

**THEME: THE THREATS TO THE SPIRIT OF PLACE**  
**“RETURNING TO PLACES OF WOUNDED MEMORY”**  
***The Role of World Heritage Sites in Reconciliation***

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**Abstract.** This paper explores the emerging role of cultural heritage in community reconciliation, particularly for identity-based conflicts. I utilize theories on the relationship between place, memory, identity and violence and interdisciplinary research focused on Ohrid, Macedonia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) and Ireland. In both countries, heritage and religion have unique roles in identity-based conflicts. I conclude with recommendations as to how UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) might encourage the creation of a new growing body of mediation, reconciliation and community transformation specialists who would become partners in the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage.

**1. Progression of ICOMOS – from conservation to community reconciliation?**

The first sentence of the Venice Charter (1964) contains the concept that historic monuments are “imbued with a message from the past” and are “living witnesses” to traditions. Andrzej Tomaszewski (Tomaszewski 2003) reminds us that in the history of the conservation movement, it was only a century ago that Alois Riegl wrote about the concept of a “memorial value”. Fifty years later, Erwin Panofsky is concerned about the *interpretation* of material works. In this manner, an architectural monument that is the backdrop of an event is a ‘silent witness’ to that happening, and gains a new dimension of ‘memorial values’, becoming a ‘*place of memory*’. Tomaszewski reminds us how a recent European theory of ‘German Places of Memory’ emphasizes their *symbolic function* rather than their material objectification.

Today, conservators are open to experimentation with different forms of memorialization to help interpret the spiritual and intangible aspects of monuments. This has particular significance and challenges when there has been an atrocity committed on a site or a site is associated with an ongoing conflict between two identities. Added to these complexities of interpretation is the issue of who owns or controls a controversial site. Shawn Landres and Oren Stier write, “control of sacred places is central to the articulation and revision of memory and through it the writing and rewriting of history. As such, both the physical excavation of place and the social excavation of memory are fraught with conflict....atrocities render places religiously charged, indigestible in their toxicity, while their commemoration creates of those sites sacred spaces,

variously digestible in and through their memorialization and contestation” (Stier and Landres 2006). Within these contexts, UNESCO is being called upon to provide more of its experience in reconciliation, mediation and healing in some of the world’s most troubled communities, often interpreting key monuments as a “shared responsibility for all humanity.” This role is consistent with Article 5 of the Venice Charter which calls for “making use of them (monuments) for some socially useful purpose”. UNESCO, by earning the unique role of ‘an honest broker’ in a recent evaluation by its Member States (UNESCO Director General’s Report 2007) can perhaps offer more resources to conflicted communities where shared heritage provides reconciliation and the healing of “wounded memory”.

## **2. Good or bad “Spirit of Place” - the challenges of multiple interpretations**

Slobodan Milosevic captured the “Spirit of Place” when he spoke in the Field of Black Birds, where, in 1389, Prince Lazar of Serbia was defeated by the Turks. Although the Serbs lost the fight, Milosevic used the field’s symbolism to promise Serbians they would not be defeated again. He claimed, “They’ll never do this to you again. Never again will anyone defeat you.” (Kaplan 2005). An Ulster Protestant will see the site of the Battle of the Boyne (won by King William of Orange in 1690) as a symbol of Protestant domination in Ireland. An Irish Catholic will see the same place where dreams and aspirations were shattered, marking the beginning of the anti-Catholic Penal Laws, and the source of annual sectarian commemorative and paramilitary-style marches. A distortion of history and an application of “community memory” feed sectarian hatred and fear to divide communities. The battle’s annual commemoration ensures these “wounded memories”, never quite heal. For Protestants, the commemoration is primarily shaped by the need for social, political and religious identity.

In 2002, UNESCO focused on the theme of *“Reconciliation and Development.”* The international community had just experienced the destruction of two 1,500-year-old Buddha statues by the Afghanistan Taliban. That year, Mounir Bouchenaki spoke passionately at the UN Headquarters, “Cultural heritage has often been a military target or the flashpoint of political ethnic and religious conflicts. But when peace returns, the rehabilitation and enhancement of these highly symbolic sites, as well as that of cultural spaces or forms of cultural expression belonging to the intangible heritage, can sometimes help to strengthen the process of national reconciliation and revive economic activity” (Bouchenaki 2002).

