

Heritage Wars: The Erasure of History in Iraq and Syria

Helen Malko

Abstract

For the last few years the world has been facing a grim humanitarian crisis due to military conflict, insurgency, and terrorism. Millions of people lost their lives in the Middle East, and hundreds of thousands became displaced and are refugees throughout the Middle East, Europe, and the USA, posing a global problem. The reaction of the international community to this crisis varied, but it can generally be characterized by socioeconomic fear, rejection, and hostility toward the displaced. This crisis is also a cultural one; manifested, on the one hand, by fear of cultural change expressed by the hosting societies and, on the other hand, by the ongoing attacks on the culture and history of the refugees themselves. This paper focuses on the latter. Based on a collected dataset of destruction in both Arabic and English language resources, it aims to explore how the destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq and Syria is affecting the shared memory, history, and identity of the local communities that once lived together with and interacted with this heritage? What do present and future consequences of attacks on places of worship and historical monuments and landscape have on these communities?