

Libricide in Iraq, Croatia and Kuwait

Bonnie Knight

San José State University

School of Library & Information Science

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The destruction of Iraq's libraries and archives following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Baghdad was evidence that the world's cultural heritage was still vulnerable to attack in spite of the advances made in creating international accords and laws protecting that shared heritage. The world's library and archival communities deplored the destruction and tried to mount international relief efforts with varying degrees of success. Continued social and political instability in Iraq has hampered recovery progress. The situation in Iraq demonstrates that international solutions may not be effective in resolving national problems.

A *nation* can be defined as “an extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language or history, as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory” (Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 1897). Nations may exist without states, such as the Kurds, and nations can exist within states, such as the tribal nations of the Native American people.

A nation's repositories contain items of cultural importance to that nation. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined cultural property as “movable or immovable property of great importance to cultural heritage of every people” and include art, books, buildings, archaeological sites, important collections of archives. Buildings and centers whose main purpose is to house or display cultural property can be considered repositories (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1954, Article 1b).

Ironically, as the concept of a global identity has become increasingly viable, today's global environment is “increasingly unfriendly,” having “hosted more than 100 substantial armed conflicts since World War II” (Knuth, 2003, p. 248). With the increase in the number of independent states and ethnic and cultural groups in this century, “the incidence of violence and

cultural destruction has risen sharply in the resulting clash of interests” (Knuth, 2003, p. 248). As Battles (2003) so aptly observed: “If the nineteenth century was about the building of libraries, the twentieth was about their destruction” (p. 156).

Examples of the willful destruction of libraries and archives in modern history are all too numerous, but a study of several such incidents can provide insight into the motivating forces underlying this destruction. An examination of such destruction in Iraq, Croatia, and Kuwait demonstrates that the motivations underlying the destruction differ depending on the specific social, cultural, and political circumstances in the environment. An understanding of these motivations provides insight into the role and significance of libraries and archives in society, culture, and politics, both nationally and globally.

Iraq

Even before the U.S. invasion of Baghdad in 2003, Iraq’s cultural institutions had been under attack. After the start of the Iraq-Iran war in 1980, Iraq’s libraries and archives “deteriorated sharply” (Eskander, 2004, The State of Iraq section, ¶ 1). This deterioration occurred both because the country’s resources were directed towards the war effort and because the ruling Ba’ath regime did not support the ideals underlying these institutions, ideals such as “multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity, peaceful coexistence and solidarity among nations” (Eskander, The State of Iraq section, ¶ 2). At Iraq’s National Library and Archives (NLA) in Baghdad, collection development was subject to censorship and government spies monitored library users. Libraries made no new acquisitions for 25 years and Saddam’s regime excluded Kurdish and Shiite books altogether (Hansen, Garcia-Navarro, & Eskander, 2005). Facilities suffered from neglect and theft, and librarians were isolated from the international community.

The Ba'ath regime's minister of culture called the NLA a "cemetery of books" (Eskander, The State of Iraq section, ¶ 3).

On April 10 and April 14, 2003, looters and arsonists attacked the NLA, "leaving a smoldering shell . . . of precious books turned to ash and a nation's intellectual legacy gone up in smoke" (Hanley, 2003, p. 3). Blame for the looting and arson has been attributed to different sources. Some have blamed Iraqis who remained loyal to Saddam Hussein (Eskander, 2004, Role of the U.S. Army section, ¶ 1). Others have blamed the coalition forces for the looting and arson. Reports in two Arab newspapers accused the U.S. of intentionally freeing criminals from prisons and permitting them to destroy Iraq's cultural institutions (Ashling, 2003, p. 34).

Initial reports in the press indicated that the losses were enormous. In a May 15, 2003, article in *Library Journal*, it was reported that "looters destroyed" the National Library of Iraq, as well as the National Center for Archives, the Awqaf Library, the University of Mosul library and the University of Basra's library (Albanese & Rogers, 2003, p. 18). Ironically, prior to the invasion, Awqaf library staff had moved a large part of the collection to a mosque for safekeeping, but moved it back to the Library believing it would be safer there. The Library was looted and burned the same day the manuscripts were returned, with two thirds having been stolen while the rest were burned (Johnson, 2005, p. 249).

