

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

English Faculty Publications

Department of English

2-9-2018

Iconic Loss: Global Civil Society and the Destruction of Cultural Property

Michael Galchinsky

Georgia State University, mgalchinsky@gsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_facpub



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Galchinsky, Michael. (2018). Iconic Loss: Global Civil Society and the Destruction of Cultural Property. Working Paper, Yale University Center for Cultural Sociology Workshop, February 9, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.57709/X13P-XZ86>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

Michael Galchinsky

Faculty Fellow, Yale University Center for Cultural Sociology, workshop paper, February 9, 2018

“Iconic Loss: Global Civil Society and the Destruction of Cultural Property”

1. A Terrible Time to be a Monument

The month of August, 2017 was a terrible time to be an American monument. First, President Trump’s senior advisor, Stephen Miller, tried to delink the Statue of Liberty from her principal historical associations. Since 1903, Liberty’s pedestal has displayed a plaque engraved with the poem “The New Colossus,” by the late 19th c. American Jewish poet Emma Lazarus. Writing during a period of mass European immigration to the United States, Lazarus referred to Lady Liberty as “the Mother of Exiles,” proclaiming that “her beacon-hand/Glows world-wide welcome.” In the poem, Liberty famously cries out to all the nations:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

When Lazarus wrote about Liberty, the statue had not yet oxidized: she was still as shiny as a newly minted penny. Lazarus’s Liberty represents a young, energetic country, a country of people on the move. The America of “The New Colossus” is a nation of migrants, not a nation of blood and soil.

That was a century ago. Today, American Liberty is no longer fresh and new. She has long since oxidized, and is available for reinterpretation. Miller's goal was to reframe her so that she would no longer symbolize a historically open immigration policy, which cuts against the grain of President Trump's America First orientation. Rather, the President seeks to erect barriers to mobility, through such initiatives as the travel ban, the border wall, the DACA program repeal, the deportation force, and extreme vetting procedures (Tarbell, 2017). Per Miller, President Trump set out not only to change America's immigration policy, but to raze the national myths on which the policy was based.

A few days after Miller attempted to reinterpret Liberty for the Trump era, violence broke out between white supremacists and counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, when the supremacists gathered to protest the impending removal of another monument. This time the inciting icon was the statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee. The violence ended with the death of one counter-protester and two state troopers. For his part, the President asserted that there were fine people "on both sides" and lamented the removal of the "beautiful" Confederate statues that came down in the wake of the violence (Greenwood, 2017). Here, the policy advocated by the Charlottesville protesters was not America First—more like *White* America First—but maybe that was a distinction without a difference.

These events offered more proof of Jeffrey Alexander's claim that the encounter with an icon produces an immersive experience (Alexander, 2008). Icons have the power to move people—to move them to march, to counter-march, even to mow people down with their cars. The controversies and different constituencies swirling around the Statue of Liberty and the Robert E. Lee monument remind us, however, that "iconic power" (Alexander, Bartmański, and

Giesen, 2012) does not trigger the same experience in every beholder. Iconic images are intrinsically—as the very condition of their iconicity—contentious, polyvalent symbols.

If the capacity to convey dense and often contradictory meanings belongs to every icon, it belongs all the more to those objects I will call *persistent secular icons*. Objects in this class have survived many human epochs, have transcended the particular meaning attached to them at their origins, and have acquired the status of “world cultural heritage,” as recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Unlike the Statue of Liberty and the monument to Robert E. Lee—icons whose meanings are primarily of interest to national debates in the United States—the icons considered here are imbued with symbolic meanings, which can be recruited for transnational and global debates. If, long after their first appearance, such icons are destroyed as a result of armed conflict, their loss triggers powerful collective emotions. These strong sociopolitical feelings can be channeled for civil or anti-civil purposes. In the wake of the loss of a persistent secular icon, cosmopolitan viewers express impulses of global civil solidarity through ritualized performances of outrage and grief, which testify to their abhorrence of the act of desecration. These feelings may be present even when the cosmopolitan viewer was unfamiliar with the object before its destruction. Anti-civil impulses take the form of iconoclasm, a certain ostentatious and jingoistic pride at the removal of a false idol for its arrogant claim to moral and ideological transcendence. Instead of cosmopolitanism, iconoclasts often embrace narrower forms of political identity, based on their local, tribal, racial, religious or national affiliations. The social responses to iconic loss are characteristically binary, the icon serving as a catalyst for debate between those who view it through an inclusive lens and those who view it through an exclusive one.

The pillage and destruction of cultural property is as old as war. We can look far back to the biblical account of Samson, who in his final act as the Israelites' famed long-haired warrior, destroyed the Philistines' Temple to Dagon, at once crushing the enemy elites and reducing their most potent cultural symbols to rubble (Judges 16.23-30, see Jewish Publication Society 1985). But if we jump ahead to the modern era, perhaps we can begin with a story that was false, but widely believed, and frequently retold. The story went that, during Napoleon's campaign in Egypt between 1798 and 1801, his soldiers used the Sphinx for target practice, which is how the ancient monument lost its nose (Lacovara 2004, p. 66). Not true, but nonetheless the story circulated for decades, becoming part of anti-colonialist lore. At about the same time (1801), the Brits' Lord Elgin *did* spirit the ancient Parthenon friezes out of Greece and into the British Museum, on the theory that the Ottoman Muslims ruling Greece at the time couldn't or wouldn't take proper care of the West's cultural patrimony (for a recent retelling of the history, see Hitchens 2016). For British imperialists, taking custody of the "Elgin Marbles" symbolized Britain's benevolent dominion and careful stewardship. For Greek nationalists mobilizing an independence movement, on the other hand, the Marbles were symbols of Greece's proud national inheritance. For those with Ottoman sympathies, the Marbles stood for the Christian West's colonial greed. Two centuries have passed, and the Parthenon friezes remain in the British Museum. Greece and Britain have periodically rattled sabers over their ownership during the entire period.

The destruction of cultural property occurs not just as a result of war, but has accompanied almost every case of genocide or mass atrocities. Whether during the Holocaust, Stalin's forced starvation campaign, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, or Darfur, the grievous harm to bodies was frequently preceded by the destruction of the targeted group's cultural icons. Some

scholars consider the widespread and systematic destruction of a group's culture to be an early warning sign of impending genocide (Morsink 1999). Acts of cultural destruction leave indelible marks on the targeted group, which may be felt and expressed years, decades, even centuries later.

The destruction of cultural property during armed conflict has continued unabated up through the present. In 2001, the Taliban's leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, ordered the bombing of two 1500 year-old, monumental statues of the Buddha that had been carved into the side of a cliff in Bamiyan, Afghanistan (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. One of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, before and after its destruction by the Taliban.

The Buddhas, Mullah Omar believed, were offensive to Allah. Isis has engaged in similar destruction. In 2015, ISIS militias looted and then destroyed large parts of the Syrian ruins of Palmyra, an ancient Amorite and Arab city, which had been a major stop on the Silk Road during the Roman Empire. Among other things, in August, 2015, ISIS destroyed the Temple of Balshammin (Fig. 2), and in January, 2017 partially destroyed an ancient Roman amphitheater, which had been well preserved and was still in use by modern Syrians.

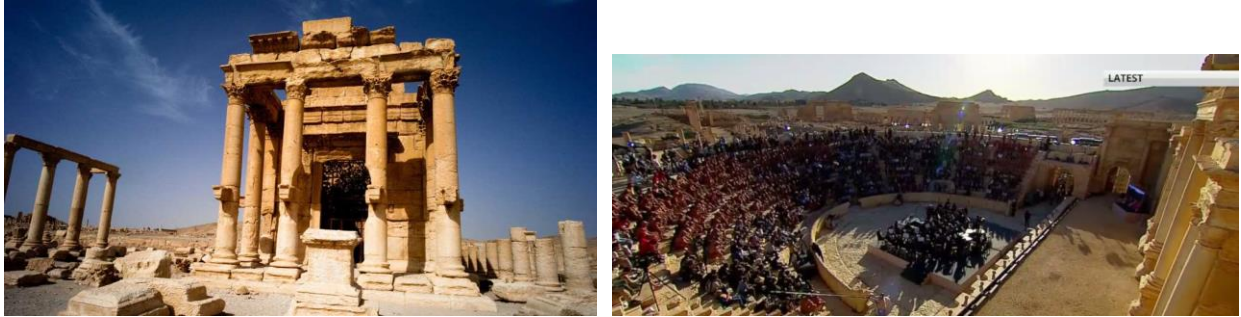


Fig. 2. The Temple of Balshamin, an antiquity in Palmyra, Syria, which was destroyed by ISIS on Aug. 23, 2015; and the ancient Roman amphitheater (during a concert by the Russian Symphony Orchestra), which ISIS partially destroyed in January, 2017.

