

# Libraries, Nationalism, and Armed Conflict in the Twentieth Century

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Collective memory is an important feature of group identity. The collective memory, or common history of a group, is in many cases represented by its cultural institutions, including libraries. During the twentieth century, many instances of genocide, or attacks on groups, occurred. This continues today. These attacks often include aggression against the cultural institutions which, as evidence of a separate cultural identity, are seen to give political legitimacy to the group under attack. This article sees the many instances of premeditated attacks on libraries as integral parts of genocidal campaigns. Examples from the Second World War are explored,

as are events in the former Yugoslavia. The role librarians have played in these examples is discussed and practical ways in which librarians and the international library community can combat such attacks are identified. Finally, it is argued that the most effective way to prevent attacks on libraries is the promotion of pluralism and respect for the cultural heritage of others. Libraries can promote pluralism through their collections, their organisation, and their approach to information. In educating their users to respect other cultures, libraries contribute to safeguarding the cultural heritage of those represented by their collections.

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In normal times we may not appreciate the extent to which books are symbols of national identity ... But when war, revolution or other forms of unrest disrupt the otherwise orderly world of libraries, we can see concretely how very much books matter and to whom and why. The lengths to which conquerors go to seize or destroy books, the perils that conservators courageously face to safeguard them, the efforts of rival political factions to possess them in order to gain the legitimacy that they can confer: all illustrate the powerful symbolism of the written word (Sutter 2001, 143).

Over the centuries, books have been destroyed on a large scale, or made illegal and dangerous to own. The world's first great library at Alexandria was reputedly destroyed deliberately at least once for ideological reasons, a second century BCE Chinese emperor is known to have ordered a huge volume of books to be burnt, and book-burnings took place during both the Inquisition and the Reformation. Futuristic, dystopian (but not, with hindsight, always wholly mistaken) visions of science fiction writers often feature books and reading, and suggest that the political potency of the written word is unlikely to subside:

George Orwell's protagonist in *Nineteen Eighty-four* asks '[h]ow could you make appeal to the future when not a trace of you, not even an anonymous word scribbled on a piece of paper, could physically survive?' (Orwell 1989, 29); Aldous Huxley, in his *Brave New World*, envisions electric shock treatment being used to prevent unsuitable classes from using books; reading the only available written words constitutes, for the heroine of Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale*, the only possible act of rebellion; in *Fahrenheit 451* Ray Bradbury imagines a society where those in power see books as a danger to be extinguished at all costs; and Murray Constantine's *Swastika Night* looks forward to a Nazi-dominated world where power is maintained due to the fact that all books referring to what preceded the current regime have been destroyed. Both those in the past and the putative future, then, consider the written word a potent force. Those who are concerned to gain or maintain political power may attempt to control this force, seeing it as either a threat, or a useful tool.

During the twentieth century, many bloody armed conflicts concerned both ideology and issues surrounding the political status of ethnic groups. Participants in these conflicts looked to and interpreted history in order to justify their positions. These conflicts also often included the destruction of, or damage to, library collections and other cultural institutions. These attacks on library collections form part of attempts to control history, and thus the future, for 'before inventing a new past, the old must be erased' (Riedlmayer 1995b). What follows will explore these issues, using examples from the Second World War and from the Bosnian War. It will examine the means by which we can ensure that such attacks remain in the past, and that, despite the predictions of the science fiction writers mentioned above, they do not form part of the social control or armed conflicts of the future. The prevention of attacks on cultural property might also contribute to limiting the rise of those campaigns against ethnic and other groups of which the destruction of libraries has formed a part.

A judgement is made at the outset that the aforementioned attacks on library collections and other cultural institutions are wrong. They cannot, as Riedlmayer writes, 'be construed as an expression of one side's views in a two-sided political dispute. [They are crimes] against humanity and a violation of international laws and conventions' (Riedlmayer 1995b, 4). The condemnation of any destruction of library collections, however, does not imply that library collections themselves always promote pluralism. It is recognised, and discussed below, that individual library collections can be built and used as part of campaigns to exclude groups and their history – the creation of any canon must exclude other works, just as the establishment of the political legitimacy of one group on one territory frequently excludes others, or diminishes the claims of subgroups. That not all library collections live up to the '[c]reed of the librarian: no politics, no religion, no morals', however, does not make their destruction any less unacceptable (Foskett 1962).

A discussion of the following themes should help examine the significance of attacks on libraries:

1. *Why is collective memory important?*

Are libraries important to groups in terms of the group's identity as a 'nation', and if so, in what way? How has this manifested itself historically?

2. *Historical examples*

If cultural institutions such as libraries are important to group identity and thus to a group's claim for a certain status, how have aggressors against the group – in particular the perpetrators of genocide – acted towards libraries and library material relating to and originating from the group under attack?

3. *Combating the destruction of libraries*

What can be done, by librarians and the worldwide library community in particular, to combat this cultural aggression, both for the sake of protecting the collections per se, and as a means of promoting understanding and *convivencia* [1], thus helping to prevent aggression against ethnic or national groups?

### *Collective memory and libraries*

To the individual, memory is important both in practical terms, as it helps that individual to learn from experiences, and also in terms of his or her sense of who they are – a person's knowledge of his or her own history helps to create an understanding of who he or she is today. Halbwachs explains that two types of memory exist – both these memories of individuals, and 'collective memory', or the memory of a group (Halbwachs 1997, 97f.).