UNESCO and the World Bank began to demonstrate this commitment by paying \$15 million to rebuild the Mostar Bridge in Bosnia, a symbol of multiculturalism intentionally destroyed during the 1990s civil war. Croats and Bosnians worked together on its reconstruction. Israel was to provide an additional challenge to UNESCO by mixing cultural heritage with politics. The Director General, Koichiro Matsuura clarified some of the principles at work between cultural heritage and reconciliation, by saying “Our task equally consists in supporting those groups and individuals committed to Israeli-Palestinian

dialogue, so as to advance mutual understanding and respect as building blocks of peace” (Matsuura 2003). Globally, there are now 30 WHSs that continue on the Endangered List, including the historic city and walls of Jerusalem.

Endangered tangible heritage is only one major concern for UNESCO and ICOMOS. Intangible heritage (stories, rituals and community memories) is also threatened. Proactively, UNESCO’s commitment to protect intangible heritage could include the preservation of older forms of mediation and reconciliation that are present in older cultures, i.e. “Tree of Man” in Uganda or “Kanun” in Albania. They are associated with threatened cultural practices that modernism and democracy are replacing with other forms of justice and reconciliation.

### **3. Resources for shared heritage from academia –research on sectarianism**

Drs. Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg, in “*Moving Beyond Sectarianism,*” spent 6 years researching at the Irish School of Ecumenics and identifying complex core issues in the Irish identity-based conflict. They describe sectarianism as a hidden force within a society, where individuals are abrogated of full responsibility for attitudes and consequences that a larger institutional “contract” can absorb or be blamed for. Individually, people may not have a sectarian bone in their bodies, yet they maintain *systems* of sectarianism. There is within popular history, memory and myth, an efficient fuel that permeates millions of people who had no direct connection with particular past events, yet “live” in these events as they are interpreted by a small minority. The smallest event can cause thousands of intelligent and rational people to move into segregated areas almost overnight. Liechty and Clegg’s definition of sectarianism is “A system of attitudes, actions, beliefs and structures at personal, communal and institutional levels which always involves religion, and typically involves a negative mixing of religion and politics which arises as a distorted expression of positive, human needs, especially for belonging, identity and the free expression of difference” (Liechty and Clegg 2001). They suggest a process whereby sectarianism is *transformed* rather than eradicated.

#### **3.1. THE FUSION OF HISTORY, PLACE, MEMORY, IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE IN AN IRISH CONTEXT**

In 1990, the Irish government purchased 500 acres of parkland around Bru Na Boinne, a Neolithic UNESCO monument (O’Kelley 1995), that has the site of the Battle of the Boyne and an historic villa, Oldbridge House, within its five mile buffer zone. It was here on July 1, 1690, the battle was won by Protestant William of Orange, against his Catholic father in law, James II of England. The battle changed the course of religious and political history in Europe, and left a painful wound in Irish memory. (Haddick Flynn 1999). The battlefield was left relatively untouched and unexplored for 400 years. The recent careful development of the site parallels the reconciliation and peace processes between the people of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. The motivation for the site’s development is both cultural and political. The Irish

government, as a result of the Sunningdale and Anglo-Irish Agreements' commitments, is seeking to fulfill its obligation to protect the rights and heritage of the minority Protestant community.

### 3.2 THE FUSION OF HISTORY, PLACE, MEMORY, IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE IN A BALKAN/MACEDONIAN CONTEXT

Robert Kaplan describes a typical Balkan view of history, myth and culture as "History is not viewed as tracing a chronological progression, as it is in the West. Instead, history jumps around and moves in circles; and where history is perceived in such a way, myths take root. Evangelos Kofos, Greece's preeminent scholar on Macedonia, has observed that these historical legacies... sustained nations in their uphill drive towards state-building, national unification and, possibly, the reincarnation of long extinct empires" (Kaplan 2005).

Sectarianism, as defined above, is very much alive in the relations between Albanians and Macedonians living in Macedonia. They are peaceful but there are misunderstandings, fears and stereotypes in how they view each other. There is little contact (very little intermarriage) and trust is lacking. Kosovar Albanians in particular are viewed with distrust and suspicion about their negative influence in Macedonia, particularly their alleged involvement in organized crime. Schools in Macedonia are segregated with students sharing the same space in shifts (Macedonian children might attend a morning session and Albanian children would attend the same school in the afternoon). Albanians are mostly Muslims (25%) and Macedonians mostly Orthodox Christians, (64%). A constant threat is the fear of the creation of a "Greater Albania" and partitioning part of Macedonia to Bulgaria (a long standing political aspiration). Slav Macedonians feel their national identity and historic boundaries are being undermined. Heritage becomes an important weapon in this battle to maintain identity.