The motives for the destruction seem to have been, in part, the desire to sell pieces of the looted antiquities on the black market to finance the terrorist group's activities, in part the urge to shock Syrians into submission through a campaign of terror against their national symbols, and in part the ideological program of wiping out the area's non-Muslim history.

Demagogues and terrorists are not the only political figures who destroy cultural property. Such destruction is a common result of armed conflict, including conflicts in which liberal Western countries take part. In 2003, United States military permitted the looting and destruction of hundreds of thousands of cultural antiquities from the cradle of human civilization during the war in Iraq (Rothfield, 2009). The looting took place in archeological digs like Ur and Nineveh, which are the sites of the biblical stories of Abraham and Jonah, respectively, and it took place, most infamously, when the US military under Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld refused to secure the Iraqi National Museum during the fighting (Fig. 3)

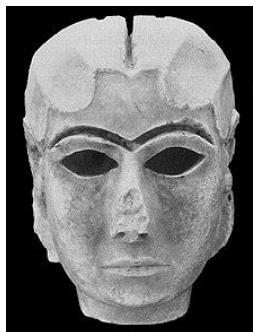


Fig. 3. The Mask of Warka (aka the Lady of Uruk), circa 3100 BCE, is one of the earliest representations of the human face. It was stolen from the Iraqi National Museum in 2003 during Operation Desert Storm and was later recovered undamaged. The same could not be said of hundreds of thousands of other Iraqi antiquities.

As a result of illegal trafficking, much of the archeological record of ancient Mesopotamia and Babylonia was sold to private collectors and lost to the public, presumably for good.

This brief historical survey suggests that it has more or less always been a terrible time to be a monument. But the history also raises several questions. When cultural property undergoes natural decay or is destroyed by deliberate human means, how does the icon's loss transform its meaning? To what purposes is the loss of a persistent secular icon put by its beholders? And what difference does the cause of the icon's loss make to these responses?

I'll begin to answer these questions by reviewing some features of iconicity commonly asserted in the cultural sociology literature, focusing, in particular, on the binary responses typical of the icon's interpretations. I'll then argue that, as compared to icons in general, persistent secular icons accrue additional layers of meaning by virtue of their longevity. These meaning-layers embody the paradoxes of material persistence: the icon comes to appear

simultaneously as temporary and eternal, contingent and transcendent. Social responses to iconic loss are conditioned by these paradoxes.

Having applied general concepts from the cultural sociology of icons to the particular case of persistent secular icons, I'll then change course and describe such icons using a different terminology, drawn from international law. I'll survey the historical development of the legal norm of *cultural property protection in the event of armed conflict*. The protection regimes codified in international law aim to ensure that, during armed conflict, cultural property (aka a persistent secular icon) is safeguarded and respected. In terms of outcomes, these protection regimes have repeatedly failed. But the codification of the norm of cultural property protection has nonetheless succeeded in a different, unanticipated sense. The norm has taken hold among a set of global actors, including intergovernmental bodies, specialized agencies, and international NGOs. The rise of a sector dedicated to cultural property protection marks an important development in the history of global civil society, demonstrating that cosmopolitans not only have recourse to a set of articulated values, but also to a set of tangible symbols that store and project those values. However, when a persistent secular icon is destroyed, a struggle ensues over how to frame what it meant. The clash of responses mirrors the larger ongoing struggle between cosmopolitans and various narrower affinity groups (e.g., nationalists, tribalists, religious groups), each collective attempting to put the icon's dense and familiar symbolic field in service to its own aims.

2. Paradoxes of Material Persistence

The cultural sociology of "iconic power" affirms that any icon owes its success to the familiarity and density of its symbolic field, within the terms of reference of a given interpretive

community. Giesen writes that icons “are embedded in the familiar symbolic universe of a social community” (Giesen, 207). Their familiarity enables icons to be what Phillip Smith calls “representative symbol[s]” (Smith, 177) that can “compress and express whole fields of myth and meaning....” (Smith, 172). Iconic symbols are not only dense with meaning but they trigger the type of emotions that require collective ritual expression. I have elsewhere called such strong public feelings “sociopolitical emotions” (Galchinsky 2016) to distinguish them from private feeling. As Werner Binder suggests, iconic symbols “store collectively shared emotions and provide a focus for subsequent rituals” (Binder, 104). The icon’s sensuous surfaces, its rootedness in place, and its “stark visibility...make its cultural image worthy of persistent commemoration, ritualization, discussion, and even commodification....” (Bartmański, 43). To paraphrase, although the icon is a tangible, material object, its meanings are still largely imaginary, in the sense that various interpretations and emotions are projected onto the object by different, historically situated viewers. These imaginary meanings do not dwell only in individual minds, but are widely shared, circulated among the community, and transmitted to future viewers, so that eventually they constitute a penumbra of narratives, values, and feelings hovering around the object—or, as Binder says, “stored” in it.

The true icon not only encodes communally familiar meanings, but does so in such a way that the community has an immersive experience with it: in Sonnevend’s phrase, community members “fuse” with the image (Sonnevend, 223). Because iconicity is a shared experience, the icon’s reception is thoroughly social and context-dependent, shaped and constrained by proximate institutions, actors, discourses, and events (Sonnevend, 224). The iconic experience depends on “social performances that usually require a series of *emplaced* practices that are always enacted under changing circumstances....” (Bartmański, 45).

Alexander sums up the situation when he writes that “Iconicity has a temporal arc” (Alexander, 34). The beholder’s immersive experience takes place in, and is conditioned by, the historical moment of the encounter. The icon lives in history: its meaning is subject to stages of gestation (i.e., its potent symbolism at the moment of creation), parturition (i.e., its changing meaning once free of the original context), and biography (the externally shifting patterns of its remembrance and celebration) (Bartmański, 61).

An icon changes meanings when something external acts on it in so as to reframe its significance. Take, for example, the statues of Stalin constructed during the Soviet period in the socialist realist mode. The statues magnified Stalin as a hero of the revolution. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the triumphant Stalins were collected and moved to a park that came to be called the Park of Fallen Idols (Galchinsky 2016). The monuments were reframed in the early 2000s by the sculptor Evgeny Chubarov. Chubarov surrounded them with smaller, more intimate statues of Stalin’s victims, including starving figures representing the victims of Soviet famines, and an iron and concrete cage that contained over 300 individualized ceramic heads representing prisoners sent to the gulags (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Stalin (left, in background), reframed by Evgeny Chubarov’s sculptures.

Chubarov’s deliberate act of reframing offered Russians a layered reading of their own history. Another more recent example of deliberate reframing is Kristen Visbal’s sculpture, *Fearless Girl* (2017). Overnight, *Girl* became a sensation when she was placed in such a way that she stared down Wall Street’s most famous icon, the *Charging Bull* (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. *Fearless Girl* faces down Wall Street’s *Charging Bull*.

While *Charging Bull* had been intended by its creator, Arturo di Modica, to represent capitalism’s ideal of the bull market, the placement of *Fearless Girl* in the bull’s path immediately reframed it, much to di Modica’s chagrin (Dwyer 2017). In juxtaposition to *Girl*, *Bull* appeared to be a figure of threatening hyper-masculinity—a reframing made to order for the #MeToo era.

The cultural sociology literature has sometimes offered mystical-sounding explanations of how an icon’s meaning transforms. Kurasawa claims, for instance, that icons are “actants” with “significant agentic capacities” (78) of their own. Boehm describes the icon in anthropomorphic terms: “something we look at, also looks back at us” (Boehm, 16). “The depiction...lends the enduring status of liveliness to the depicted, who long ago departed or crumbled into dust” (Boehm, 17). Yet, at least in the case of persistent secular icons, I think

transformation comes about less because of mystery and more because of history. For persistent secular icons, the temporal arc has been longer and more varied than usual. A succession of interpretive communities associates the persistent secular icon with a variety of meanings, values, and experiences over time. Each era assigns new values to the object, unanticipated by the icon's creators and informed by the later interpreters' own peculiar contexts. A line of caretakers and pilgrims transmits these associations, along with the object itself, to new generations of viewers.