What are we to understand by this term 'group' to which a collective memory belongs? For Hastings, a community or group is the product of communication. The literature relating to and produced by that group, then, could be seen to define it (Hastings 1997, 20). Certain freedoms, such as participation in a common culture, can only be enjoyed as members of such a group. For Stavenhagen, one definition of culture is 'the sum total of the material and spiritual activities and products of a given social group which distinguishes it from other similar groups' (Stavenhagen 1998, 5). A group, then, is defined by culture. The instances of attacks on library collections which form part of attempts at cultural domination today and in the last decade seem to be principally concerned with the political status of minority peoples, or groups as entities to whom a culture, represented by institutions such as libraries, 'belongs'.

What was said above of individual memory can also be applied to that of groups. Memory is important to society in practical terms, in that, like the individual, the group needs to learn lessons from its past experiences in order to develop. For Lowenthal, '[g]roups lacking a sense

of their own past are like individuals who know nothing of their parents' (Lowenthal 1985, 44).

The sense of self of individual members of a group is in part formed by their very membership of that group. The group itself must therefore have an identity. But for Plaskow, this necessitates a reference to the past; she '[doubts that it is] possible within any historical, textual tradition to create a present in dramatic discontinuity with the past' (Plaskow 1990, 29). Writing specifically about Jews, she argues that only knowledge of the past enables the learning of 'who we truly are at present.' But this principle can be applied to all peoples:

Our cultural heritage finds its expression in the common, every-day activities, which are the sum and substance of our character as a people and as a nation. We must not lose this heritage, and we must understand it. Knowledge of the antecedents of this heritage is the keystone of any conscious effort to achieve meaningful goals for ourselves as individuals and as a people (Burr 1952, v).

Zalenskaïa also expresses the importance of a relationship with the past: '[l]osing one's cultural heritage is like losing one's memory and we know that we cannot build a future without having roots in the past' (Zalenskaïa 1999, 2). While these roots, or collective memory, can be stored and made available in different ways, texts, and thus libraries, are significant players in this process in societies that rely on the written word. For Katz, information is what creates nations and states – the ability to communicate on a mass scale makes a group coherent (Katz 1988). Vickery also sees information as helping to form a society (Vickery 1992). For Riedlmayer, books are not only a means to create a group or 'nation', but have also historically led to greater understanding, tolerance, and respect *between* groups (Riedlmayer 2001, 267). This was particularly evident in what could be called the quintessential example of text-based cross-cultural communication – that of Muslim Spain. The translation of texts from one language to another encouraged dialogue and mutual respect for other groups' traditions.

### *Nationalism and literature*

Much writing on nationalism emphasises the importance of shared language, literacy, and a body of vernacular literature to group identity and the

perception of nationhood. For Hastings, the development of a body of literature changes a group from sharing a less defined, more fluid 'ethnicity' to having the self-aware status of nationhood (Hastings 1997). He concludes that the recognition of this ownership of a literature precedes and justifies a claim to political self-determination. The desire and belief in the justification of and need for political self-determination in minority groups, and the fear of and opposition to this in the dominant group, has been the cause of much conflict in recent decades – examples include the conflicts in Kashmir, in Macedonia, in Northern Ireland and in the Basque Country. In this context, it is easy to understand why, in recent decades, cultural property, including library collections, has become a target, when armed conflicts have increasingly been internal to a state – the claims of a minority for self-determination may be seen to rest solely on their cultural difference.

Literature on library history relates how library collections and library systems have at times consciously been designed to aid the development of this sense of nationhood; to mould Hastings' ethnicity into a political nation, or to reform the nation, and lend it coherence. The following example demonstrates this phenomenon. Stuart describes how the creation of the Rossica collection of the Russian Imperial Public Library was a significant step in the nineteenth century project to create and promote a Russian identity, the Official Nationality (Stuart 1995). The Rossica collection was to house foreign-language material relating to Russia and its history. The director of the collection was given unlimited funding to acquire this material.

An examination of this mandate – the acquisition of foreign-language material related to Russia – suggests two means by which the library helped to shape a cultural and political identity for Russia. Firstly, since Peter the Great's push to modernise Russia through the importation of Western systems and methods, comparison with Western Europe had been a key factor in the national identity of the Russian intelligentsia. A large collection of other countries' works on Russia, then, acts to confirm the importance of Russia's place in the world: 'The fact of being perceived, described, interpreted, and assessed – objectified – by the 'other' augments national identity while also authenticating it' (Stuart 1995, 10). In an age

before mass media, the most concrete way of demonstrating this objectification, and the legitimacy it conferred, was the bringing together of publications which unquestionably proved that an interest in Russia emanating from the powerful West existed.

The second issue that this direction of collection development raises is one with implications not only for 'Russian' culture, but also the identity, and collective memory of minority nationalities and the inhabitants of areas on the fringes of Imperial Russia. In the introduction to a catalogue of the collection, Korf, the director of the library, discusses the issue of the works of which minority groups should be included in the collection – which should be regarded as Russian. Stuart describes how the Rossica project was informed by an 'expansionist philosophy' (Stuart 1995, 19). In this way, it could be argued that the Rossica collection de-legitimised minority cultures by subsuming their works under Russian culture. The Rossica collection, then, represented what the nationalist elite aspired to make their country. In creating the collection they also consciously defined and created the new Russia.