Other reports were equally pessimistic. "Almost nothing remains of the library's archive of tens of thousands of manuscripts, books, and Iraqi newspapers" (Burkeman, 2003, p. 5). "First came the looters, then came the arsonists. It was the final chapter in the sack of Baghdad" (Fisk, 2003, p. 1).

Soon, however, news agencies issued more accurate reports as reporters and other investigators were able to view the damage first-hand. In late April, the *Wall Street Journal*

reported the discovery that many items from the NLA had been stored in a nearby mosque (Ashling, 2003, p. 33). In the NLA, after the first fire on April 10, 2003, a steel fire door was welded shut, effectively sealing off an entire wing and securing the contents before the second fire, several days later, destroyed about half the building (Johnson, 2005, p. 229). On May 16, a U.S. military report said that many books and manuscripts, believed to have been lost, had been located in a Baghdad bomb shelter and in a bank vault (39,000 books and manuscripts and some 6,744 museum items) (Ashling, 2003, p. 34). Observers agreed that the original estimate of 170,000 lost items was too high, although exact numbers were difficult to ascertain since there was little accurate documentation on the collections prior to the attacks.

A UNESCO report issued in July 2003 estimated that the NLA lost about 30% of its collections, the Baghdad University Libraries about 10%, the University Library of Bassorah about 20%, the University Library of Mossul about 5-10%, while the Public Library of Bassorah and the library of the Museum of Ethnography lost their entire collections. The Awqaf Library, the religious library of Baghdad, as well as other religious libraries from other cities lost all their manuscripts and a large part of their book collections as well (UNESCO, 2003c). Another report estimated that the NLA lost 60% of its archival materials and 90% of its rare book collection (Hansen et al., 2005).

Arsonists had purposefully destroyed the National Library, the National Records, the Awqaf Library, and the Public Library of Bassorah, “showing the inflexible intention to reduce the books to ashes and to destroy even the buildings” (Arnault, 2004, p. 34). The arsonists destroyed many valuable materials with the rest of the buildings’ contents rather than stealing them for reselling. In contrast, the damaged university libraries showed evidence of looting,

whether organized or not, thus demonstrating that “profit was the cause of the outburst of violence” (Arnoult, 2004, p. 35).

A team of experts from the Library of Congress (LC) visited the NLA in October 2003, declared the library building to be unfit, and recommended relocating the library to the Senior Officers Club building, in agreement with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) (Deeb, Albin, & Haley, 2003, p. 9).

In assessing damage to the National Archives, the LC team determined that the destroyed archives were from 1977 to the present, covering the Republican era, while other archives, such as those from 1920 to 1977, were unharmed in spite of being located very near to the burned records. The team concluded that “some kind of highly incendiary device had been used” and that the damage had not been caused by “random looters” (Deeb et al., 2003, p. 5).

Other reports corroborated that finding, saying that “some people loyal to the old regime” had destroyed the Republican Archive, a deplorable loss because of its political and historical value (Eskander, 2004, Role of the U.S. Army section, ¶ 6).

Other cultural heritage sites suffered damage and destruction as well, including the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad that housed, among other priceless items of antiquity, thousands of cuneiform tablets, leaving only back up records from archaeological studies to document their existence. This loss represented a “great loss to humanity,” particularly since the archive could never be reassembled in its entirety (Holmes & Randerson, 2003).

International Response of Librarians and Archivists to Iraq Destruction

Professional organizations, librarians and archivists worldwide issued statements, convened fact-finding missions, offered plans and support for rebuilding efforts, and donated money and books.

Statements Issued by Professional Organizations

As the destruction of Iraq's libraries and museums became headline news in April 2003, professional library and archive organizations responded with universal expressions of outrage and support.

Librarians and archivists worldwide immediately convened meetings to issue formal statements deploring the destruction of Iraq's cultural heritage and to develop plans of action for support. UNESCO, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Council on Archives (ICA), the Society of American Archivists (SAA), and the American Library Association (ALA) all issued statements offering support.