The totality of historical associations hovers around the icon and constitutes its *aura*. The aura combines with the object's tangible and visible material properties—its suggestively convex, concave, or negative spaces, its textures, colors, and lines, its orderly patterns and chaotic regions, its engravings and reliefs, its embedded signs, symbols, and codes—to condition any particular viewer's response.

This analysis suggests that, however dense the icon is with familiar symbolism, it can neither transmit its own aura nor dictate its reception. Nor is the aura's transmission the passive result of the icon's mere persistence. The work of transmission has to be undertaken by intermediaries, who might be governments, intergovernmental institutions, or civil society actors. The latter might include activists, museum curators, librarians and archivists, journalists, participants in social media, and artists (Kurasaw, 77). The intermediaries' frame narratives can be studied independently from their associated objects, so as to comprehend how social actors attempt to align the icon with their own structures of feeling and agendas. Far from being their own agents, persistent secular icons succeed only to the extent that they attract an evolving group of living pilgrims and caretakers. The caretakers consist of those assigned the responsibility for

maintaining the icon and its site, while the pilgrims are those individuals who journey to the site of the icon to witness and venerate it.

To summarize, the icon's social reception—i.e., its meaning—is the interactive product of four distinct sets of meaning-makers. The first group of meaning-makers consists of the object's creator(s), along with those who subsequently altered the object's material form. The initial creator(s) embedded potent cultural codes into the object's suggestive material embodiments. Alterations to the object's material form may have been introduced later by other hands, or else the object's surface was deformed through natural entropic processes that themselves became spurs to viewers' imagination and part of the object's meaning. The second set of meaning-makers is the group of historical interpreters, whose frames were preserved and transmitted with the object. Their frames might be in conflict with the interpretations intended by the first group, or with those offered by the third group, the icon's current caretakers and pilgrims. Finally, there is the ordinary viewer, someone who came not as a pilgrim but as a tourist, who is anything but a passive receptor of the frames offered by the other groups; rather, she brings her own abundant set of preconceptions to the iconic encounter.

The persistent secular icon's aura has the structure of a palimpsest. The more recent meanings the object has accrued cover over—but do not entirely efface—its earlier meanings. Take the case of the Buddhas of Bamiyan. The monuments originated in late Roman times as important pilgrimage sites for Buddhist travelers on the Silk Road, were later woven into the folklore of the local Hazara Shiite Muslim minority (interpreted by locals to be, variously, the lovers SalSal and Shahmama, or Adam and Eve, or Allah's daughters, Lat and Munat), were covered by the graffiti of French vandals, were riddled by the bullets of British and Russian soldiers, before finally being blasted to dust by Taliban dynamite (Haldar 2012). Those earlier

encounters persist; their traces show through the patina of later additions, perhaps dormant yet still available for subsequent viewers to revive. Perhaps the earlier meanings become amalgamated with later ones, perhaps they become syncretized, or synthesized, or perhaps, one day, the older meanings rise to the surface and predominate again. The icon's aura may outlast its material form. (Thus, the aura of "Woodstock" has long outlasted the original musical event—see Smith 2012). Fundamentally, the icon lives in the mind, where the iconoclast cannot be assured of dominion. The "mind's image" (Halder 2012, 67) may continue to be transmitted through folklore, literature, film, art, photographs, reenactments, restorations, or other forms of imaginative revival long after the icon itself is physically destroyed.

The multiple meanings associated with the icon are not only various, but frequently binary. As Wendy Bowler suggests, the nature of the immersive experience with the icon is "to see from two positions simultaneously" (Bowler, 88; also see Giesen, 208). In a sense, for persistent secular icons, the binarism is built in. On the one hand, to the extent that every generation interprets the significance of persistent icons differently, according to the needs and categories of its moment, these objects offer tangible, empirical means by which to measure the *discontinuity* in human experience. On the other hand, to the extent that the objects survive from era to era more or less intact, they become symbols of human *continuity*. The icons' very survival in the midst of historical change offers mute testimony that some symbols, narratives, and values endure, that there are images every generation returns to and wrestles with anew. In this way, the icons in question exist in a perpetual dialectic between contemporaneity and timelessness, the real and the imaginary, the present and the absent, the disjointed and the smooth. These are the paradoxes of material persistence.

Because of its binary reception, the icon becomes the destination for different sorts of pilgrimages, often contradictory to one another in intent and meaning. Some pilgrims come to hallow the collective memories and myths they associate with the object. Others, the anti-pilgrims, the iconoclasts, are offended by a false idol's undeserved sacred aura. They come to desecrate the idol and tear it down. In Philip Smith's terms, because the icon is "a cultural node, or some high ground that needs to be fought over and reclaimed" it is "variously interpretable as sacred or profane" (Smith, 177). Alexander, too, claims that iconic discourse revolves around the profane/sacred binary (2012, 31). The icon's binarism (what Giesen terms its "social ambivalence," 208) is an intrinsic part of its staying power, because as an inherently dynamic object it can appeal to different social constituencies. Even political opponents may both attempt to recruit the icon as their side's symbolic standard-bearer.

The icons studied here may be secular, but they nonetheless inspire an experience of sacredness, albeit one unaffiliated with any church. The secular icon is one that transcends any location or group of people. Even if a persistent icon's creators originally endowed it with local, religious, or national significance, in the course of time, such original meanings come to be seen by cosmopolitan pilgrims as secondary. Regardless of what the icon meant to its founders, the persistent icon may be gradually absorbed into the cosmopolitan narrative of *world cultural heritage*. Whatever the collective values its symbols held for its initial beholders, for the caretakers of global civil culture, the object's persistence *becomes* its iconic value. The icon comes to be seen as a survivor from the storms of history, a remainder (and reminder) bearing witness to an essential part of the larger, *human* story. The guardians of global civil culture promote the icon as a universal heritage, rooted, certainly, in one spot of land, but in its inestimable value as the property of everyone everywhere. That is, the persistent icon gains an

aura of universal sacredness because it appears to certain viewers to transcend and bind all humanity.

The persistent icon's secular sacredness is similar to the form of sacredness cosmopolitans ascribe to human rights, as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and associated treaties. International legal scholar Irwin Cotler has argued that human rights are the modern secular religion (Cotler, 1998), starting with the faith statement that all human beings are created equal. And indeed, one can trace the concept of "civil religion" back to its beginnings in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract, at the dawn of the concept of the Rights of Man, through Durkheim's functionalist sociology in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, right through to Robert N. Bellah's 1967 analysis of "Civil Religion in America" (Rousseau, 1762; Durkheim, 1912; Bellah, 1967). If certain ethical principles inhere in the concept of humanity, then these principles can be culturally transmitted by means of widely recognized symbols. Persistent secular icons may be the cosmopolitan civil religion's most potent symbols. By spiritually fusing with the values encoded in the icon, the community of cosmopolitan pilgrims experiences a common core of intuitions and feelings, which (so they hope) will one day come to be universally shared.

Binder articulates a similar idea when he remarks that secular icons function "as symbols in a shared system of beliefs and convictions" (Binder 104), and he goes on to remark that "In our multilingual world, secular icons [provide] common points of reference for a global civil discourse" (Binder, 113). In the case of persistent secular icons, international human rights law serves as the ground for a secular, yet hallowed, order of values, a form of supranational sacredness—following Binder, a global discourse of universal civility. These values are championed by actors in global civil society—by UN bodies and specialized agencies, NGOs,

protesters, journalists, participants in social media, scholars, and artists. UNESCO explains on its home page that its goal with respect to world cultural heritage is to establish “a holistic cultural governance system based on human rights and shared values” (UNESCO, 2017). By supporting the preservation of world cultural heritage as common points of reference, certain actors constitute themselves as members of global civil society.