In other examples of the phenomenon of libraries being used by nationalists to canonise their vision of society, Stipcevic shows how libraries were the means by which a Croatian identity was retained despite the dominance of foreign rulers, (Stipcevic 1989) and Sutter how Polish nationalists created libraries abroad which they hoped to transfer onto Polish soil as part of the rebirth of an independent Poland (Sutter 2001, 145). Dean relates how the library system developed in Italy at the time of political unification attempted to facilitate a parallel *cultural* unification of Italy, and later helped develop the Fascist identity (Dean 1983), and Schidorsky shows how library collections were instrumental in developing the Zionist identity; 'Jewish libraries contributed to the realization of the goals of modern Jewish nationalism' (Schidorsky 1998, 272). German conservatives' development of public libraries in the border areas of Germany, following the First World War, was intended to establish a cultural base for their irredentist political goals (Stieg 1992). These examples demonstrate how library collections themselves can be used to create a false, or at least subjective, view of history. Collection development policies, the integrity of the

authors of books contained in them, and even the way that the collections are classified, can affect the reader's sense of the culture and history to which the library collection pertains, or which it represents. The creation of one view of the history and culture of the region inevitably excludes others, and can lead to the loss of collective memory of sections of a group or of entire cultures.

#### *Attacks on a body of literature/collective memory*

The corollary of the importance of knowledge of a group's past in ensuring its sense of identity today, and of the political importance of a body of literature, is attacks on this heritage or collective memory by enemies of the group. It is no surprise, then, that documents and whole libraries have long been targets during genocidal campaigns and civil wars, when one side seeks to obliterate a group and its identity. Boylan, in his review of the Hague Convention reports how '[s]ome of the greatest losses in recent armed conflicts have been the result of deliberate damage and destruction of the cultural evidence of the existence of enemy, or indeed just different, peoples' (Boylan 1993, 9).

The destruction in war of libraries and archives is designed to destroy the claims of a group in two ways – the first is the pragmatic course of destroying actual records. This inhibits post-conflict claims to land, housing and other property, as well as making the pursuit of justice, and punishment of the perpetrators, a much more difficult task. The second way in which destroying 'collective memory' in the form of libraries and archives can be seen as an act of genocide is the effect the loss of this memory has on the integrity of the group for itself. According to Boylan, the destruction of physical evidence of existence of a group's culture is legally defined as genocide in the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* of 1948 (Boylan.1993, 8). '[K]illing of members of a group (or groups)', argues Chrisjohn (2002, chapter 4) 'is only one of the acts that constitute genocide. How are we to conceive', he goes on 'of a person without a culture, or a culture that is peopleless?'

The following section will discuss two historical examples of the destruction or corruption of library collections. Although it has been noted above that the burning of books has been a feature

of political control throughout the ages, it will focus principally on the destruction of library *collections* as distinct from unorganised or individual books, and on research collections in particular during the Second World War, and the Bosnian War of the 1990s. Unlike the destruction of records and archives, which can be seen as a means of self-protection – the communal records of Bosnian Muslim and Croat communities, for example, were destroyed during the war, enabling the ‘nationalist forces ... to insure themselves against any future claims by the people they have driven out and dispossessed’ (Riedlmayer 1995, 2) – research or national libraries are significant due to the power they have as symbols of the nation or ethnic group. It is not simply the contents of the library as an aggregation of books that the aggressors seek to destroy or pervert, but the library as a symbol or indicator of the group or nation’s permanence or level of development. That it is not solely the contents of the library which are the target of attacks is evident in the description given below of the Nazis’ reorganisation of the University Library in Cracow – the contents themselves were not rejected by the Library’s new German directors, but the Polish nature of the library’s organisation itself. The existence of a national library surely bestows a claim of legitimacy, longevity, permanence, and evidence of a high stage of development on the group to which it belongs or applies. In this way, libraries as *institutions* threaten those who would deny the right to political or cultural recognition of the said group. This provides a motive for the destruction of cultural institutions:

[A] people’s identity is inextricably linked with the visible symbols of their culture. Once those anchors are gone, the past, like the future, can be recreated by the victors (Riedlmayer 1995b, 4).

### *Historical examples of attacks on libraries*

*Lost Memory*, a UNESCO report on libraries and archives destroyed and damaged during the twentieth century, lists the instances in which libraries have sustained serious damage through the wilful acts of humans (Hoeven 1996). The destruction of libraries in the twentieth century has been an ideological weapon, a tool used against groups. Martin Segger sees this attitude towards

cultural property as a recent phenomenon. In previous centuries, actions against libraries, archives, museums, and monuments, according to Segger, merely constituted looting, while now the intent is to eliminate the owner group’s ethnic identity (Segger 1998). This section will describe the German onslaught against books and libraries within Germany, in Poland, and in the context of European Jewish culture, and Bosnian Serb attacks on the cultural institutions of Sarajevo.

The Second World War introduced the concept of ‘total war’, where no area of society was exempt from involvement. As we have seen, libraries and attacks on libraries played a significant role in this, the first ‘total war’. Books became targets for the Nazis early on in their period of power. One of the first series of attacks on books as representative of an ‘enemy’ culture were the famous book-burnings of 1933, which provoked outrage throughout the world. Book-burnings were symbolic of the whole Nazi world-view, in that the destruction of ‘un-German’ literature was seen as necessary in the Darwinian struggle to protect German culture. The student body organising the first book-burnings called the event an ‘action against Jewish decomposition of German literature’ (quoted in Hill 2001, 14). The books and other cultural artefacts which were burnt were representative of all that the Nazis opposed and perceived as threats – the Jews, Bolshevism, pacifism, and so on. Thus, book-burnings were a purifying with fire of German culture, the destruction of certain cultures to ‘save’ another. As Kaiser explains, ‘[a]lthough we perceive destruction as barbaric, it is seen as an act of creation in the eyes of its perpetrators’ – their ideal society cannot exist without the removal of the cultures which are seen as an impediment to it (Kaiser 2000, 2). This destruction of enemy cultures was undertaken parallel to the destruction of the peoples to whom those cultures belonged. These groups were targets because they were perceived to be threats to the German people.