Prior to the invasion, UNESCO, along with the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) had written letters to President Bush, Great Britain's Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and Saddam Hussein in March 2003, urging all parties to take appropriate measures to secure Iraq's cultural heritage (Kniffel, 2003, p. 40).

Following the invasion, UNESCO immediately sent letters to Iraq's neighbors, as well as to Great Britain and the United States, requesting that adequate security be implemented at "heritage sites and historic buildings to prevent further looting" (UNESCO, 2005, 2003 section, ¶ 15).

The Arab Regional Branch of the International Council of Archives (ARBICA) issued a statement on April 14, 2003, stating that they were "horrified and grieved" at the damages to the NLA, "the memory of modern Iraq" (El Reyes, 2003, ¶ 6).

On April 23, 2003, the Secretary General of the ICA issued a statement expressing concern at "reports of burning of archives and libraries, removal of government records and ransacking of cultural institutions in Iraq" (van Albada, 2003, p. 1). The ICA called the

destruction “an immeasurable loss to the memory of the world” (van Albada, 2003, p. 1). ICA offered support for damage assessment, retraining of personnel and reconstruction of archival infrastructure. ICA also called upon all countries to monitor trade in antiquities for objects or stolen documents.

In April 2003, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) issued an official statement on the Iraqi Archives expressing concerns over reports of the deliberate destruction of government records to “hide evidence of past crimes” (§ 2). The SAA (2003) noted that a nation’s documentary history must be managed and preserved because these records “safeguard the rights and freedoms that citizens enjoy and are vital to the health and well being of a nation” (§ 3). The SAA “urged that reconstruction efforts include funds to rebuild the archives of Iraq” (Society of American Archivists, § 7).

However, Alan Ginsburg published a dissenting opinion, which appeared with the official statement in the organization’s April 2003 newsletter. Ginsburg (2003) criticized the SAA’s position as being too politically partisan. More appropriately, Ginsburg said, the SAA should have reminded the “occupying forces of their obligations under international law with respect to the cultural heritage of Iraq” (Ginsburg, § 9)

The American Library Association (ALA) issued a preliminary statement offering support to Iraq and calling upon the U.S. government to help rebuild Iraq’s libraries. Some ALA members criticized that statement for not censuring the U.S. troops in their failure to prevent or stop the looting (Albanese & Rogers, 2003, p. 18). In June 2003, the ALA did issue a resolution deploring the failure of the coalition forces to protect Iraq’s cultural property. The ALA also urged the U.S. government to ratify The Hague Convention of 1954 and its Second Protocol, to provide funding for rebuilding libraries and other cultural institutions in Iraq and to include

library experts in upcoming damage assessment missions to Iraq (American Library Association, 2003).

Fact-Finding and Damage Assessment Mission

Several groups organized fact-finding missions in an effort to better assess the damage to Iraq's libraries, archives and cultural heritage sites. UNESCO, the Library of Congress, and a doctoral student from the University of Chicago visited Iraq in the six months following the U.S. invasion of Baghdad in April 2003.

UNESCO launched two missions to assess the damage to Iraq's cultural property, including the Iraqi Museum, the Baghdad National Library, the Bayt al Hikma (the first Iraqi Parliament place), and the Abbasid Palace. The recommendations, following the first mission in May 2003, stressed the importance of securing archaeological sites to prevent further looting, but acknowledged that the highest priority was the resolution of the "desperate humanitarian crisis in the city" (UNESCO, 2003a, p. 10). UNESCO dispatched a second mission in June 2003 and assessed damage in many cultural institutions, including the NLA, where it estimated that over one million volumes had been destroyed (UNESCO, 2003c, p. 12). UNESCO published a detailed report on the condition of libraries in Baghdad, Basra and Mosul and recommendations for remedial action following the mission (Arnoult, 2003). In September 2003, UNESCO (2003b) issued a needs assessment report that recommended securing temporary sites, preventing further damage and beginning work on reconstructing lost collections.

Al-Tikriti (2003), a University of Chicago doctoral student, acting on his own initiative, visited Baghdad in late May, tabulated the conditions of 12 library and manuscript collections in Baghdad and 16 provincial manuscript collections and posted his report on the Iraq Crisis LISTSERV hosted by the University of Chicago.