The persistent secular icon stands as a revelation of a double miracle—that humans can create objects that outlast themselves, and that these objects can become imbued with their dead creators’ living presence. The persistent secular icon testifies to our species’ dignity, tenacity, and endurance. The longer the icon survives generational strife and natural decay, the more successive interpretive communities insist that the object has become tinged with permanence. It seems to have conquered history. The icon’s creators materialized their essence in an enduring form, and the viewers project on that form their own hopes for an enduring legacy. The symbolic work these icons perform is to divorce certain types of human experience from ordinary processes of change and decay. Instead, through the icon’s survival, the beholder experiences the possibility that what human hands have touched can persist—may even, perhaps, persist so long that, for all intents and purposes, it *becomes eternal*. And if so much can be said of the work of human hands, why not of the humans who created it?

Thus, the persistent secular icon gives those who encounter it brief yet meaningful access, from their own vantage point in history, to the feeling of *temporal transcendence*. Such feelings are usually beyond us, for our existence is profaned by our inescapable association with time. Pilgrims come to worship at the foot of ancient monuments both to wonder at the icons’ beauty and because they see in such objects their own longing to persist beyond the unpassable limit of death.

Still, the persistent icon's imperviousness to change will always prove to be illusory. Like all matter, the icon must eventually decay or be destroyed. Yet the persistent icon's distinction from other material symbols is that, if not swallowed up by an earthquake or destroyed by war, it decays *slowly*, at a time-scale which, if not quite geologic, still outpaces individual human memory. The persistent icon staves off entropy, sometimes for centuries or even millenia. If in the end, it must succumb, its loss only makes its prior survival appear the more remarkable, and draws attention to the preservation efforts of pilgrims and caretakers.

At the moment of the icon's loss, or when it is threatened, the struggle to name its value reaches its highest pitch. This is especially the case for icons destroyed by deliberate human means. As the poet Donall Dempsey puts it in "The Buddhas of Bamiyan,"

Now the kohl-eyed Taliban reduce the giant guardians to nothing
giving the world's press a front seat as eternity is destroyed.

The statues com[e] alive in their very death

burning into men's minds, living forever in their destruction. (qtd in Haldar 2012, 69).

In the immediate wake of the icon's disappearance, its various interpretive communities feel they must settle what the icon meant, so that they can make its aura live forever in its destruction. The values and narratives that were associated with the object during its long persistence—at least those that have not been lost to history—now resurface, simultaneously, and become embroiled in a public contest among groups claiming the icon for competing social visions. Civil pilgrims show every sign of outrage and grief, whereas those who destroyed or who supported destroying the icon express giant-killing pride and ostentatious indifference. We will examine some cases of such competing visions below, but first we need to switch frames to get

acquainted with the distinctly modern array of organizations that have emerged to protect persistent secular icons from decay and destruction.

3. Raising the Blue Shield

I have so far linked the persistent secular icon's aura of temporal transcendence with the ethos of human rights. To be more precise, however, the normative framework that was developed during the 20th century to protect such icons is not international human rights law, but its cousin, international humanitarian law, aka the law of war.

The treaties that address the icons' protection refer to them as *cultural property*. A brief history of the development of the normative framework for protecting cultural property, will set the stage for our investigation of the social responses to iconic loss. For purposes of this analysis, the norm of cultural property protection should be distinguished from the protective regimes that grew out of it. On the one hand, the regimes that require states to take actions such as registering cultural property, marking it as such, notifying authorities and opponents, and so forth have so far generally failed their purpose. On the other hand, the normative framework for understanding such objects as part of the universal heritage of humanity has spurred the development of a cultural property protection sector within the nascent global civil society. This is an important development: as more NGOs and individuals respond to the call to protect a set of commonly shared symbols, they strengthen the density of global civil culture and deepen the bond that exists among cosmopolitans (Galchinsky, *Modes*).

International law began to codify efforts to protect cultural property in the wake of the 1905 Russo-Japanese War. President Theodore Roosevelt and Czar Nicholas II convened a group of 44 states to discuss treaties limiting armaments and their uses in war (for a historical

treatment going back to the Roman Empire, see Gerstenblith, 2005-2006). The conference distinguished for the first time between military property (which was a legitimate military target) and civilian property (which was not a legitimate military target). The states parties recognized a special need to protect cultural property as a subset of civilian property. In 1907 Hague Convention IV (Laws and Customs of War on Land), they declared that, “In sieges and bombardments all necessary steps must be taken to spare, as far as possible, buildings dedicated to...art,...or...historic monuments..., provided they are not being used at the time for military purposes” (Art. 27). Furthermore, the treaty stated that, “The property of...institutions dedicated to...the arts..., even when State property, shall be treated as private property. All seizure of, destruction or wilful damage done to institutions of this character, historic monuments, works of art and science, is forbidden, and should be made the subject of legal proceedings” (Art. 56). Similarly, 1907 Hague Convention IX (Naval Bombardment) prohibited the bombing of buildings used for artistic purposes and historic monuments “as far as possible” (Art. 5), unless these sites were in use for military purposes—at which point their special status as protected civil facilities would be lost. Similar language was used in later Hague law, such as 1923 Hague Draft Rules (Air Warfare), which repeated the language from the treaty on naval bombardment, but added that “Such buildings, objects and places must...be indicated by marks visible to aircraft,” both by day and by night (Art. 25). The rules on air warfare also established the first inspection regime. Monuments would have a protected perimeter of 500 meters, provided that the belligerent army “accept a special regime for their inspection” (Art. 26). Any misuse of the markings and protection zones would be classified as perfidy, and the cultural property would lose its protected status.

These early treaties had little effect on the ground. In the prelude to WWII and throughout the Holocaust, the Nazi destruction of cultural property continued unabated. Approximately 17,000 works of art created or owned by Jews were looted, either for display in the Nazis' 1937 Degenerate Art Exhibition or in the Hitler Museum projected to be built in Linz, Austria. Property belonging to synagogues, Jewish libraries, and schools was systematically destroyed. On Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938, 1400 synagogues were set on fire in Nazi Germany and their Torah scrolls systematically burned (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. A page from a Torah scroll burnt on Kristallnacht, from a municipal archive in Dortmund, Germany.

Alon Confino described the attacks on the Torah scrolls in some detail (Confino, 2014):

In the small town of Fritzlar in Hessen, Torah scrolls were rolled along Nikolaus Street as Hitler Youth rode their bicycles over them. In Vienna, by that time part of the Reich, Jews dressed in the robe and decorations of the Ark were marched and chased in downtown streets with torn Torah scrolls tied to their backs; in Frankfurt, Jews were forced to tear the Torah themselves and then burn it. In Berlin, Germans carried the scrolls from the Fasanen Street synagogue to Wittenberg Square, and burned them there. As Torah scrolls burned in a synagogue's yard in Düsseldorf, German men, some wearing the robes of the rabbis and cantors, danced around the fire.

After the war, the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, recognizing that further protection for cultural property was needed, wrote such protection into its 1945 Charter.

Accordingly, for the first time, international law classified destruction of cultural property as a war crime, that is a “violation of the laws or customs of war” (Art. 6b), for which military and civilian officials could be individually punished. It said: “The Tribunal ...shall have the power to try and punish persons who, acting in the interests of the European Axis countries, whether as individuals or as members of organizations, committed any of the following crimes...for which there shall be individual responsibility: **“WAR CRIMES...shall include...plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity...”** (Art. 6b).

This was strong, if somewhat vague, accountability language, given that it failed to name cultural property as a specific sub-category of civilian property. During the late 1940s, the newly formed United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights proposed more precise forms of accountability during the drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948). The members of the Committee, led at that time by Eastern bloc and Arab states, wanted to define the intentional and widespread destruction of a racial, ethnic, or national group’s culture as cultural genocide (Morsink, 1999). The proposal was opposed, however, by the Western states, who, with their jurisprudential tradition of liberal individualism, were wary of any group rights (including minority rights), and so the proposal was dropped.

Nevertheless, the drafters of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which codified the lessons learned from Nuremberg and became the core of international humanitarian law, did pick up on the normative language from Hague law and the Nuremberg Charter with respect to civilian

property. Geneva Convention IV Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War declared that “Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons, or to the State, or to other public authorities, or to social or co-operative organizations, is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations” (Art. 53). Furthermore, any “extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly” (Art. 147) would be considered a “grave breach” of the Convention, that is, a war crime, for which leaders could be individually punished.