Book-burnings were not the only pre-war attacks on ‘un-German’ literature. Blacklists were compiled, private and public libraries and libraries attached to independent organisations, as well as homes and bookshops, were raided by the Police and the SA. Their owners destroyed many books and other documents in order to prevent

persecution in the event of their discovery. Jewish owned publishing houses and bookshops were 'Aryanised'. During *Kristallnacht* hundreds of synagogues and their book collections were destroyed. Attacks on 'un-German' written culture, then, were clearly an integral part of *Gleichschaltung*, and could also be said to prepare the way for, and normalise attacks on the producers of that written culture.

While 'un-German' culture at home was seen as a threat to German survival, cultural policies in the east aimed to *construct* a society that would have as its sole function the service of the German economy. The Poles were to become 'a society of peasants and workers.' The removal of libraries from Poland was part of the process of eliminating the 'Polish cultured class' (Stubbings 1993, 39). Poles were to be machine-like beings, and thus needed no high culture. Indeed, written culture, and its potential to develop the mind would simply be a hindrance and a threat to the Poles' usefulness; '[t]he ability to read would be irrelevant to their lives' (Stubbings 1993, 41).

Control of libraries passed to German personnel as soon as Poland was occupied. This demonstrates the strategic importance of libraries to the Germans. This control of culture was of particular significance in the western part of Poland, the General Government, which was annexed to Germany, and was essentially to become part of Germany, and have its culture and people become German.

The University of Cracow Library, also known as the Jagiellonian Library, was situated in the General Government zone, and was an important repository of Polish culture. It contained 600,000 volumes, which included manuscripts and incunabula, and was the oldest academic library in the country. In 1941, it was identified as a key institution in the process of Germanisation of the region, and it was decided to reform it in the image of the *Staatsbibliothek* in Germany. All the important library collections in Cracow contributed to the new *Staatsbibliothek Krakau*. The library was to be transformed through restricting user access (only *Volksdeutsch* or so-called 'ethnic Germans' could use the collections), reorganisation to give prominence to material reflecting the German world-view and underplaying the Polish nature of the collections, banning certain authors and weeding the collections of 'undesirable' items,

reforming classification and cataloguing in a way which would give the library a German appearance, buying only German-language material, and forcing all staff to work in German. In this way,

[r]epudiating the library's centuries-old cultural and educational role in Polish history, the Germans renamed it another *Staatsbibliothek* in order to serve the purposes of the Nazi regime (Sroka 1999, 6).

While the destruction, perversion and dispersal of library collections went hand in hand with the destruction and breakdown of cultures in Germany, Poland, and other countries under Nazi control, in the case of Jewish culture, civilisation, and life, this was combined with the *creation* of a great library collection. After initial destruction of Jewish books during book-burnings organised by students, whole libraries, and the most valuable parts of others, were confiscated from Jewish individuals, organisations, and communities from all over Europe, and sent to Frankfurt, a town which already held an important collection of Judaica and Hebraica, to form part of the library collection of Alfred Rosenberg's Nazi Party Institute for Exploration of the Jewish Question. This library was to be a weapon against the Jewish threat as perceived by the National Socialists – it was designed to educate the German people, thus enabling them to avoid again falling foul of the supposed 'ideological foe'. The 'research institute', of which it formed a vital part, was one of various such organisations, which Rosenberg worked to establish, stocked with books removed from the library collections of individuals and organisations in the territories captured by Germany. Thus, we see that German action against Jewish libraries was not designed to obliterate the memory of the Jews and their history in German and European civilisation, as, we shall see, it could be said that Serb action against Bosnian cultural institutions represented, but rather, through the preservation of Jewish literature, the Nazi ideologues wished to *perpetuate* the memory of Jewish culture, preserving, in Chrisjohn's words, 'a culture that is peopleless' (Chrisjohn 2002, chapter 4). This has a certain logic, given that the perceived threat of Jewish culture to German civilisation was one of the Nazis' principal reasons for being, while the fruitful cohabitation of different cultures in one state, of which Sarajevo's national

cultural institutions were evidence, went contrary to the Bosnian Serb world view.

### *Bosnian War*

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a significant country in the history of international and intercultural relations. It is situated at the crossroads between three major civilisations: the Catholic, the Orthodox Christian and the Muslim. It represents both the successes and the failures of these civilisations as they have both striven to live together and also fought against this accommodation. The country has been at the centre of the competition for cultural dominance for centuries, not least in our own time. However, it has also been a country that epitomises the concept of *convivencia*. Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Jews have lived together profitably in Bosnia and Herzegovina, enriching their own cultures through contact with those of others.

Riedlmayer recounts the series of attacks made on the libraries of Sarajevo over the centuries. This narrative, framed by the incredible history of the Sarajevo Haggadah, suggests that, in Sarajevo at least, library collections are not only symbolic of, but integral to, the parallel history (and suffering) of the peoples of the city;

On at least four occasions in its long history, the Sarajevo Haggadah has survived attempts to destroy multicultural communities. Each of these attempts to eradicate pluralism was also accompanied by the burning of books (Riedlmayer 2001, 266).

Riedlmayer provides evidence that, in the most recent conflict to involve Bosnia, the 1992–1995 war, the cultural institutions of Sarajevo, including the National Library, clearly constituted targets for the Serb forces. Buildings surrounding the Library were left standing, while the Library was shelled for three days, and was eventually razed to the ground. BBC reporter Kate Adie was in fact informed by a Bosnian Serb officer that the National Museum was indeed an official target (Riedlmayer 2001, 276). The library of the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo was destroyed in May 1992. This library contained thousands of priceless Oriental manuscripts, which emanated from both Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also other Islamic countries, as well as an important archives collection, which chronicled the history of the Muslim

community in that country. The Oriental Institute's collection had been consulted by scholars from all over the world prior to its destruction. The Institute, like the National Library, even though it was not situated in any proximity to legitimate military targets, was destroyed by shelling from the Bosnian Serb forces.