The Library of Congress (LC) joined with the U.S. State Department on a fact-finding mission to Iraq in October 2003 to assess the damage to the National Library and Archives and the House of Manuscripts. Their recommendations included relocating the Library to Senior Officer's Club and reorganizing the NLA be reorganized as three separate entities under the Ministry of Culture: a National Library, a National Archives, and a House of Manuscripts (Albanese, 2004, p. 17).

Donations and Aid

Worldwide donations of money and books were reported from organizations as varied as small public libraries in the United State (Ishizuka, 2004) to international coalitions such as the Cultural Emergency Response, a joint effort between the Prince Claus Fund of the Netherlands and the International Committee of the Blue Shield (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2004). Book donations came from many universities and publishers worldwide, and proved to be somewhat of a burden even though OCLC offered to provide free catalog data for donated items. Those with previous disaster relief experience urged the international community to ensure that book donations “correspond to the actual need expresses by the Iraqi authorities” (Johnson, 2005, p. 218). USAID reported the donation and distribution of about 8,500 books to five Iraqi universities by early 2005 (Johnson, p. 219).

Six grants totally \$559,000 were provided by the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to support projects to rebuild Iraq's cultural heritage, including the agency's initiative, “Recovering Iraq's Past.” The grants also provided training and educational opportunities for Iraq's librarians, archivists, and preservation specialists, including a joint program with Simmons College of Library and Information Science and the Harvard University libraries (Johnson, 2005, p. 216).

The British Library offered assistance with conservation training for Iraqi personnel, and offered to participate in an international effort to produce surrogate copies of culturally significant items held in BL collections (IFLA, 2003a, ¶ 2).

UNESCO organized a \$5.6 million consignment of laboratory equipment, reference books, and textbooks based on priorities identified by Iraqi educators as part of an initiative to restore the country's universities. The International Fund for Higher Education funded the project, and included a provision for 500 Iraqi teachers and researchers to study abroad (Williams, 2004)

Criticisms of Efforts

However, in spite of the outpouring of sentiment from the world community, actual support was slow to materialize, hampered in part by the continued political instability of Iraq. The NLA did not receive promised support from the CPA, which failed to secure a new site for the library despite the initial approval of Paul Bremer, the civilian governor. Although the Library of Congress, in its October 2003 visit to Baghdad had promised training and equipment and confirmed that the "U.S. Department of State had agreed to sponsor the reconstruction of the new NL," no such help materialized (Eskander, 2004, The Role of CPA section, ¶ 6).

UNESCO, which formed the Committees for Safeguarding the Cultural Heritage in Iraq, and was to have created an expert committee to oversee and coordinate activities to rebuild NLA and other Iraqi libraries, did not convene its first session until nine months after the committee was established. After that, UNESCO delayed forming the expert committee and did not contact NLA until August. Aside from a small project creating records for the national bibliography, UNESCO did not make any further concrete contributions (Johnson, 2005, p. 217).

Among the countries offering aid-- Japan, France, the United States and Great Britain, as well as Czechoslovakia—the Director General of the NLA said in 2004 that “the only country which I feel will fulfill its promises is the Czech Republic” (Eskander, 2004, Aid from Foreign section, ¶ 6).

Other Examples of Deliberate Destruction in the Twentieth Century

During the twentieth century “mass violence and destruction of culture” which was “goal-oriented and carefully rationalized within struggles between competing worldviews” (Knuth, 2003, p. iii) was a frequent occurrence. The destruction of culture was not limited to libraries and books, but included many other repositories of cultural heritage, such as churches, museums, archives, archaeological sites, and buildings, among others. “Our shared cultural heritage consists of artifacts of value to all humankind” (Bowman & Brailo, 2005, p. 5).

An examination of two examples of this type of destruction can provide insight into the continued occurrence in spite of lessons of the past. The first example is the destruction of Croatian libraries, archives, and cultural heritage sites by Serbian nationalists following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991. The second example details destruction to Kuwait’s information infrastructure from the 1989 Iraqi invasion.

