

# **BRIDGES OF TRUST**

## **The symbolism of the destruction and reestablishment of libraries**

**Surrah al-Himidy**

Examensarbete (30 högskolepoäng) i biblioteks- och informationsvetenskap för  
masterexamen inom ABM-masterprogrammet vid Lunds universitet.

Handledare: Eva Nylander

År: 2023

Degree project (30 credits) in library and information science for a master's degree  
within the ABM master's program at Lund University.

Supervisor: Eva Nylander

Year: 2023

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I praise God, the Almighty, for the blessing of successfully completing the research.

In addition to my own efforts, the success of this thesis is largely due to the encouragement and guidance of many others. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation to everyone who has contributed to the completion of this thesis.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my research supervisor, Eva Nylander, and my professor, Björn Magnusson Staaf, for providing invaluable guidance and stimulating suggestions throughout this research. Many thanks to Eva Nylander for the time spent proofreading and correcting my mistakes.

My deepest thanks go to all my friends, classmates, and colleagues for their support, advice, and encouragement throughout this research. I would like to express my gratitude to the interviewees who have participated in this research – this endeavor would not have been possible without you.

I am extremely grateful to my family for their love, prayers, caring, and sacrifices that ensured my opportunity to safely pursue an academic career. My deepest appreciation goes to my mother, Afrah Sahib, whose strength has inspired me to continue drafting this thesis despite the sad passing of my father midway through the research.

Finally, I am immensely thankful to everyone who has offered me emotional support during this time and encouraged me to complete the research.

Surrah al-Himidy

## **Title**

Bridges of Trust: The symbolism of the destruction and reestablishment of libraries

## **Abstract**

National libraries play a leading role in the creation of national identities. For that reason, the destruction and reestablishment of libraries may hold strategic meanings beyond the physical. This master thesis examines the symbols and cultural implications of such devastating events and resilient initiatives. Data for the thesis was collected through interviews with two librarians in Baghdad, who have experienced or witnessed the destruction and reestablishment of libraries. The data was then thematically coded, analyzed, and interpreted. Among the implications discussed in the thesis are the roles of libraries in uniting the nation's citizens by creating a mutual national identity and representing multiculturalism by diversifying the national collections. The destruction and reestablishment of libraries play important roles in understanding national, historical, and personal identities. The destruction of libraries works as a strategy to destroy identity, making the reestablishment an act of resistance. The findings show that national libraries may bring about political and/or social change, and that the reestablishment of libraries may symbolize resistance against an oppressive power.

## **Keywords**

Library- and Information Science, Destruction of Libraries, Reestablishment of Libraries, Libraries in time of War, National Libraries, National Identity, Cultural Identity, Cultural Memory.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Opening Section .....	7
1.1.2 Context.....	7
1.2 Problem Statement .....	8
1.3 Rationale .....	9
1.3.1 Research Aim.....	9
1.3.2 Research Objective .....	9
1.3.3 Research Question .....	9
1.4 Limitations and Delimitations.....	9
1.5 Significance.....	10
1.6 Structure of Document.....	11
<b>2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	12
2.2 Cultural Heritage: Tangible and Intangible, Movable and Immovable ..	12
2.3 Cultural Memory and Cultural Heritage .....	14
2.4 Libraries' social Functions.....	18
2.4.1 Preserving Cultural Heritage.....	18
2.4.2 Community Building .....	18
2.5 Libraries and Cultural Heritage as a nation's Narrative .....	19
2.6 Conclusion .....	22
<b>3. Methodology.....</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	23
3.2 Research Design.....	23
3.2.1 Research Philosophy.....	23
3.2.2 Research Approach .....	24
3.2.3 Research Strategy .....	24
3.2.4 Time Horizon.....	25
3.2.5 Sampling Strategy.....	25
3.2.6 Data Collection Methods .....	25
3.2.7 Data Analysis Methods .....	29
3.3 Conclusion .....	30
<b>4. Results.....</b>	<b>31</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	31
4.2 Findings.....	31
4.2.1 Unity .....	31
4.2.2 Symbolism .....	34
4.2.3 War Strategy .....	36
4.3 Conclusion .....	38
<b>5. Analysis.....</b>	<b>39</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	39
5.2 Key Findings .....	39
5.3 Interpretation of Findings.....	39
5.3.1 What the Destruction of Libraries Symbolizes .....	40
5.3.2 What the Reestablishment of Libraries Symbolizes .....	43
5.4. Conclusion .....	44
<b>6. Discussion .....</b>	<b>46</b>