In a war fought for the power to define the ethnic composition of a country, cultural institutions that offered a different vision of that country's society had to be tamed or destroyed by the aggressor. This was due to these institutions' ability to belie false representations of history. Access to history is that which all regimes who seek to impose, and represent as legitimate, the supremacy of one ethnicity, must control. Riedlmayer summarises these actions as follows:

Throughout Bosnia, public and private libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural institutions were targeted for destruction in an attempt to eliminate the material evidence – books, documents, and works of art – that could remind future generations that people of different ethnic and religious traditions once shared a common heritage and life in Bosnia (Riedlmayer 2001, 279).

While the destruction of archives and records pertaining to ownership of property is clearly one of the practical means of fulfilling the 'ethnic cleansing' of the population, the destruction of purely 'cultural' material signals a desire to deny the very existence of the culture being targeted. Indeed, for Stipcevic, the Serb nationalist forces wished to destroy 'all objects that could prove that on these territories there ever was someone alive who was not a Serb' (Stipcevic 1998, 278).

### *Combating the destruction of libraries*

#### *Librarians and resistance*

Librarians and library organisations often regard their profession as a humanistic one. The history of the destruction of libraries as part of genocidal campaigns provides examples which both confirm and belie this image. Rosenzweig argues that librarians have always been a potent force politically, despite today's propensity to characterise librarianship as seeking to separate itself from politics, and maintain a position of neutrality (Rosenzweig 1991). Dosa and Stieg both show that German librarians as a profession did not or-

ganise resistance to the Nazi regime, but were indeed often supportive of it, and allowed their profession to be used as a valuable tool in the building of the totalitarian society, and the state of mind of the German population which made genocide possible (Dosa 1974, Stieg 1992).

Examples can be found, however, of the heroic nature of librarians' responses to attacks on libraries, and of how librarians, in times of armed conflict and ideological struggles, have stayed true to what they see as the principles of their profession, even at risk to their own lives. Sutter relates the heroic efforts made to save Polish bibliographical treasures from the Germans (Sutter 2001). Polish librarians' efforts to preserve their library collection and their culture, indicated that '[t]hey were never reconciled to the destruction of the Polish state and its culture' (Sroka 1999, 10). Their clandestine activities were not limited to smuggling valuable manuscripts out of Nazi-occupied territories, but included lending forbidden books to Polish students, working in the underground movement and collecting underground publications for the University Library, conducting bibliographical work relating to unauthorised additions to the collections, and sabotaging efforts to send material owned by the library to Germany. Sayej-Nasser shows how Palestinian librarians in territories occupied by Israel have attempted to continue to provide an information service at considerable personal risk and under extremely difficult conditions. Riedlmayer describes the efforts to safeguard the national collections in Sarajevo made by Bosnians of all ethnic backgrounds (Riedlmayer 2001, 274). One librarian was killed by Serb attacks on the Library. Under mortar fire, librarians and others attempted to save precious volumes from the National Library.

As Paul Sturges reminded delegates of 1998's 'Disaster and After' conference, librarians are partisan human beings who themselves have varied group allegiances (Sturges 1999, 168). They live in real political situations, and hold particular points of view. It cannot be expected that they operate with no personal biases. The situations discussed above, in which librarians have found themselves over the past century, certainly leave little room for a detached stance. This is not to say, however, that librarians should not be a force for working towards tolerance and mutual re-

spect for one another's culture. A recognition of partisanship may indeed be necessary before the library community can work together and communicate honestly to prevent such attacks on cultural property.

#### *Practical measures librarians can take to combat attacks on libraries*

While international laws have been developed and ratified since the cultural devastation of the Second World War (these are described below), they have not prevented attacks on libraries. However, even if the attacks cannot be prevented, librarians can take action to counter their effects. Sayej-Nasser describes ways in which librarians can provide an alternative information service, thus subverting attempts at preventing access to information by those who wish to limit the cultural life of a particular section of society (Sayej-Nasser 1999). In the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, these include the development of a Palestinian union catalogue. This should enable libraries to share the cost of periodical subscriptions, which are very high due to prohibitive taxation. When students were prevented from entering the Birzeit University Library, the Library's catalogue was moved to a different location, and material identified by students from this source was fetched for them by librarians. Other local institutions, such as the British Council and public libraries, made their collections available to students. Mobile libraries were set up which distributed reading material, putting a particular emphasis on providing cultural activities for children.

#### *Relevant developments in library technology*

Developments in information and communications technology can be significant in the library community's attempts to preserve collective memory. If the bombing of the Bosnian National Library was an attempt to destroy evidence of non-Serb society, in that the existence of the collection proved that Muslims, Croats, and Serbs had lived together, then, even if the documents did not survive, the existence of a catalogue which inventoried and described the contents of that collection would have gone some way to demonstrate that cohabitation. Praštalo recounts her attempts to save the periodicals catalogues of the

Library, indicating the importance of preserving these (Praštalo 1997, 97). The catalogues of many of the world's research collections are now visible to all on by way of the Internet. This is one way in which modern technology's ability to allow us to share information resources flouts the goals of those who seek to destroy collective memory by the destruction of cultural institutions.