Croatia

Following World War II, Communist Russia imposed a new national identity on six Balkan nations—Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia—creating from the six nations a single federated state known as Yugoslavia under the leadership of Josip Boz Tito. The federation held until Tito’s death and the decline of Communist power in the 1980s. Tensions became more acute as Serbia exerted its domination, causing Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia to declare independence. Serbia, which controlled the Yugoslavian army, waged an

ostensible civil war, claiming the intention to reunite the nation. Loyalties soon split along national, ethnic and religious lines and the war became an ethnic struggle between the Serbs and the Croats with both against the Muslims. Both Serbs and Croats engaged in ethnic cleansing (Knuth, 2003, p. 107).

Knuth observed that although both sides tried to rewrite history to exclude the other, the Serbs particularly sought to obliterate all traces of their enemy's presence as well as "all personal and political claims and all testimony to their enemies' cultural achievements and legitimacy as a people" (Knuth, 2003, p. 107).

Against this backdrop, it is perhaps unsurprising that both sides deliberately targeted cultural repositories for destruction. In Croatia, libraries have had a long history dating back at least to the seventh century. Croatian libraries "contained resource materials reflecting the life, history, and creativity of the Croatian people from the seventh century to 1991, when the conflict with Serbia exploded into open war" (Brailo, 1998, p. 20).

Libraries throughout Croatia suffered damage, including the Town Museum Library, located in a Baroque castle in Vukovar, which was destroyed, its contents stolen and taken to Serbia (Brailo, 1998, p. 23). The City and University Library, which was the central public and research library in Eastern Croatia, was left with its collection largely intact although its building suffered considerable damage in spite of the fact that the international sign of the Hague Convention was clearly displayed (Brailo, p. 23). The Historical Archives of Osijek suffered considerable damage. The Serbs destroyed most of the region's public libraries, including one that served the Ukrainian and Ruthenian minorities. In two military libraries in Zadar, soldiers burned books written in Roman script while sparing books written in Cyrillic script, used by the

Serbs. Brailo called this conflagration the “first massive book burning in Europe since the time of Hitler” (Brailo, 1998, p. 28).

Dubrovnik, a “cradle of Croatian medieval culture” (Brailo, 1998, p. 31) and listed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, survived both world wars only to sustain heavy damage in 1991 and 1992. Some have speculated that the destruction was an attempt to humiliate and disgrace the Croatians (Brailo, p. 31).

Many cultural repositories sustained damage in Dubrovnik, including the Dubrovnik Archives. The Archives housed notary records dating back to 1277 and was described as “one of the richest archival collections in the Mediterranean region, containing 22,000 volumes measuring 8,500 meters in length” (UNESCO, 1993b, as cited in Brailo, 1998, p. 34). Shelling and fires also damaged two monastery libraries, the Dominican Monastery Library and the Franciscan Monastery complex. The Dominican Monastery Library, one of the “richest in the Balkans,” dated from the fourteenth century and contained about 23,198 books including 236 manuscripts dating from the 11th century and 239 incunabula (Brailo, p. 42). The Franciscan Monastery complex, whose collection dated back to the 14th century, had about 70,000 volumes predominantly written in Croatian, Latin, and Italian, including valuable incunabula, an extensive archive, manuscripts (some dating from the 11th to the 14th century), historical records, and a music collection (Brailo, p. 44). The attack on Dubrovnik also destroyed the public library network. Looters stole literature from the Inter City University and burned the building (Knuth, 2003, p. 120).

Although the Croatians were also engaged in destruction of their enemy’s heritage, having attacked the Bishop’s Library in Serbian territory of Pakrac and destroying a collection of ancient Serbian books and manuscripts, they began to deplore the deliberate destruction of

cultural heritage, perhaps because of their own growing losses in this area. News reports of Croatia's losses drew international attention. One report described the loss of 370 museums, libraries, and archives (Tuttle, 1992, as cited in Knuth, 2003, p. 120). The international condemnation, while deterring the Croatians, seemed to inspire the Serbs to greater efforts (Knuth, p. 120). Serbian forces attacked those sites that were most vital to Croatia's national identity –“the more precious the site, the more vulnerable it was to attack” (Knuth, p. 122).

Ultimately, the Serbs may have succeeded in making territorial gains, but alienated the world and attracted international retribution for their crimes against culture. The Croatians largely refrained from attacking Serbian cultural monuments, unlike the Serbs who “were completely in thrall to an unbounded ideological commitment to racial and ethnic purity” (Knuth, 2003, p. 131).