The drafters of the Fourth Geneva Convention did not go so far as to protect cultural property by name. But when the international community convened again in 1954 in the Hague, the delegates prepared a more specific instrument, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. This treaty became the centerpiece of the international legal effort to protect persistent secular icons. To date, 128 countries have become parties to the Convention. The Convention’s Preamble for the first time invoked a global civil discourse to justify cultural property protection, declaring that “damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world.” Furthermore, the Preamble insists that “the preservation of the cultural heritage is of great importance for all peoples of the world and...it is important that this heritage should receive international protection.” Thus, for the first time, the norms of international law claim that “all peoples of the world” have a stake in protection of a type of property called “cultural heritage of all mankind.” The body of the Convention then goes on to require national and international measures to be organized in time of peace to protect such icons from loss in time of war.

The operable part of the 1954 Convention then begins by defining cultural property as “movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people” (Art. 1), including monuments, archeological sites, historic buildings, artworks, books, and manuscripts, as well as any buildings whose main and effective purpose is to preserve or exhibit such cultural property, such as museums, libraries, archives, property refuges and shelters, and centers containing monuments. When a state adopts the treaty, it commits to maintaining two legal requirements: it must *safeguard* its own cultural property, and it must *respect* its own and its enemy’s cultural property (Art. 2). Safeguarding means that, during peace, states must take active measures against “the foreseeable effects of an armed conflict” (Art. 3), meaning they must strive proactively to prevent iconic loss. Respect means that, during armed conflict, states must refrain from any use of the property which might expose it to destruction, and must refrain from any act of hostility directed against the enemy’s cultural property except “where military necessity imperatively requires” a waiver of the property’s protection. Furthermore, states must “prohibit, prevent, and...put a stop to any form of theft, pillage or misappropriation of, and any acts of vandalism directed against, cultural property,” and if the other party to the conflict destroys cultural property, the first party must refrain from doing so in reprisal (Art. 4).

The Convention establishes a protection regime. Any piece of cultural property must be marked with a distinctive emblem, a Blue Shield (described in Art. 16; see Fig. 7). The Blue Shield will henceforth be to civilian cultural property what the Red Cross is to civilian persons—a sign of special protection from hostilities during armed conflict.



Fig. 7. The international emblem of the Blue Shield, per the 1954 Hague Convention.

The Blue Shield emblem formally draws a link between persistent secular icons from around the world, asserting that regardless of culture of origin, these civilian objects are worth protecting *in perpetuity*, because they belong to all humanity. For example, civilian objects in Haiti, those stored in the National Museum of Iraq, and those on display in a church in Austria are all protected by the Blue Shield (Fig. 8).

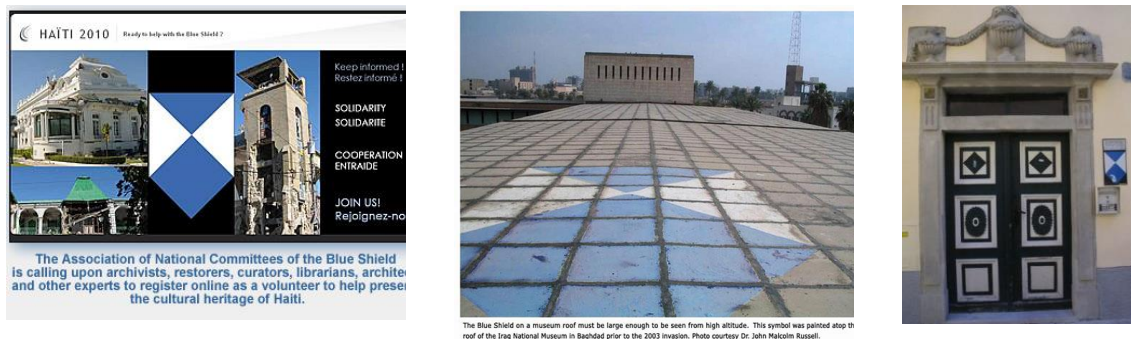
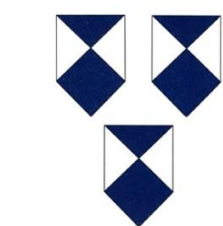


Fig. 8. The Blue Shield in Haiti, Iraq, and Austria.

For cultural property “of very great importance,” the Convention sets out additional conditions under which grants of *special protection* can be designated by UNESCO’s International Register

of Cultural Property under Special Protection (Art. 8). Objects under special protection have their own distinctive emblem (Fig. 9).¹



*Emblème de protection spéciale des biens culturels
(article 16, alinéa 2)*



Fig. 9. The Blue Shield insignia for cultural property under special protection (left), and as displayed at the archaeological ruins of an ancient Zapotec metropolis in Monte Alban, Oaxaca, Mexico (right).

Furthermore, all parties to the Convention agree to take steps to criminalize the destruction of cultural property in their domestic laws (Art. 28). States must take special care “to foster in the members of their armed forces a spirit of respect for the culture and cultural property of all peoples” by training personnel “whose purpose will be to secure respect for cultural property and to co-operate with the civilian authorities responsible for safeguarding it” (Art. 7). States agree to include the study of the Convention in their military training programs (Art. 25). In addition to the treaty, many states have opted to sign a Protocol (1954 First Protocol), which commits them to protect cultural property from illegal trafficking.

Since 1954, a variety of international treaties, military rules of engagement, and military manuals have addressed the protection of cultural property, but always in terms that mirror the

¹ For the most recent list of cultural property under special protection, see UNESCO, International Register.

1954 Convention.² The statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) reiterated that destruction of cultural property is a war crime, both in cases of international armed conflicts and in civil wars (1998 Rome Statute, Art. 8(b).ix and 8(e).iv). In 2016, the first case of “destruction of cultural property” came before the ICC, in the trial of Ahmed Al Faqi Al Mahdi, known as Abu Tourab, who as the head of the Islamic morality brigade during the occupation of Timbuktu, northern Mali, from April 2012 to January 2013, destroyed nine mausoleums in the “City of 333 Saints” as well as the entrance to the Sidi Yahia mosque. For committing the destruction of these persistent icons, he pled guilty to war crimes (Maupas 2016).

However, over the decades since the 1954 Hague Convention, it became increasingly clear that the Convention’s protection regime was insufficient. Cultural property continued to be destroyed in every armed conflict with impunity. Recognizing the insufficiency, in 1972 UNESCO adopted a new instrument, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which established the World Heritage Committee to keep two lists of properties with “outstanding universal value,” a “World Heritage List” and a “List of World Heritage in Danger.” The World Heritage Committee coordinates international efforts to conserve and protect the properties on these lists.

² 1970 UNESCO Convention; 1977 Protocol I, Art. 53, 85.4(d), 85.5; 1977 Protocol II, Art. 16; 1980 Protocol II, Art. 6.1.b.ix; 1991 Operation Desert Storm, US Rules of Engagement: Pocket Card, Art. C; 1993 Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Art. 3.d; 1994 International Committee of the Red Cross, Sec. 3.9(d); 1994 San Remo Manual, Art. 47(d), 110(g), 136(d); U.N. Secretary-General’s Bulletin, 38.6 (November 1999), pp. 1656-1659 URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20693947> Accessed: 20-08-2017 16:02 UTC, Art. 6.6.

This structure, too, proved insufficient, and the international community attempted again to strengthen the protection regime through the addition of 1999 Second Protocol, which came into force in 2004. The Second Protocol cited “the need to improve the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict and to establish an enhanced system of protection for specifically designated cultural property” (1999 Second Protocol, Preamble). Whereas the 1954 Hague Convention merely *calls for* preparatory measures in peacetime to safeguard cultural property, the Second Protocol *spells out* these measures, to include “the preparation of inventories, the planning of emergency measures for protection against fire or structural collapse, the preparation for the removal of movable cultural property or the provision for adequate *in situ* protection of such property, and the designation of competent authorities responsible for the safeguarding of cultural property” (Art. 5). It strengthens the requirements for *respect* in two ways, first, by narrowing the number of cases in which “military necessity” could justify the destruction of cultural property (Art. 6), and second, by requiring verification that a military target is not protected cultural property before an attack and suspension of an attack in progress if it is discovered that the target is protected cultural property (Art. 7). Occupying powers must prohibit the illicit excavation, illegal sale, and transport of cultural property (Art. 9).