### *Reconstruction of libraries*

While clearly preventing the destruction of cultural institutions is the ideal, an important part of the fight to reassert cultural identity that has come under attack has been to reconstruct libraries that have already been damaged during armed conflict. These laborious tasks not only refuse victory to aggressors against culture, but are also necessary if the pre-war society itself is to be revived. Boylan sees this as a humanitarian issue (Boylan 1993, 131), as does Riedlmayer;

People need more than just physical security, food, medical aid and shelter. They also have urgent cultural needs. The task of rebuilding libraries, archives, schools and other cultural institutions cannot wait. A generation of Bosnians is coming of age as we speak, and if we want them to play a part in rebuilding their society, they will need educational and cultural resources (Riedlmayer 1994, 5).

Throughout the twentieth century, these projects aimed at reconstructing library collections have been undertaken. The wilful destruction of the Catholic University of Louvain's Library by the German army in 1914 met with international outrage and an international response. A book fund was set up, and considerable German contributions to the Library's reconstruction were required by the Versailles Treaty. The building itself was restored using funding raised in America, and it was formally reopened in 1928. Unfortunately the whole cycle was to be repeated as a result of a second destruction of the same library by the German army during the Second World War, which was again followed by reconstruction through international effort.

The fate of Jewish libraries during the war was complex – some were destroyed, some transported to private Nazi collections, some to so-called 'research institutes' – and so were attempts at their reconstruction. Not only libraries, but also the communities which they served, were destroyed.

Many of the contents of these libraries were collected in German research institutes, and evidence of their original ownership was at times removed. Dobbs describes how, over fifty years after the close of the war, questions of Jewish-owned books stolen by the Nazis have not been resolved (Dobbs 2000). Many books from Rosenberg's Institute ended up in American libraries, including the Library of Congress, forming part of collections that were confiscated from the Nazis as a result of the Allied victory. Confiscations were made on the basis that the material was Nazi propaganda. Many of these items, however, would have been returned to other European countries, but the lack of clear marks on many volumes made this impossible. While many other books that had been gathered in Frankfurt have gone to Israeli and American Jewish organisations, other ways of safeguarding the memory of Jewish life in Eastern Europe through their library collections have been suggested, such as making the origin of such items part of Library of Congress catalogue records (Dobbs 2000, 5).

Other examples of attempts to reconstruct library collections may differ from that of Jewish libraries after the Second World War in two ways. Firstly, much important Jewish library material did still exist at the end of the War for the reasons described above. Reconstruction was a question of repatriating what had been collected in Germany. However, the second difference – that the communities who had used these libraries no longer existed – meant that other appropriate homes had to be found for these books.

The situation in Sarajevo today is very different. Only around ten percent of the National and University Library's collection was saved, and the Oriental Institute's collections were almost completely destroyed. Much of the collection can never be replaced, but Tatjana Praštalo, a former employee of the Library, believes that it is important to build new collections – the Library should house, for example, a collection of material on the war which brought about its destruction (Praštalo 1997, 99).

International assistance in the task of rebuilding the Library's collections and services has been made available through funding from UNESCO and the World Bank. This has facilitated projects such as the development of computing and internet-based facilities for library users, refurbish-

ment of the building in which library material is to be housed, and funding for research (UNESCO 1998, 5).

One major effort in the reconstruction of Bosnian libraries seeks the help of scholars and librarians around the world. The Bosnian Manuscript Ingathering Project aims to compile a database of copies held on CD-ROM made by researchers who had used the Oriental Institute, the National Library, the Museum of Herzegovina's Library, and others, and are held in libraries and by individuals around the world, 'thus resurrecting 'virtual' collections from the ashes and helping to thwart the intentions of those who have sought to destroy them' (Riedlmayer 2001b).

### *International law related to the destruction of libraries*

Since the Second World War, and the attacks on culture, which accompanied atrocities against people, the international community has taken major steps to safeguard cultural property, and thus collective memory, from such attacks. The history of international law related to cultural property in times of armed conflict begins in 1832 with von Clausewitz's emphasis on attacking only *military* targets (Clausewitz 1942), and explicit bans on the destruction of cultural property made in Lieber's Code – the USA War Department's *Instructions for the Governance of the Armies of the United States in the Field* (Lieber 1863). The first international treaties to be ratified which prohibited attacks on non-military sites were conceived in The Hague in 1899 and 1907. As it has been seen, however, with reference to the destruction of the Catholic University of Louvain during the First World War, these treaties did not prevent such attacks from taking place.

In 1935, countries from both the South and North American continents signed the Treaty of Washington, known as the Roerich Pact, named after its author. This treaty contained the first proposals for the prominent display of a sign indicating a building or site's protected status, part of the system of protection which survives in current international law.

During the Spanish Civil War, the 1907 Hague Convention was breached by attacks on historic buildings and sites on a large scale. This was compounded by the period's development of aerial

bombing capacity. The International Museums Office proposed the text for a new convention. Although the international conference which was needed if this convention was to be enforced did not take place, throughout Europe actions suggested by the draft treaty were taken. Also, as it became clear that a Europe-wide war was on its way, President Roosevelt sought assurances from Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Poland, that non-military sites, including sites of cultural importance, would be safe from attack in the forthcoming conflict. All sides made these assurances. By 1943, however, it had become evident that promises of respect for cultural property were not to be kept. The British bombing of the city of Lübeck prompted reprisals from the Germans, resulting in the destruction of four of England's historic cities. Three important libraries outside London were damaged, as were four London libraries (Hoeven 1996, 13).