#### 3.2.1 *Sectarianism In Heritage - A Recent Example*

Ohrid (a city of 50,000 people with over 100 historic churches) is a UNESCO WHS and is believed to be the cradle of history for many cultures, including the Macedonian/Slavic tradition that now dominates the religious and cultural heritage of the city. The history of Ohrid mirrors the larger history of Macedonia. When the ruins of an Ottoman mosque (built over the empty shrine of St. Clement in Ohrid), were recently removed to be replaced by an Orthodox shrine, costing the Macedonian government several million euros, the interpretation of the site became a wedge of contention between the two communities.

Behicuddin Shehapi, an art historian and President of the largest Muslim NGO in Macedonia, El Hilal, served on a variety of government cultural heritage projects and is familiar with the work of UNESCO. His book, "*Uncured Wounds*" (Shehapi 2003) documents the destruction of 50 mosques in Macedonia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, (including the mentioned ruins in Ohrid) through war, deliberate destruction and decay. There are clearly at least two sides to the story. The

Christian Orthodox community would say the original church at Pantelejmon was destroyed by the Turks and a mosque built in its place.

Church authorities in Ohrid moved the holy relics to another church. They have merely returned an important part of the region's heritage to its original place by re-interring St. Clement's relics. The government agreed and paid for the building of the new shrine that is now the most visited tourist venue in the country. Mr. Shehapi mentions this particular site again in an open letter to UNESCO in July 2007.

What could have become an integrated shared heritage site and cultural center at Pantelejmon in Ohrid, became a missed opportunity for a deeply divided community. We might have seen a different utilization of a heritage site if the *Ename Charter* (ICOMOS document 2008) was available to the UNESCO and Ohrid advisors a decade ago,

However, the UNESCO city had some recent successes with the signing of the Ohrid Agreement in 2001 (protecting the rights of the minority community in Macedonia and commitment to democracy) and two international conferences on religious reconciliation. The symbolic nature of this site as a place of reconciliation gives authority and credibility to agreements and conferences that are based there.

#### **4. Emerging understanding of History, Place, Memory, Identity and Violence**

In exploring the relationship between intangible heritage and how the "Spirit of Place" is invoked or *re-membered*, religion plays a central role. Religion, from an anthropological point of view, could be described as a cultural system that is heavily reliant on the use of symbols, remembering and retelling of stories and the association of physical places with supernatural people or events. These symbols, stories, and places reinforce a sense of identity and belonging for the people of the Earth. Many of our WHSs are places of "Eruption" where it is believed, the sacred breaks through the profane. The *axis mundi*, the *omphalos* - the axis or the navel of the world, gives human beings an orientation, often marked by buildings with brilliant mathematical and astronomical properties. These unique places are highly sought after, fought over and remain some of the most valuable properties on the Earth. Mircea Eliade (Eliade 1961, 1970 and 1985) would describe "history being compressed" in these places and our genealogies and thus our identities are realized in space and time. Rodger Freidland and Richard Hecht say: "Memory can 'speak' in central places, holy places and sacred places" (Stier and Landres 2006). However, the international community's experience in Kosovo (OSCE Report 1999), Ireland and Macedonia has shown that history can be easily distorted, religion can fuel division, academia can become victim to revisionism, archaeology can be used to ensure one culture is devalued by another, and community memory cannot be fully trusted. Professional interdisciplinary collaboration may be the only way to keep everyone accountable and focused on the task of building a culture of shared heritage through healing and reconciliation.

#### 4.1. DRAWING FROM AN EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIANITY'S INTANGIBLE HERITAGE –FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Miroslav Volf, (A Christian theologian from Croatia) has written extensively on the subject of “remembering rightly”. The representatives of both sides of a story, victim and perpetrator, share in the process of gathering and challenging the fragments of memory, including the parts that have been sometimes conveniently forgotten, and creating a new shared future for each other in the process. In “remembering rightly”, Volf further develops this process to include the transformation of wounds through “exemplary memory” where the community’s pain is transformed by learning from past experiences at a particular site so it may be avoided in the future. “The past thus becomes a principle of action for the present” (Volf 2006).