Most significantly, the Second Protocol adds a third category to the 1954 Convention’s protection regime (which, remember, already includes general and special protections), namely, those objects that require *enhanced protection* (Art. 10). Such objects consist of cultural heritage “of the greatest importance for humanity,” which is “protected by adequate domestic legal and administrative measures recognising its exceptional cultural and historic value and ensuring the highest level of protection.” Those persistent secular icons deserving of enhanced protection are “not used for military purposes or to shield military sites and a declaration has been made by the

Party which has control over the cultural property, confirming that it will not be so used.” (Art. 10). The Second Protocol establishes a distinct Blue Shield emblem for cultural property with enhanced protection (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. The distinctive Blue Shield emblem for icons meriting enhanced protection under 1999 Second Protocol.

To date, only a few sites and objects have been granted enhanced protection, including the Walled City of Baku in Azerbaijan, the Neolithic flint mines at Spiennes (Mons) in Belgium, and the Painted Churches in the Troodos Region of Cyprus (Fig. 11).

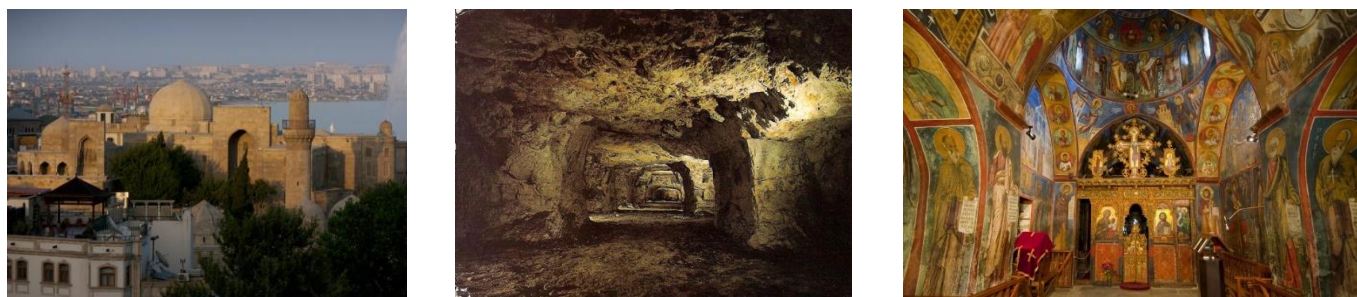


Fig. 11. Three of the sites granted enhanced protection under 1999 Second Protocol.

The Second Protocol establishes a Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, under UNESCO (“Cultural Property Committee”), to which states may submit a list of cultural property for which they wish the granting of enhanced protection (Art. 24). Other parties, including NGOs with consultative status at UNESCO or ECOSOC, may

also recommend specific cultural property for the designation. The 1999 Second Protocol establishes a periodic reporting mechanism, whereby parties to the treaty submit a report on their implementation of the Protocol every four years (Art. 37).

Recognizing for the first time that efforts to protect cultural property come at a heavy financial cost, the Second Protocol establishes a Fund for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (“Cultural Property Fund”), to be paid into by states parties to the treaty, NGOs, and public and private donors, and administered by the Cultural Property Committee (Art. 27). The Cultural Property Fund provides international assistance for states to undertake preparatory, emergency, and recovery measures, as well as financial and other assistance. However, the Fund is not exactly flush: as of January 1, 2017, it amounted to US \$417,022 (UNESCO *Fund*, 2017). (Other resources are much greater, including the new International Fund for the Protection of Heritage, with an initial contribution from France of US \$30 million).

Partnerships with national militaries, INGOs, and regional intergovernmental organizations have been central to UNESCO’s strategy. To aid in the training of national militaries in safeguarding and respect for cultural property, UNESCO produced *Protection of Cultural Property: A Military Manual* (UNESCO *Manual*, 2016). It signed a partnership agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross, in order to “enhance UNESCO’s ability to collect information on the ground, particularly in areas where access is difficult” (UNESCO 2016). It held joint events with regional and state partners such as the European Union, Abu Dhabi, and Azerbaijan.

These developments in codifying the norm of cultural property protection during armed conflict, and building institutional support for the norm, are progressive and impressive—but so

far their record of protecting persistent secular icons is mixed. The Blue Shield has garnered far less public recognition and support than the Red Cross. Whether judged in terms of the military, diplomatic, or juridical protection provided to such icons, the various protection regimes (general, special, and enhanced) have proven to be inadequate to the task, more often observed by states in the breach.

One reason for this mixed record is that the formal attempt to require states to safeguard and respect persistent secular icons during armed conflict has lacked a sufficient informal ethos to support it.³ UNESCO's programs, while necessary, are not widely known, and even less widely *felt*. If the protection regimes set up under the auspices of international humanitarian law have so far largely failed, however, the normative framework that undergirds those regimes has succeeded to a degree. The norm of protecting world cultural heritage has spurred the development of a sector of the global civil sphere. The sector's actors are defined by their dedication to encouraging the United Nations and state governments to save our most precious yet fragile symbols from the depredations of time and the havoc of war.

4. The Binary Meanings of Iconic Loss

In the effort to safeguard humanity's threatened heritage, the Blue Shield emblem has proven to be a powerful icon in its own right. It was adopted by an international NGO: the

³ I have written extensively on the interplay between the formal framework of human rights and the informal structure of feeling that supports it in my book, *The Modes of Human Rights Literature: Towards a Culture without Borders*, chs. 1 and 4. The main point is that culture and society have lagged far behind law in the global human rights arena.

International Committee of the Blue Shield. The emblem has also been adopted in many countries by their own national committees of the Blue Shield (see, e.g., Fig. 12).⁴



Fig. 12. Two of the national committees of the Blue Shield.

In 2008, the Association of the National Committees of the Blue Shield was formed to facilitate coordination of the national bodies. These bodies, in turn, coordinate with other national, intergovernmental, and global civil society actors. These include, for example:

Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations

Cosa Doca, Consortium for the Preservation of Documentary Patrimony in Case of
Disaster

International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural
Property

International Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities

International Council of African Museums

International Council on Archives

International Council of Museums

International Council of Monuments and Sites

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

⁴ For a current list of national committees of the Blue Shield, and those under construction, see <http://www.ancbs.org/cms/en/home2/blue-shield-national-committees/list-of-national-committees> .

UNESCO Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed
Conflict

UNESCO Fund for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict

UNESCO World Heritage Committee

United States Central Command Historical/Cultural Action Group

World Monuments Fund

As this list demonstrates, the 1954 Hague Convention's normative framework, as strengthened by its Protocols and other treaties, has anchored the development of a particular sector of the nascent global civil society. A field of actors has emerged to ensure that states live up to their commitments to safeguard and respect cultural property. For a cultural sociologist interested in conducting an empirical study of global civil responses to iconic loss, these organizations would provide excellent subjects. In this paper, I am only able to gesture toward such a study.

Just as the normative legal framework distinguishes between measures to be adopted during peacetime and those to be adopted during periods of armed conflict, so the cultural sociology of iconic loss should distinguish between how the icon's loss is perceived when due to ordinary entropy (e.g., weather erosion or natural disaster) or when due to armed conflict. Social responses to the symbol's *decay* differ markedly from responses to its intentional *destruction*. Pilgrims and iconoclasts impose different frames on iconic loss. So do civil and anti-civil actors. Here we should recognize that these categories may not neatly overlap: specifically, pilgrims may be civil or non-civil actors. For example, a devout Catholic may make a pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem in order to witness and venerate Jesus's tomb. In this case, the pilgrimage does not have a global civil purpose—i.e., the purpose is not aligned with the secular aims of cosmopolitans, but rather with a particular set of religious beliefs. At the

same time, it would not be accurate to claim the Catholic's pilgrimage qualifies as an act of iconoclasm, since the goal is to celebrate, rather than desecrate, the icon. This sort of pilgrim hallows the icon as a sacred symbol with respect to a particular theology, *not* as a secular symbol for all humanity. Of course, one can imagine a Catholic individual who, while devoted to the icon's religious symbolism, is also comfortable with the notion of the icon being conscripted as part of the world's cultural heritage. One can also imagine a Catholic individual for whom the icon's Catholic symbolism would exclude all other claims of cultural value.