The immediate post-war period brought major developments in international law, which included efforts to make the attacks on culture and restrictions on cultural freedom, which had been such a feature of the preceding war, a thing of the past. The three documents which make up the International Bill of Human Rights all make reference to the right to cultural freedom. The Genocide Convention of 1948 is also relevant to the question of safeguarding cultural property. It applies not only to the direct killing of people, but also to other means which lead to the destruction of a people, entailing the loss of their identity as a group; it includes 'causing serious ... mental harm to members of a group' (United Nations 1948). The originator of the word genocide, Holocaust survivor Raphael Lemkin, used the term to describe 'a co-ordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves,' which included the unravelling of the social and cultural fabric of the group in question. Thus the destruction of libraries and other institutions that represent and safeguard the culture of a people can be said to constitute genocide (quoted in Schabas 1999). Schabas believes that evidence of acts such as the destruction of cultural institutions can in fact be a necessary part of the case against the perpetrators of genocide when the numbers killed are relatively low (Schabas 1999, 5).

In 1954 the contracting parties signed the legislation that currently governs treatment of cultural property in times of armed conflict. The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict built on the work that had been done by the International Museums Office during the Spanish Civil War. The resulting convention includes the following principles. Cultural property is of importance not only to its originators or to the community of its origin, but to all humankind – it is in all of our interests to ensure that it is safeguarded when threatened by war. The Convention's definitions of cultural property include both movable items – which would include documents and library collections – and the buildings used to house these collections. The Contracting Parties must prepare their armed forces to safeguard and respect cultural property in times of armed conflict. The Convention provides for the identification and registration in peacetime of sites deemed to require Special Protection. The status of the given site is published and the surrounding area is de-militarised, thus enabling the area to be respected by enemy forces. The emblem of the Hague Convention, the Blue Shield, is, like Roerich's peace banner, to be used to identify relevant sites and personnel.

In 1999, a Second Protocol was added to the existing text of the Hague Convention. This addition was deemed necessary following the Convention's failure to prevent large-scale cultural destruction during the war in the former Yugoslavia at the beginning of that decade. According to Mackenzie (2000, 6), '[t]he Convention reflects the experiences of the Second World War.' This means that it was not equipped to prevent the destruction of cultural property in conflicts, which, like the Bosnian war, were conducted within a state rather than between 'nation-states'. The Second Protocol clarifies and concretises aspects of the Convention for which the application had lacked uniformity. Among these were the *specific* measures to be taken in peacetime to prepare for the event of armed conflict. It also provides for the setting up of a committee and fund to oversee the application of the Convention. The Second Protocol provides a more limited definition of 'military necessity' than that which had existed in previous international law, and which had provided justifications for attacking targets that were not strictly military. Military necessity allows for

the attack on civilian targets when it becomes militarily imperative to do so. This term is clearly defined in the Second Protocol, thus limiting its application. The Protocol seeks, in laying out clearer guidelines for the circumstances in which it is legitimate to attack cultural property, to minimise circumstances in which military necessity can be used as an excuse for aggression.

The Second Protocol also attempts to make the Hague Convention more enforceable, ensuring that signatory states make violations of the Convention criminal under domestic law. According to Patrick Boylan, the principal problem with the Hague Convention was not its content, but failures to enforce the treaty;

Although technical improvements to the detailed provisions of the *Convention* and *Protocol*, are certainly desirable in the long term, these are less urgent at this time than the over-riding priority of achieving greater recognition, acceptance and application of their provisions (Boylan 1993, 143).

One important feature of the Second Protocol, in light of the non-international nature of many of the armed conflicts of recent decades, is the fact that it is applicable to all combatants from or acting within the territories of High Contracting Parties, regardless of their political position within these.

### *The International Committee of the Blue Shield*

Another major step taken by the international community was the creation of the organisation The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) in 1996. The formation of this organisation was also prompted by the lack of co-ordinated response by the international community and by the different organisations involved in protecting cultural institutions, during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. This demonstrated the need for a body that would play a central role in dealing with such crises.

The symbol of the Blue Shield is taken from the Hague Convention. It is the agreed international symbol denoting cultural property covered by the Convention, and thus protected from attack by international law. Mackenzie questions the use of this symbol, due to the tendency during recent conflicts to make cultural institutions into intentional targets, as illustrated above in relation to

the bombing of the Bosnian National Museum (Mackenzie 2000, 7). Does the use of the Blue Shield symbol simply encourage and facilitate this? It seems unlikely that the perpetrators of these attacks would rely on the symbol to select their targets. However, the identification of sites as important for a culture by any means – UNESCO's Memory of the World register is another example – may prove to be a dangerous strategy. We have seen that cultural aggressors have destroyed that which a group or nation considers important to its identity. It may be possible that designating sites as such does encourage their destruction.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield was set up, as its name suggests, to respond to situations which the Hague Convention addresses in the manner that the Red Cross does in relation to people. It works to protect cultural property as defined by the Hague Convention. As befits its cross-sectoral remit, constituents of the ICBS include The International Council on Archives (ICA), The International Council of Museums (ICOM), The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). The organisation's principles were agreed in November 1998. These state that it is the duty of all signatories of the Hague Convention to take the necessary measures to improve preparedness and facilitate the prevention of damage to cultural property in the event of armed conflict. The ICBS seeks to do this by co-operation with national institutions, providing expertise and training, and promoting standards and respect for cultural property.

National Blue Shield committees are important in the effort to co-ordinate the activities of different bodies and groups which work to prevent the destruction of cultural property, acting as a central point of reference, and to combat the results of such attacks when they do occur. These bodies include library, archive and museum professionals, government, the emergency services, and non-governmental organisations. These are all bodies which would inevitably take part in any rescue effort, as well as potentially being (knowing or unintentional) agents for harm to cultural property at home or in conflicts abroad. Other, less immediate, activities which national Blue Shield committees can spearhead are lobbying their government to ratify and implement the Hague Con-

vention, and raising awareness of the issues at a national level.