6.1 Application.....	46
6.1.1 Representation and Multiculturalism.....	46
6.1.2 Social Function and Democracy.....	47
6.2 Further research.....	48
6.2.1 Comparative Studies.....	48
6.2.2 Transnational Identities and National Cultural Heritage.....	48
6.2.3 International Relations and Cultural Heritage Institutions.....	49
6.2.4 Racially Charged Implications of the Destruction of Cultural Heritage.....	50
6.3 Conclusion.....	51
<b>References.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Attachments.....</b>	<b>57</b>

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Opening Section

A quick online search reveals that Ukraine, Palestine, South Africa, Turkey, Afghanistan, The United States of America, Mali, China, Brazil, Malawi, Russia, Iraq, and the United Kingdom all had to face the destructions of libraries between 2015 and 2022. And yet, the search fails to include destroyed libraries that did not get international coverage. Nor does it include all of the book burning incidents or natural disasters during the period 2015-2022.

What the search reveals, however, is that the destruction of libraries is a recurring phenomenon, and one not limited to war ridden nations. It may be a deliberate calamity, or it may not. The destruction itself knows no borders, no language, no community, except that of a unified cultural loss. It speaks with the tongue of desolation and basks in the aftermath of a lost history.

Not only do libraries constitute community hubs, providing access to information, and unifying the local community, but they are also institutions that preserve cultural heritage (Scott 2011). That is precisely why libraries are important to rebuild, reestablish, and uphold after destructive incidents leave them vulnerable.

Libraries symbolize much more than a building or books lost; they represent resistance – specifically resistance through knowledge. Perhaps it is through the understanding of libraries as cultural identity creators and up holders that the importance of rebuilding and reestablishing libraries becomes evident.

### 1.1.2 Context

The year of which this research was conducted (2023) marks 20 years since the destruction of Iraq National Library and Archive. Following the United States (U.S.)-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Iraq National Library and Archive was looted and set on fire multiple times (Mite RFERL 2004). Furthermore, the U.S.-led invasion unleashed waves of sectarian violence that resulted in the Iraqi sectarian war of 2006–2008, with civil unrest continuing long after the U.S. troops pulled out in 2011 (Rubin 2023).

While civil unrest continued, insurgent groups who had taken part in the insurgency against the United States and the coalition as well as against Iraqi forces, disbanded

and formed the terrorist group known today as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (CISAC 2021). In 2013 ISIL invaded and seized control of provinces in Iraq, sending the country into another wave of violent turmoil (CISAC 2021).

During this period, ISIL waged war against both Iraqi citizens and their cultural heritage, destroying monuments and institutions, with one such incident being the arson and bombing of Mosul's central University Library in 2015 (Wright 2017). Other news outlets that reported on the destruction of Mosul's central university library are the UK-biased the Guardian (Fadhil 2015), the Qatar-biased Aljazeera (Qualey 2017), and the UN-biased United National Development Program (UNDP 2023). Despite the different biased narratives of the news outlets, they report the same sequence of events that led to the destruction of the library, which is that ISIL seized control over Mosul and subjected the city to massive cultural destruction.

International interventions against ISIL included airstrikes and drones over Iraq and Syria in an attempt to be rid of ISIL – this, however, resulted in many casualties (Khan 2021), thus amplifying the civil unrest.

Starting in July of 2018, protests over deteriorating economic conditions and government corruption began in many cities throughout the country (Coker and Hassan 2018), resulting in high death tolls (Mallinder 2023) and continuing until the spring of 2023. To say that Iraq has had a history of turmoil and unrest is an understatement due to the prolonged state of reconstruction the nation has been under. Librarians in Iraq have therefore experienced, firsthand, the effects of the destruction of libraries and participated in the reestablishment of libraries.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

What we know about libraries is that they exist not to merely store ink on paper. Rather, they are there to tell stories and to document, either the past, the present, or the future. It is through those stories that knowledge is created. In many ways, libraries provide their patrons with community, history, and culture (Fabian 2016). If building a library means creating access to cultural resources such as education, community, history, and a cultural identity, and destroying a library means to deprive a people of these assets, then a library unbuilt means a community forgotten and a culture lost. Is it not a given then that libraries must be reestablished after being exposed to destruction?