The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1989 provides another example of the devastating effects of the intentional ravaging of a nation's cultural heritage. In the six months of occupation by Iraqi forces, Kuwait lost significant portions of its library collections across all sectors: university, public, school, and special libraries (Shawky, 1992). According to Aman, Iraqis stole or destroyed more than 80% of the public libraries' collections (Aman, 1992, p. 25). University libraries lost an estimated \$20 million worth of items, not including furniture or equipment. Abdel-Motey characterized the destruction as an “information catastrophe ... far more dangerous and with deeper effects” than the ecological destruction to Kuwait and observed that the Iraqis treated “libraries and information centres [sic] as if they were his main enemies” (Abdel-Motey, 1992, p. 442).

The Central Library of Kuwait served as a depository library for government publications to “enrich cultural activities and guard the national heritage and culture” (Abdel-Motey, 1992, p. 443). This library differed from the U.S. Library of Congress in that it was more similar to a public library and did not hold rare items although its collection was significant, numbering about 297,000 volumes before the attack. Iraqis stole much of the collection and took it to Iraq. The building was damaged and equipment stolen. International authorities have aided in the return of about 120,000 items to date and the building has undergone rehabilitation.

The Department of the Arab Heritage of the National Council for Culture, the Arts, and Literature was intentionally flooded, destroying and damaging many of the 10,000 volumes, 1,500 manuscripts, and 2,500 microfilms in the collection. One estimate put the irreparable damage at 30% of the books (Aman, 1992, p. 25). Authorities believe that Iraqis removed all the manuscripts to Iraq (Aman, p. 25).

Damage to century-old Sief Palace, which is home to the royal family, was extensive, and included the loss of some rare books that were stored on the ground floor of the palace.

Overall, damage to Kuwaiti libraries consisted of physical damage to the buildings, loss of equipment and personnel and collection losses that included many irreplaceable items (Abdel-Motey, 1992, p. 445).

The intensive looting and pillage of the Kuwaiti information infrastructure has been attributed to the Iraqis’ resentment and jealousy of Kuwait’s advances in these areas, although the gratuitous destruction of libraries, among other public institutions, seemed more designed to inflict pain and humiliation (Knuth, 2003, p. 138).

Further, by destroying Kuwait’s cultural identity and negating Kuwait’s position as a “sovereign nation and as a regional leader,” Iraq could more easily absorb Kuwait as a province

(Knuth, 2003, p. 158). In an effort to exert ideological control over the Arab world, the Iraqis had to destroy libraries “because they served as a repository of memory and supported critical thinking” (Knuth, p. 160).

The Library of Congress, before the Iraqi invasion, had the second largest collection of Kuwaiti materials in the world; after the invasion, it became the largest collection, and would form the foundation for rebuilding Kuwait’s devastated libraries (Lamolinara, 1991, p. 95).

Role and Significance of Libraries

A society is a group having a “distinctive cultural and economic organization” (WordNet, n.d.c). Culture is “all the knowledge and values shared by a society” (WordNet, n.d.a). Politics is “social relations involving authority or power” (WordNet, n.d.b). Within this context, libraries and archives play a central role in the cultural and political lives of the societies in which they are located.

Libraries and archives are “repositories of collective and individual memories, knowledge and achievements” (Zgonjanin, 2005, p. 128) that preserve the “cultural heritage of the countries in which they were situated” (Rubin, 2000, p. 218). Libraries “satisfy a fundamental need of society: the need to have society’s records readily accessible to the citizenry” (Rubin, p. 207).

The function of archives is “the storage and dissemination of usually unique records of long-term value” (Rubin, 2000, p. 280). Archival values include citizens’ rights of access to the information contained within the archive. This access ensures government accountability that is a foundation for democracy. “Archives constitute the memory of nations and of societies, shape their identity” (International Council on Archives, 2004, p. 1).

The IFLA Council resolution, issued in August 2003, affirmed the “central importance of libraries to civil society ... recognizing libraries as an essential part of the social infrastructure” (IFLA, 2003b).