### *Libraries as educators for pluralism*

While these efforts to safeguard cultural property in the event of conflict, and to encourage states to non-aggression against cultural property, are essential, for Boylan, another approach must also be part of the solution. Education which encourages respect for cultural property and for different groups and cultures is the clearest way to safeguard both the cultural institutions which are in danger, and the lives of those to whom they belong. Martin Segger of ICOM discusses this question in relation to the museums sector. As discussed above in the context of library collections, museums have not always had a history of tolerance and promotion of cultural diversity. In fact, the world's major museum collections have often made their reputation by what would today be called looting and cultural vandalism. Collectors from colonial powers have stripped local cultures of their most precious artefacts, objects at times of ritual significance for their original owners. However, according to Segger, museums are now in a position to help promote diversity and tolerance. They can do this by helping to work towards the prevention of what, it could be argued, is the cause of ethnic conflict today – the tendency to view the world solely from the point of view of one's own group and the unwillingness to appreciate the values of the other. Segger imagines museums as a vehicle for the promotion of pluralism. Breaking down superstitions about the other is an important component of building tolerance. Museums should celebrate or at least give voice to those who have worked towards peace and reconciliation in the past. They should also assume international organisation and agendas, thus precluding the abuse of cultural heritage by museums for the benefit of one group.

Library collections have been discussed here principally as institutions belonging to, or referring to individual groups, and their preservation has been described as important in that they are an integral part of the survival and identity of these groups. However, libraries as well as Segger's museums can have another part to play. They can be agents for the promotion of tolerance

and respect for different cultures called for by Patrick Boylan. John Gray's description of Belfast's Linen Hall Library's Northern Ireland Political Collection shows how a library can become the environment in which such work becomes possible, while in the wider society dialogue between groups is becoming ever more difficult;

[No library staff] had any obvious overt political agenda beyond a general liberal sensibility. Indeed a clearer motivation lay in their common enthusiasm for local bibliography and the strength of the Linen Hall's own collection of the small printing of the city. Suffice it to say that only the Linen provided the environment in which they could coalesce and act, and without any immediate sense of constraint (Gray 1999, 96).

Libraries can provide one means of upholding a spirit of pluralism in increasingly closed societies. Gray writes of the Linen Hall that '[t]o those who sought to find new ways out of the cultural impasse of a depressed and paranoid city, the Linen Hall Library, and in particular its Irish collection, offered sanctuary; the Library could not deny the breadth of its heritage' (Gray 1999, 95). While it has been argued that library collections can exclude the voice of minority groups, they are also one of the few means by which these voices can be heard. Another example of the way in which libraries can safeguard a multiplicity of memories – not just that of the victor who, it is said, always controls history, could be found in the Bosnian National Library before it was destroyed by Serbian Nationalists. The library possessed a collection of material written by individuals who had fought on both sides during the Second World War (Praštaló 1997, 99).

Segger's prescriptions for museums, described above, are as appropriate for libraries. Libraries should ensure that their collections and their activities promote pluralism and facilitate a respect for diversity, rather than providing evidence for only one group's version of history. This can be done through the acquisition of a wide range of material, a thoughtful organisation of the collection, and the provision of an objective and respectful information service. Interested parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina express a wish to make the site of the destroyed National and University Library into a 'symbol for culture, freedom, coexistence and co-operation among people having different traditions and religions' (UNESCO 1998, 5).

Libraries and librarians, it has been shown, do not always remain aloof in the seemingly endless series of disputes between cultures and peoples. Efforts of individuals and the library community in the shape of ICBS and IFLA have shown, however, that librarians can fight to uphold the values that libraries can bring to the pursuit of tolerance and mutual respect;

We may not ourselves, as librarians, resolve acute problems. We will at least cease to be part of the problem! We can certainly aspire to make available the materials from which others may devise new futures for us all. Then again, if our own generation fails, we can bequeath the materials with which tomorrow's historians can judge us to good effect (Gray 1999, 104).

### *Conclusion*

We are living in a time where the loss of culture is an important concern. Debates about the benefits and demerits of globalisation often focus on the cocolonisation of hitherto diverse and mutually instructive cultures, and the loss that this entails for individuals, groups, and the world community. In the library world, other concerns such as brittle paper, the question of the preservation of electronic resources, and other preservation issues, show that many threats to library collections and so to culture and collective memory are chronic and unpremeditated. These must be and are being addressed on both a local and an international level, notably by UNESCO's Memory of the World project. Here I have attempted to investigate the instances in which damage to libraries has been a premeditated act in the pursuit of cultural domination, and have also attempted to express an important principle in the pursuit of freedom and peace, in which the prevention of bombing, looting and perversion of purpose of library collections forms just one element; that is, in the words of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,

the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights (United Nations 1966).

The brutal ideological conflicts of the twentieth century were the cause of much human suffering. While recognising that the eradication of the suffering of individual human beings must be our

primary concern, we must also recognise that this suffering is compounded by any loss of cultural heritage and collective memory. Not only do persecuted individuals suffer from the loss of their group and its culture, but also, as stated in the Hague Convention, the entire human community suffers from the depletion of the world's patrimony.

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### Note

1. *Convivencia* is a term used by András Riedlmayer in his essay 'Convivencia under Fire' and refers to the pluralism of Muslim Spain, which was reflected in that society's intellectual advances.

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