During peaceful periods, the social ethos cultivated by global civil society actors toward the persistent secular icons in their midst consists (beyond sheer awe in the face of the object) of a complicated kind of pathos. This pathos arises because the beholder perceives the icon as simultaneously surrounded by a sacred aura of temporal transcendence, *and* as a fragile physical object with the entropic tendency toward decay. For instance, I recently took my teenage boys on a tour of the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde. This magnificent site, designated by UNESCO as part of world cultural heritage, was carved by the Ancient Pueblo people into the table mountains that line southwest Colorado's Soda Canyon. My boys and I went to Mesa Verde on pilgrimage to admire the human tenacity that built those dwellings into the sheer mountain-sides 1400 years ago. Standing in the Puebloans' Balcony House (Fig. 13), we communed with people who seemed to have left traces of their liveliness in their sleeping spaces, grain silos, and kivas; we felt our connection with their struggles and longings across the temporal divide.



Fig. 13. The Balcony House at Mesa Verde, southwest Colorado.

My sons and I paid tribute to the Puebloans' remaining presence even while our own presence hastened their monument's decay. As we reached for the best angle from which to snap our selfies, the sandstone of their ancestral home yielded a little under the pressure of our shoes. We left the scene a little less intact than it was before we came.

The ambiguous combination of reverent pilgrim and inadvertent despoiler defines the modern cosmopolitan tourist of the persistent secular icon. We touch the bronze statue because we want to get closer to the people who materialized themselves to us through the metal medium: we want to read the miraculous message in a bottle they sent us from across the sea of time. We touch the bronze statue, we and the thousands who came before us and the thousands who will come after us, until little by little, we rub away the thing we came to celebrate. Our consciousness of our dual role triggers the pathos we feel in the face of ordinary, entropic, iconic loss. The sentiment of pathos can be harnessed toward efforts of preservation, as UNESCO invariably demonstrates in its fundraising appeals on behalf of world heritage.

However, when a persistent icon is threatened with disappearance or destruction by deliberate human means—as a result of terrorism, genocide, states of emergency, civil war, or interstate war—pathos is no longer the first line of response. Under the circumstances of armed conflict, global civil actors tend to react to iconic loss with outrage and grief, framing the lost artifact as a symbol of human dignity, endurance, and world heritage, in accordance with the norms set out in the 1954 Hague Convention and subsequent treaties. Such frames seek to reflect and promote a global community, organized around a system of shared narratives, symbols, and values. By appealing to this system, actors who protest and lament iconic loss help

to build and strengthen global civil society. Each such act better prepares the cultural protection sector to undertake a more vigorous and effective defense of persistent secular icons against future acts of desecration. The sociopolitical emotions aroused by iconic loss due to intentional destruction have been systematically cultivated and ritually expressed since the mid-twentieth century by UNESCO and the NGOs associated with the Blue Shield.

The dynamiting of the Buddhas of Bamiyan provides one well-documented set of responses to the destruction of global civil icons. In the wake of the detonations, the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, an NGO with consultative status with the UN Economic, Social, and Cultural Committee (ECOSOC), published a special issue of its journal, *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, dedicated to canvassing the meanings of the Buddhas' destruction (2012). One essay in the special issue, Anikta Haldar's "Echoes from the Empty Niche: Bamiyan Buddha Speaks Back," surveys English-language literary responses to the dynamite blasts from writers in Afghanistan, Poland, Ireland, the United States, India, Canada, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka. Haldar shows that while some writers responded by reviving *local* legends—such as the Hazara Shiite folklore of the lovers SalSal and Shahmama—others responded by seeing the monuments as Afghani *national* symbols, specifically as anti-sectarian symbols that might bind together Pashtun and Hazara, Sunni and Shiite. Some saw in the destruction a reminder of Buddha's belief that nothing lasts forever (and of the deep history of Buddhism in the Bamiyan valley), while others used the statues' destruction to call for a decidedly anti-fundamentalist, anti-Taliban Islam. Still others, the civil pilgrims, saw in the monuments "the philosophy of successive stages of human civilization and evolution in human thought and ideology," as Haldar puts it. These civil pilgrims have attempted to bring together UNESCO officials with locals in the Bamiyan community to decide whether to replicate the

Buddhas. Haldar sums up the variety of responses the Buddhas inspired over their long persistence, invoking

all those tourists and visitors of the likes of Hieun Tsiang, Mongols, Mughals, French archaeologists, German tourists, Indian merchants and art conservationists and sculptors...who have been thronging the Buddha niches since time immemorial and till today; sometimes in faith, sometimes for carving, sometimes for excavation, and sometimes for desecration. This again recalls the multicultural essence of Bamiyan..."

(Haldar 2012, 63).

Here we see what cultural sociologists have referred to as the icon's polyvalence playing out across centuries of encounters.

Not all responses to iconic loss will be of the civil variety. We have already seen that the icon, while still standing, sometimes becomes the occasion for the expression of exclusive forms of identity politics, such as religious triumphalism, racial hatred, ultra-nationalism, xenophobia, and tribalism. The icon's destruction may incite similar political manifestations. The mobs carrying torches (or tiki torches, in the American context) can be motivated to desecrate the icon or celebrate its destruction because, in their estimation, it is either an alien symbol (e.g., a Buddhist symbol in an Islamic milieu) or it has become *too civil* a symbol. In the latter case, the iconoclast perceives that, by insisting on the continuity of human civilization, the persistent secular icon undermines valued distinctions between human groups.

We have seen already, that as a thoroughly anti-civil enterprise, war can be expected to produce iconic loss, but also that international humanitarian law seeks to minimize the damage to cultural property during war, so that a return to civility will be possible when hostilities cease. With the legal norm of cultural property protection in place for half a century, it was not a given

that, in spring, 2003, during Operation Desert Storm, the United States military would exercise a malign neglect toward Iraq's cultural antiquities. Lawrence Rothfield, in his meticulous account of the looting and destruction of antiquities during the war, characterizes mass iconic loss as a "slow-motion disaster" (Rothfield 2009, 124, 137). Rothfield demonstrates that many civil society actors foresaw the danger to the Iraqi National Museum and archeological sites, warned the US government that looting and destruction were likely to ensue on a grand scale, reminded the government and the military of their responsibilities under the 1954 Hague Convention, and provided the military with detailed maps of potential targets under Blue Shield protection. The US allowed the disaster to unfold anyway.

US military and government neglect signaled to others that protection of Iraq's persistent secular icons was not a priority: in consequence, between 2003 and 2005, an estimated 400,000 to 600,000 of the icons were trafficked out of the country by private collectors, with unscrupulous archeologists and museum owners acting as black market antiquities brokers. These were artifacts which, *in situ*, would have contributed significantly to the story of Iraq's national history, and also to the story of the world's religious and cultural history. However, private wealth exercised an anti-civil effect. The world's people lost critical pieces of their collective heritage so that private individuals might hoard a few dislocated treasures, like so many poached elephant tusks.

Yet I find it encouraging to remember that iconoclasts cannot entirely control the meaning of their destructive acts. Haldar points out that the graffiti artist who vandalizes the Buddhas of Bamiyan "mars" the icon "with his name and identity so that people will remember him..., in a way...showing that the visitor...also tries to assume a bit of...'immortality' by associating his name with that of the historical object" (Haldar 2016, 65). In other words, the

very need to desecrate the icon serves as a backhanded acknowledgement of its longevity and value. The niches where the Buddhas once stood survived the Taliban's blasts (Fig. 1). Each empty niche makes the icon's absence visible, mutely testifying that something of irreplaceable value once stood there. Through photographs of the vanished Syrian temples, ISIS will be long remembered for the loss of Palmyra. The act of erasure always leaves traces. And the merest trace—even the wisp of a memory of a trace—can become the anchor for a new mythos, or the revival of an old one. As long as the icon dwells in the mind—as long, that is, as its aura's caretakers continue to transmit representations of it to new beholders—the icon cannot be utterly destroyed. True, the photograph of the extinct animal is not the animal. It is merely the animal's ghost. Yet the representation at least confirms that something unique and precious once existed in the world, before it was destroyed.

Just as the photograph of the extinct animal may be fetishized, so, too, the loss of a persistent secular icon may give impetus to the creation of new icons. Go to the Bebelplatz, the plaza outside Humboldt University in Berlin where, in 1933, the largest Nazi book-burning took place. There, on that site, in 2007, the Israeli sculptor Micha Ullman inset a square glass plate among the plaza's cobblestones. You can stand on the plaza and look down through the glass into a white room below your feet: the room holds enough empty bookshelves for 20,000 burned books (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14. Micha Ullman, Memorial to the Nazi Book-Burning, the Bebelplatz, Berlin, Feb. 16, 2007.