Yet, it is not so easy to prioritize the reestablishment of libraries in times of destruction. But what if the act of reestablishing libraries symbolizes something other than repurchased books and reconstructed buildings? Eradicating cultural heritage institutions is much more than destroying the collections; the destruction has other implications to a nation or a culture and its people. To understand what the reestablishment of libraries symbolizes, we must begin by understanding what the destruction of libraries symbolizes.

## 1.3 Rationale

### 1.3.1 Research Aim

This thesis aims to examine the cultural importance of reestablishing libraries.

### 1.3.2 Research Objective

The objective of this thesis is as follows:

1. To identify what national libraries symbolize as well as their implications and relevance for societies.

### 1.3.3 Research Question

1. What do the destruction and the reestablishment of national libraries symbolize?

## 1.4 Limitations and Delimitations

The destruction of libraries is a vast subject. This thesis specifically explores the symbolism of National Libraries as cultural heritage institutions from the perceptions of two librarians in Baghdad as a case study. Therefore, this exploratory research studies what the two librarians of Iraq felt in 2003 when the National Library and Archive was destroyed and generalizes the results to derive answers to what the destruction and reestablishment of national libraries symbolize. Although existing literature is not limited to national libraries and may also discuss other forms of libraries (such as public libraries) the results of this thesis are strictly limited to National Libraries – however, the results may well apply to other forms of libraries as well.

My data covers my limited stay of two weeks in Baghdad and focuses on learned information within a limited timeframe for the study. I utilized two hours with each interviewee, and it is quite possible that there is much more to investigate regarding

the symbolism of National Libraries in relation to their destruction and reestablishment, because their experiences of this phenomenon cannot be confined to the two hours I had with each interviewee.

Lastly, although I speak Arabic and am well versed in the contemporary history of Iraq, I have not lived there and do not have real-time knowledge of how patrons of Iraq's National Library and Archives responded to the destruction. Furthermore, I was only a child at the time of the destruction of both Iraq National Library and Archive and the National Museum of Iraq. As such, my knowledge of this topic is limited to the perceptions of the two librarians and the new outlets that reached me in Sweden. I am not presenting the history of the incidents, rather I am exploring reflections regarding the destruction and reestablishment of the Iraq National Library and Archive 20 years after the incidents.

## 1.5 Significance

Within the field of cultural heritage institutions, such as archives, libraries, and museums, there is a much greater understanding of museums as being cultural heritage preservers, than there is of libraries and literary archives. Although libraries function differently, with a much more profound role in the building of communities rather than that of exhibiting history, they are just as culturally significant as museums. Moreover, national libraries play important roles in the creation of national cultural identities.

The destruction of libraries is far from uncommon. Perhaps it is by understanding the roles and symbolism of national libraries that we may understand the roles of libraries in culture and history. It is precisely that symbolic meaning that I aim to investigate in this thesis.

Presently I have not been able to find information pertaining to the symbolism of libraries, of their destruction and their reestablishment. While, in recent years, there has been more research produced on the topic of libraries as custodians of cultural heritage, there is little on the topic of libraries as creators of cultural heritage and national identities. I find it important to partake in a scholarly discussion on these matters, hence this case study.

I hope that the findings of my thesis will help in enabling the reestablishment of libraries after destruction. In addition, it is my hope that my results can illustrate the importance of diversified national collections, and that cultural heritage workers

take on the role and challenge of representing their contemporary societies and communities in the national collections.