#### 4.2. WHEN HERITAGE, RELIGION, POLITICS AND RECONCILIATION RHYME

On May 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, following the first meeting of the new Northern Ireland Assembly, (when Protestants and Catholics entered into a power-sharing government), there was a surprise visit to the Battle of the Boyne site by Rev. Ian Paisley and representatives of the Irish government. The site choice and the timing of the visit were historic, symbolic and particularly significant of the new “cross-border” relationship between Loyalist Protestants and Catholic Republicans. Dr. Paisley planted a tree, in what is to become a memorial garden in Oldbridge House and presented the Irish Prime Minister with a musket used at the battle.

Bru na Boinne and the Battle of the Boyne site could become a model center of education, cultural preservation, and reconciliation where issues of “wounded memory” are addressed in a meaningful way. Northern Ireland could not have achieved its peace process without the international community’s help. The growing body of expertise in Irish mediation and reconciliation is now responding to other identity-based conflicts in the Middle East, the Balkans, Sri Lanka and Africa. The Irish Government is creating a Conflict Resolution Unit (Department of Foreign Affairs 2008) to harness this expertise, apply to other international contexts where Irish military serves as international peacekeepers, and combined with Ireland’s ambitious Millennium Development Goals, is linking development issues with conflict reduction strategies. The Irish community is providing a model, where military, academic, heritage, civil society and government are all working together to be available to other conflicted communities. The development of an ICOMOS-like international network where Member States of UNESCO are encouraged to develop similar Conflict Resolution Units would allow the noble principles of the Ename Charter to flourish.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1. A NEW PRO-ACTIVE ROLE FOR HERITAGE WITHIN THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE PROGRAM

The role of “honest broker” in identity-based conflicts is one of the most important roles UNESCO could play in the contemporary world. To meet this new challenge effectively, it would need a cadre of resources and expertise that the organization does not currently have. Mats Friberg describes the parallels between the Lebanese, Sri Lankan, Northern Irish, Cypriot and Israeli Palestinian conflicts as “conflicts over deep rooted social identities.” He suggests the need for grass-roots decentralized and co-operative processes that would provide opportunities for safe spaces with a trusted “third party” facilitator (Kuzzmanic, and Truger,1992).

### 5.2. EACH MEMBER STATE IS INVITED TO PROVIDE RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE TO IMPLEMENT THE ENAME CHARTER.

As the Ename Charter is discussed by the international community before its ratification, each Member State is:

- a. invited to list WHSs endangered by identity-based conflicts and would benefit from community reconciliation.
- b. prioritize how local and regional “intangible heritage” (specifically around conflict resolution and mediation), could be developed as a resource.
- c. Invited to support university-based research and community education models that encourage respect for different heritage, storytelling methods to heal past events, and community participation in shared memorial projects.
- d. familiar with models of good practice where WHS and other museum programs are proactively involved in peace-making (i.e. the Caen Memorial in Normandy).
- e. encouraged to develop their own databases on reconciliation and mediation resources available to their own community and other Member States. Integration of academic, military peacekeeping, development of civil society and interfaith dialogue is encouraged with strategies to meet their Millennium Development Goals and other Member State development initiatives.
- f. encouraged to review the use of historic and national sites for potentially divisive public expressions of memorialization, national identity or community solidarity at the cost of another (usually minority) community. Applying the principles of the Ename Charter, these events should be inclusive and be able to share creatively in the telling of multiple stories for interpretation and expression. Ecumenical and inter-faith conferences (like the recent Ohrid conference on world religions held in October 2007) should be featured at targeted WHSs on regular basis.

### 5.3. ESTABLISH A NEW INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF RECONCILERS AND MEDIATORS BASED ON THE ICOMOS MODEL BY UNESCO

Member States who have invested significant resources in peace and reconciliation work, including the protection of indigenous intangible heritage are invited to form an international coalition to assist UNESCO with more challenging regions where identity-based conflict is prevalent. This emerging model could use the logistical experience of ICOMOS – how it was shaped by its dynamic mission and the development of policies and structures. This new entity might become a crucible of innovation for reconciliation through heritage. ICOMOS, as the parent organization of this new entity, could provide technical assistance, conference themes and cross-disciplinary publications of interest to these new partnerships. Most importantly, the Ename Charter would have the resources needed to build upon ICOMOS's 43 years of successfully negotiated shared heritage to understand and shape the issues that still lie ahead.

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