A nearby plaque carries an inscription from the 19th c. German Jewish playwright Heinrich Heine: "Dort wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen." ("There, where they burn books, in the end they will also burn human beings"). Each year since 2007, students at Humboldt University have held a book sale in the square to mark the anniversary, in a sense recognizing that the book-burning (and the human burning that accompanied it) haunts the cultural basement of modern German identity. The potential for a renewal of Nazi terror is always just below street level. In this way, the Nazis' anti-civil act of destruction gave rise to a civil iconic response, and also to a community of pilgrims who worship annually at the icon's secular shrine. You can go and make your pilgrimage. Next year in Berlin.

Will the haunting image of Ullman's memorial remain intact beneath the Bebelplatz hundreds of years from now? Will there still be pilgrims to tend the icon and transmit its aura? Every year that passes, will the memorial's bookshelves expand to hold, not merely the books the Nazis burned, but all the newly visible absences, all the cultural property that tyrants everywhere have destroyed? Will future visitors be able to discern, standing by those shelves

full of absences, the ghosts of all the human beings who were burned alongside them?

Generations must pass before Ullman's icon has the chance to transcend the meaning of its origins and become eternal.

5. Persistent Secular Icons as Symbols of Human Longing

For reasons both specific to the icon per se, and to persistent secular icons as a class, such objects become the triggers for competing narratives and experiences. Iconic loss by deliberate human means adds a final set of binary meanings to the icon's aura, because it elicits both civil and anti-civil reactions. Layers of potential meaning are expressed situationally and simultaneously—a palimpsest made possible by the interaction of the object's visible and tangible presence, its historical associations, the current framing narratives imposed on it, and the viewer's own needs and preconceptions. Indeed, any single response must be partial as compared to the complete set of associations the icon has accrued during its long temporal arc.

The binary response to the destroyed persistent secular icon mirrors a larger political contest. On one side are those who seek symbols that reflect exclusive forms of political kinship (e.g., America First). These actors see in the destroyed icon a universalism that threatens to tear down the walls they believe they need to feel rooted and safe. On the other side, the actors in global civil society's cultural protection sector raise the Blue Shield on behalf of cosmopolitanism. Their goal is to make everyone everywhere feel that some images stand for all of us, and we ought to treat those images as if they were eternal, by working to preserve them in perpetuity. In the broadest sense, the protectors of world heritage aim to safeguard and respect basic human longings: the longings for shared experience, enduring values, and temporal transcendence.

Works Cited

Treaties, Rules of Engagement, Manuals, and Intergovernmental Documents

1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

1954 Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict [aka 1954 First Protocol].

1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 14 Nov. 1970.

1977 Protocol I, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, Art. 53, 85.4(d), 85.5

1977 Protocol II, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts, Art. 16.

1980 Protocol II, Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices, Art. 6.1.b.ix.

1991 Operation Desert Storm, US Rules of Engagement: Pocket Card, Art. C.

1993 Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Art. 3.d.

1994 International Committee of the Red Cross/UN General Assembly Guidelines for Military Manuals and Instructions on the Protection of the Environment in Times of Armed Conflict, Sec. 3.9(d).

1994 San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea, Art. 47(d), 110(g), 136(d).

1999 Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

1999 U.N. Secretary-General's Bulletin on the Observance by United Nations Forces of International Humanitarian Law, *International Legal Materials*, 38.6 (November 1999), pp. 1656-1659 URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20693947> Accessed: 20-08-2017 16:02 UTC, Art. 6.6.

UNESCO (Nov. 16, 1972). Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Adopted by the General Conference at its seventeenth session (Paris).

--- (July 23, 2015). International Register of Cultural Property under Special Protection.

--- (2016). *Protection of Cultural Property: Military Manual* (Paris).

--- (2016). "Protecting Our Heritage and Fostering Creativity,"

<http://en.unesco.org/themes/protecting-our-heritage-and-fostering-creativity>, accessed 8/25/2017.

--- (2017). *Fund for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* (Paris).

--- (n.d.). List of Cultural Property under Enhanced Protection.

Secondary Literature and Journalism

Alexander, J. C. (2008). "Iconic Consciousness: The Material Feeling of Meaning,"

Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 26 (2008): 782- 794.

--- (2012). "Iconic Power and Performance: The Role of the Critic," in Alexander, J. C.,

Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social*

Life. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 25-37.

- Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds (2012). *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bartmański, D (2012). “Inconspicuous Revolutions of 1989: Culture and Contingency in the Making of Political Icons,” in Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 39-65.
- Bellah, R. N. (Winter, 1967). “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96.1: 1-21.
- Binder, W. (2012). “The Emergence of Iconic Depth: Secular Icons in a Comparative Perspective,” in Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 101-116.
- Boehm, G. (2012). “Representation, Presentation, Presence: Tracing the Homo Pictor,” in Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 15-24.
- Bowler, W. (2012). “Seeing Tragedy in the News Images of September 11,” in Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 85-99.
- Confino, A. (June 1, 2014). *Commentary*, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/why-the-nazis-burned-the-hebrew-bible/>, accessed December 21, 2017.
- Cotler, I. (1998). “Jewish NGOs and Religious Human Rights: A Case Study,” in Broyde, M. J. and Witte, J. Jr., eds., *Human Rights in Judaism: Cultural, Religious, and Political Perspectives*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, p. 167.
- Durkheim, E. (1912). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

- Dwyer, C. (Apr. 12, 2017). "Sculptor of Wall Street Bull Says 'Fearless Girl' Horns in on His Work," *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/04/12/523592057/sculptor-of-wall-street-bull-says-fearless-girl-horns-in-on-his-work> .
- Fortin, J. (Aug. 13, 2017). "The Statue at the Center of Charlottesville's Storm," *New York Times*.
- Galchinsky, M. (2016). *The Modes of Human Rights Literature: Towards a Culture without Borders*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gersteinblith, P. (2005-2006). "From Bamiyan to Baghdad: Warfare and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage at the Beginning of the 21st Century," *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 37.2: 245-352.
- Giesen, B. (2012). "Iconic Difference and Seduction," in Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 203-218.
- Greenwood, M. (Aug. 17, 2017). "Trump Defends 'Beautiful' Confederate Statues," *The Hill*.
- Haldar, A. (Apr.-June, 2012). "Echoes from the Empty Niche: Bamiyan Buddha Speaks Back," *Himalayan and East Asian Studies* 16.2: 53-91.
- Hitchens, C. (2016). *The Parthenon Marbles: The Case for Reunification*. New York: Verso.
- Jewish Publication Society (1985). The Book of Judges, in *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*. Philadelphia.
- Kurasawa, F. (2012). "The Making of Humanitarian Visual Icons: On the 1921-1923 Russian Famine as Foundational Event," in Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 67-84.

- Lacovara, P. (2004). *The Pyramids, the Sphinx: Tombs and Temples of Giza*. Boston: Bunker Hill Publishing.
- Maupas, S. (Apr, 2016). “‘Destruction of Cultural Heritage’ at the Heart of the Mali Trial,” *Justiceinfo.net*, <http://www.justiceinfo.net/en/component/k2/28798-%E2%80%9Cdestruction-of-cultural-heritage%E2%80%9D-at-heart-of-mali-trial.html>, accessed 9/8/2017.
- Morsink, J. (Nov., 1999). “Cultural Genocide, the Universal Declaration, and Minority Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 21.4: 1009-1060.
- Rauer, V. (2012). “The Visualization of Uncertainty: HIV Statistics in Public Media,” in Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 139-154.
- Rousseau, J.-J. (1762). *The Social Contract*.
- Smith, P. (2012). “Becoming Iconic: The Cases of Woodstock and Bayreuth,” in Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 171-183.
- Sonnevend, J. (2012). “Iconic Rituals: Towards a Social Theory of Encountering Images,” in Alexander, J. C., Bartmański, D., and Giesen, B, eds., *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 219-232.
- Tarbell, E. (Aug. 4, 2017). “At Statue of Liberty, Words that Resonate Even if They’re Unfamiliar,” *New York Times*.