## 1.6 Structure of Document

In the next chapter, I present existing literature that describe definitions of cultural heritage, cultural memory, and the social functions of libraries, as well as their roles in assisting in the creation of a nation's narrative. For the benefit of the analysis of the topic, I chose cultural memory as the thesis' theoretical starting point. The theoretical framework is interwoven with and presented in the literature review. The subsequent chapter deals with the methodology used to research what the destruction and the reestablishment of libraries symbolize, as well as ethical aspects of the conducted research. The results are presented in thematical order, based on categories derived from the data. The thesis concludes with an interpretation of the findings and a discussion on the application of the results.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Introduction

Much has been written about libraries and the social role of librarians for their communities. Here I limit myself to look at libraries as cultural heritage preservers and community builders. The theoretical framework for this thesis, i.e., cultural memory, is integrated in this section. The theory of cultural memory will be the starting point for the analysis as it explains the ways in which people understand culture based on the ability to remember and construct memories.

In this chapter I present definitions of cultural heritage based on an Erasmus report containing descriptions of cultural heritage by various European countries. The definition I will be using is interwoven from a handful of European descriptions from the report.

The chapter begins by introducing definitions of cultural heritage and moves on to describe the social constructions of cultural heritage and cultural memory, that is, the ways in which they are dependent on people and their ability to remember. Thereafter, literature on the social functions of libraries is introduced – specifically that which concerns the roles of libraries as preservers of cultural heritage and community builders. Finally, is an account of how libraries and cultural heritage play a role in the narrative of a nation.

### 2.2 Cultural Heritage: Tangible and Intangible, Movable and Immovable

This subsection introduces the concepts of cultural heritage. There are many definitions of cultural heritage: Some nations have clear distinct definitions, while others allow for a subjective understanding of the term. The Erasmus report, *The Role of Librarians in Promoting Cultural Heritage*, describes the definitions of cultural heritage of a handful of European countries. In this thesis intangible culture will be the term used to cover the immaterial heritage. Intangible culture is, in short, anything that intends to be passed down through generations, regardless of its physical shape or documentation format. Intangible culture is ever-changing, much like the definition of cultural heritage. Tangible culture refers to material heritage, which is objects, artifacts, documents, and anything else that can be physically

touched, whether it is movable or immovable. There may be different definitions of cultural heritage and what constitutes cultural heritage in other cultures and nations outside of Europe. As the Erasmus report is based on European nations, the explanations provided in this subsection are strictly based on European definitions and laws provided in the report.

Estonia's way of describing cultural heritage is that cultural heritage refers to objects, phenomena, as well as cultural spaces valued for their historical, scientific, artistic, social, technological, and religious values (Virkus 2019). Cultural heritage is not limited to the material heritage such as buildings, locations, artifacts, clothes, books, photos, videos, and so on. Rather, it also includes so called spiritual heritage that is perceived as part of local, ethnic, religious, or other aspects, of identity, which is intended to be passed on to future generations, such as beliefs, practices, rituals, traditions, technologies, and songs.

Virkus (2019) presents intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, customs, expressions, knowledge, cultural spaces, and skills that have been passed on from generation to generation and that are constantly recreated, i.e., still practiced today. He states that the intangible cultural heritage is an essential part of all people's lives and that it changes with people and circumstances. Intangible heritage is entirely based on knowledge, and knowledge is dependent on a living thing possessing said knowledge, hence intangible heritage can also be referred to as living knowledge. Living knowledge cannot be separated from people – for without people there is no knowledge that constitutes the heritage (Virkus 2019).

Boustany (2019), who introduces the French definition of cultural heritage, points out that cultural heritage is developed every day and as such is hard to define. Much like Virkus's presented definition, the French definition of cultural heritage consists of a set of tangible and intangible elements of a cultural nature charged with multiple meanings, with a collective dimension, and transmitted from generation to generation (Boustany 2019).

Based on these definitions, cultural heritage covers both physical and non-physical heritage, which may be referred to as spiritual, intangible, or immaterial heritage, whereas tangible cultural heritage refers to the material and physical aspects. Furthermore, tangible cultural heritage is, in Latvian laws, divided into two types: immovable and movable (Dziluma, Mezjane, and Papule 2019). Immovable cultural heritage refers to buildings, architectural ensembles, cultural landscapes,

and memorial places, whereas movable cultural heritage refers to smaller objects such as antiquities, works of art, manuscripts, rare prints, cinema, photos, video documents, phonograms, institutional and private records, and artifacts. Within the library context the cultural heritage may refer to printed publications, electronic publications, manuscripts and other documents, the collection, systemization, cataloging, bibliographic classification, and the storages of such material (Dziluma, Mezjane, and Papule 2019). As such, both the interior and the exterior of a building may constitute tangible cultural heritage.