The growth of nationalism in the seventeenth century led to the establishment of national libraries throughout Europe, with the special charter of preserving the “cultural heritage of the countries in which they were situated” (Rubin, 2000, p. 218). The cultural institutions of a society are shaped by the values of that society (Rubin, p. 244). The accumulation of records enables culture and progress (Besterman, 1946, as cited in Knuth, 2003, p. 2)

Politically, libraries and archives thrive in democratic, pluralistic societies. Typically, in “western societies, the archive has historically been closely related to politics that is [sic] liberal” (Joyce, 2001, p. 372). “Libraries flourish best when civilizations are at a summit of high culture” (Wallerstein & Stephens, 1978, as cited in Knuth, 2003, p. 3).

An examination of the purposeful destruction of national repositories reveals much about the reasons for their creation, and their significance to the societies that created and destroyed them. Libraries and archives “have come to serve many functions, both material and symbolic, and likewise embody certain values,” and serve varied and controversial social and political functions. Violence results from differences in opinion as to what those functions should be (Knuth, 2003, p. 20).

The inextricable relationship of libraries and archives to their socio-political environments is the reason for their importance as well as the reason for their vulnerability to attack. To political extremists, books and libraries take on the symbolic attributes of their opponents, becoming “either tools of the regime or enemies of the state” (Knuth, 2003, p. 9).

Nationalism leads to the destruction of libraries because they contain “texts that validate or invalidate claims to power” (Knuth, 2003, p. 41). In Croatia, Serbs destroyed libraries and archives that bore witness to the shared cultural past of the Serbs and the Croatians in order to obliterate the memory of that shared past. Iraq, in attempting to extend its nationalistic interests, destroyed libraries and archives in Kuwait that testified to Kuwait’s superiority in global information infrastructure.

At its most fundamental level, a library is a place to be. In describing how many Iraqi universities had to face the start of a new academic year with no resources available, in many cases without so much as tables and chairs, Arnoult (2004) observed, “In a context of destitution, we better realize how useful libraries can be” (p. 35).

Annihilation of cultural property is a means of annihilating an enemy, and the many instances of this all have a common thread—undermining a group’s identity by erasing its cultural memory (Zgonjanin, 2005, p. 128); this is “a tactic of war as old as war itself” (Bowman & Brailo, 2005, p. 6). Libraries embody the culture of the groups that create them and become a symbolic representation of those groups. In times of conflict, libraries become “convenient targets- the representations of an entire world or culture, conveniently stored in one location” (Hamblin, 1999, p. 11).

In Croatia, in spite of the prominent display of international symbols meant to guarantee preservation, Serbs deliberately destroyed libraries and archives in their quest for ethnic cleansing. Some speculated, “rather than safeguarding the buildings, the designation highlighted them as priority targets for bombardment” and hypothesized that “a spiteful sort of ‘cultural cleansing’” motivated destruction (Violich, 1998, as cited in Brailo, 1998, p. 49).

Conclusion

The deliberate destruction of libraries, archives, and other cultural heritage sites directly relates to the significance of their role in society as repositories of culture. These institutions take on a symbolic importance in addition to their functions as places of stored memory. In times of political upheaval, they become targets in the struggle to undermine, humiliate, or annihilate the enemy.

An increasing number of independent states and ethnic and cultural groups in this century has led to an increase in struggles for national interests and many incidences of the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage. At the same time, technological advances have enabled the creation of a global community that deplores such destruction as a loss to the greater culture of the world. Humanists and internationalists “embrace plurality and support the preservation of books and libraries because of the witness they bear, the counterforce they exert” (Knuth, 2003, p. 248).

As we have seen in Iraq, a country’s civil strife can irreparably damage its heritage, whether political expedience, greed, or carelessness motivates the destruction. In Croatia, the devastating effects of ethnocide led inevitably to the destruction of the cultural heritage of the world. In Kuwait, nationalism led Iraq to destroy its neighbor’s superior information infrastructure out of jealousy and a desire for territorial expansion.

The very reason for the existence of libraries and archives is the reason for their destruction in times of instability. Libraries and archives are part of the society they exist within, embody the culture of that society, and are controlled by the politics of the society.

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