighting the country's multi-ethnic past through heritage has been effective in bringing a shattered country's communities back together. Although, according to Bevan, this is not the case and

⁵⁵ Benson 2001: 153.

⁵⁶ Benson 2001: 265.

⁵⁷ Benson 2001: 166-167.

⁵⁸ Benson 2001: 266.

⁵⁹ Bevan 2006: 177.

⁶⁰ Bevan 2006: 177.

he believes that 'it seems a vain hope to try to achieve reintegration through monuments'.⁶¹

The majority of the capital city of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo's multi-ethnic architecture has been restored, but Bevan implies that this actually contradicts the reality of the situation, as neighbourhoods are ethnically based and are hostile to other communities across the street.⁶² In Banja Luka, a Muslim community which had been subjected to ethnic cleansing came back in the summer of 2001 to lay a foundation stone ceremonially for the rebuilding of a mosque.⁶³ This act of symbolic reaffirmation of heritage was boycotted by a group of Serbs and a riot began that saw elderly Muslims pelted with objects and a pig was let loose to defile the site.⁶⁴ Attempts to rebuild mosques have been resisted by hostile crowds all over Bosnia since 1995 when the fighting was officially brought to an end.⁶⁵ It would seem that Bosnian religious architectural heritage is too fraught to be able to defuse the ethnic and religious tensions of the country. In some cases, mosques have been rebuilt with mild success. An example from Kozarac demonstrates this. The village was once home to a Muslim majority of around 25,000 which was ethnically cleansed and the houses and minarets of the mosque were burnt and blasted in the war.⁶⁶ 6000 Muslims have subsequently returned to the community and they have rebuilt their mosque. Unfortunately, the peace was broken by violence between the Muslim returnees and the Serbs, but the mosque still stands against a context of friction⁶⁷.

Another factor to consider when buildings are rebuilt is how true they are to the original form, as this can affect the tensions of a community too. The restoration of heritage monuments that has taken place due to Saudi sources of funding has meant that the richly decorated interiors, characteristic of Balkan Islamic architecture, have given way to whitewashing demanded by the Wahhabi Islam of the Saudi funders.⁶⁸ The Gazi Hursrev Beg central mosque in Sarajevo has been a victim of

⁶¹ Bevan 2006: 175.

⁶² Bevan 2006: 177.

⁶³ Bevan 2006: 175.

⁶⁴ Bevan 2006: 175.

⁶⁵ Bevan 2006: 175.

⁶⁶ Bevan 2006: 176.

⁶⁷ Bevan 2006: 176.

⁶⁸ Bevan 2006: 180.

the previously mentioned scheme. The damage caused by its rebuilding, whitewashing and the removal of applied decoration, could be considered by some more thorough than the damage caused by Serbian shelling.⁶⁹

The Stari Most bridge was an Ottoman monument that was both the symbol of the city of Mostar and a living place where people came together; it was destroyed by shelling in the Bosnian war.⁷⁰ Four months after the bridge collapsed, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) placed a bid for wide scale reconstruction and the UNESCO website states that 'the Old Bridge was destroyed for its symbolic value. It is for this same reason that UNESCO promised to rebuild it'.⁷¹ The UNESCO article shows how the rebuilding of heritage may be used to defuse religious and ethnic tensions: it states that the inauguration of the bridge 'will bring together heads of state from across south-eastern Europe, including the presidents of all of the former Yugoslav republics' and 'their presence confirms their commitment...to work together to foster a "new era in which dialogue, understanding and reconciliation replace the turbulent past"'.⁷² The rebuilding of the bridge allows it to become 'a symbol of reconciliation and human solidarity'⁷³ and UNESCO's director-general, Koïchiro Matsuura, explained,

We are present in Mostar in order to breathe fresh life into an exceptional heritage which, after having been used as a target, needs to become a rallying sign, a sign of recognition, the powerful symbol of a plural identity founded on mutual trust.⁷⁴

It is clear that the UNESCO article makes a convincing case for the use of heritage in defusing tensions but Bevan suggests that despite the faithfulness of the bridge to the original design, it is only a 'statement of hope in a less divided future rather than a sign of present reality'⁷⁵ as Mostar still remains divided into a Catholic Croat West and a Muslim East. In the predominantly Catholic district of Mostar, the Franciscan church of St Peter and St Paul was destroyed by the Serbs and in its place a

⁶⁹ Bevan 2006: 180.

⁷⁰ Bevan 2006: 25.

⁷¹ UNESCO 2004.

⁷² UNESCO 2004.

⁷³ UNESCO 2004.

⁷⁴ UNESCO 2004.

⁷⁵ Bevan 2006: 175.

concrete basilica has been constructed with an outsized spheroidal campanile rearing up to dominate the townscape.⁷⁶ Thirty three-metre-high crosses have also been erected just above the city on Hum Hill; both the crosses and the spheroidal are suggested by Bevan as being an 'architectural one-fingered gesture.'⁷⁷

Conclusion

The use of heritage in defusing ethnic and religious tensions has been shown to have mixed results as an effective tool. It has been made clear by the two case studies described in this paper, that some events from the past are too traumatic and close to facilitate reconciliation exclusively through the reconstruction of monuments. In the case of Thessaloniki, it is obvious that tensions will never cease if the monumental heritage is ignored. By ignoring the Ottoman and Jewish heritage of the city it fuels tensions further, particularly between Turkey and Greece. As mentioned above, when attempts to celebrate the multicultural ethnicity of the city are put into action, it causes more tension because it is not how some people want the heritage of the city to be seen. The fact that Byzantine heritage has brought Thessaloniki together as a city is a positive thing; but the consequence of choosing to remember one heritage over another means that the less appealing heritage is lost.

As already discussed, the rebuilding of mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been restricted by crowds and bureaucracies since the war ended and this in turn has fuelled tensions.⁷⁸ The example from Banja Luka demonstrates this. Maybe the act of standing one's ground, as in the case of the Kozarac Muslims, will pay off and eventually the community's tensions will pass, but is it too soon to say? In Kozarac, the peace is still broken by violence between the Serbs and the Muslims, demonstrating that tensions have not been defused by the rebuilt heritage.⁷⁹

Also, the rebuilding and preservation of monuments may not always be undertaken with the right attitude; the crosses on Hum Hill and the campanile in West Croatia

⁷⁶ Bevan 2006: 178.

⁷⁷ Bevan 2006: 178.

⁷⁸ Bevan 2006: 175.

⁷⁹ Bevan 2006: 176.

were built with the purpose of not only commemorating a loss but also of antagonising the Muslims in the East. Despite the rebuilding of the Stari-Most bridge there is a clear divide between the West and the East.

As mentioned earlier, Uzzell believes the use of hot interpretation and heritage is an honest representation of past events⁸⁰ and Uzzell and Ballantyne both suggest it can provide community development.⁸¹ The National Museum shows the long roots of all the communities within Bosnia-Herzegovina, demonstrating how heritage can be used to show the multi-ethnic past of the city and some mosques have been rebuilt with success. The Stari-Most Bridge was rebuilt as a symbol of reconciliation and unity; although there are still tensions between the East and the West of Mostar the bridge still stands as a symbol of hope for that reconciliation.

So, should heritage be used to defuse religious and ethnic tensions within the Mediterranean? There are places where heritage can and should be used effectively, but there are other areas where heritage is not the right means. All heritages should be preserved for people to learn, remember and enjoy. In some cases, heritage can be used to reconcile, but as the case studies in this paper have shown, some wounds are still too deep to be defused through heritage.

⁸⁰ Uzzell 1989: 46.

⁸¹ Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008: 512.

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