Using the definitions provided by Latvian laws, the understanding of tangible cultural heritage used in this essay constitutes both the library building and its content, as well as the services it provides. For instance, The National Library of Latvia is seen as an institution that collects and stores historical and cultural monuments. The library is expected to acquire publications significant for the development of the nation's statehood, science, education, and culture; any literature that is being used; and to preserve these for future generations.

According to UNESCO's definition of cultural heritage, cultural heritage is:

Both a product and a process, which provides societies with a wealth of resources that are inherited from the past, created in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. Most importantly, it includes not only tangible, but also natural and intangible cultural heritage.

*Unesco 2014, quoted after Boustany 2019, p.59*

Interestingly, the countries whose cultural heritage definitions are included in the Erasmus report, have all been victims of cultural violence. It may be because they have been subjected to cultural violence and have seen the effects of destruction on culture, that the topic of cultural heritage has become relevant for their nations.

### 2.3 Cultural Memory and Cultural Heritage

Both cultural memory and cultural heritage rely on collective memories and cultural definitions. This subsection looks at descriptions of cultural memory and cultural heritage as dependent on a society, a collective, or a community.

Virkus (2019) refers to the Estonian scholar Kurmo Kõnsa and his explanation of the concept of cultural heritage divided into three approaches: here labeled A, B, and C. The first approach, A, consists of understanding cultural heritage as a set of valuable objects. The second approach, B, is understanding cultural heritage as a part of the environment. The third approach, C, is understanding cultural heritage as a socio-cultural construction. The first two approaches perceive cultural heritage,

both tangible and intangible, as things and objects, whereas the third approach perceives cultural heritage as cultural practices participating in the creation of values and understandings. According to this approach of socio-cultural constructions, artifacts comprise a small part of culture. The major part is connected to the intangible aspect, such as languages, experiences, behaviors, memories, and narratives. Virkus points out that intangible cultural heritage cannot exist without the people that carry it, as the heritage consists of untouchable non-material things. Additionally, cultural heritage is intertwined with all aspects of culture and society. As such, the socio-cultural approach to cultural heritage may 1) challenge the cultural hierarchies, and 2) focus on the diversity of the values related to heritage as well as the dependency on the users of heritage. It is important to understand that different people have different ideas about heritage and its set of values, thus there is no single and correct approach to heritage that has been presented and legitimized by either experts or the state (Virkus 2019). It is this last approach that will be especially referred to in this thesis as it accounts for how cultural heritage is socio-culturally constructed and emphasizes the cultural practices. When people and their cultures change, so does the cultural heritage.

As noted by Boustany (2019), the definition of cultural heritage evolves and changes over time. Each generation redefines the boundaries of cultural heritage and the characteristics of objects. Cultural heritage is entwined with the contemporary social, economic, and cultural reality (Boustany 2019). In another definition presented by Boustany, cultural heritage refers to that which a nation intends to conserve for its future generations. It may be a relationship to the future or a relationship to history made up of continuities and discontinuities, that is, a redefinition of cultural heritage (Boustany 2019). The understanding of cultural heritage as redefinable and construable is recurring.

Cultural heritage is, as claimed by Weiss (2019), inherited from the past, and continuously created and recreated by people and people's interactions with their environments. Thus, cultural heritage consists of continuously evolving values, beliefs, knowledge, and traditions, which offer a frame of reference to a group of people and future generations. For an object or an activity to be considered cultural heritage there must be a human group that is able and ready to recognize them as such. Furthermore, there must be a set of values that link the asset inherited from the past to a present understanding. and a future use, in a sense of meaningful continuity (Weiss 2019). The values however are dependent on cultures, knowledge, and the understandings of history.

Despite cultural heritage being important for people's perceptions and understanding of themselves, their histories, their futures, their values, beliefs, and traditions, they are entirely dependent on people's abilities to define an asset as heritage and to link it to personal or collective values – which are everchanging. On that account, cultural heritage may be seen as socio-culturally constructed. However, it is not only cultural heritage that is understood as socio-culturally constructed; cultural memory may also be seen in that way.

When it comes to the theory of cultural memory, Erll (2010) puts forth a theoretical framework for the concept. She describes cultural memory as a form of a collective memory around culture shared by a group of people. The practice is a multi-disciplinary one, comprising social aspects which include people and institutions, material aspects, such as physical objects and monuments, and mental aspects, like culturally defined ways of thinking. Media, institutions, and practices enable social groups to construct a shared past. However, for monuments, rituals, and books to be considered cultural memory, individuals must actualize them to bear a collective historical significance (a shared notion of the past). For an object to be considered a cultural memory it is not enough that the object is only represented by media and institutions – for without actualization by a social group the object is merely dead material with no perceived impact on societies (Erll, 2010). Thus, it is important that there is an intersection of the aforementioned social, material, and mental aspects. Thus, a cultural memory and the object that is considered a cultural memory, are socio-culturally constructed and dependent.

We remember, or create memories, through culture. As A. Assmann (2010) explains, culture is intrinsically related to memory, meaning that culture is preserved if its memories are preserved. To remember a culture, there must be something to remember it by. Contrarily, to lose a culture is to forget about its memories or that which we remember it by. A. Assmann divides the concepts of remembering and forgetting into two categories: active and passive (A. Assmann 2010).

Whereas passive remembering refers to the acts of preserving the past as the past, active remembering refers to the acts of preserving the past as the present (A. Assmann 2010). An archive can be seen as an institution that preserves the past as the past since they collect and accumulate objects. A. Assmann describes the archives' materials in a state of “no longer' and 'not yet', deprived of their old



existence and waiting for a new one” p. 103). Museums on the other hand are seen as institutions that preserve the past as the present: they showcase the objects for the contemporary society. To be actively remembered is to become a working memory, and to become a working memory an object must pass processes of selection. Once an object has been endowed with a sanctified status and presented to the masses, it becomes a cultural working memory of a society. That is, it becomes an instrument for a society to understand its past. Interesting enough libraries fall into both categories in A. Assmann’s presentation of the concepts of active and passive remembering. Furthermore, librarians (as well as archivists) are described as guardian angels of paper as they store books and thus account for the past. Both active and passive remembering relies on the existence of objects, however there are cultures and cultural traditions that are absent of material existence, among which are oral storytelling, practices, rituals, performances, and dances (A. Assmann 2010). This immaterial culture is, as explained in the previous subsection, considered intangible cultural heritage.

In equivalent manner, there is a passive and an active forgetting (A. Assmann 2010). Passive forgetting is explained as non-intentional acts, such as losing, hiding, neglecting, disregarding, or abandoning objects and monuments. The objects exposed to passive forgetting are not materially destroyed, rather they have merely fallen out of the frames of attention, valuation, or usage. As such they can be found and reevaluated. Thus, passive forgetting can be seen as a temporary forgetting, which is a luxury that active forgetting does not have. Active forgetting is described as intentional acts of destruction, such as trashing, destroying, burning, negating, and vandalizing objects and monuments. What is destroyed cannot come back – it can, however, be replicated (A. Assmann 2010). It is precisely that active forgetting that occurs when a library is destroyed. A library destroyed implicates *inter alia*, a building, its objects, monuments, memories, traditions, and norms destroyed, which in turn implicate a culture erased.

As explained in this subsection both cultural memory and cultural heritage are socio-culturally constructed and dependent. To create, define, and understand a phenomenon as culture, there must be a people who are willing to understand it as such. Since libraries – particularly public and national libraries – gather and bring people together, they henceforth preserve and create culture and cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible, that is material and immaterial. When a library is destroyed, so is the culture that it has A) created and B) preserved.

## 2.4 Libraries' social Functions

### 2.4.1 Preserving Cultural Heritage

To reiterate, Ninkov et al (2019) argue that intangible cultural heritage includes oral tradition, language, performing arts, traditional crafts, social practices, and rituals. They add that cultural, artistic, and social events fall into this category of cultural heritage, and therefore makes any cultural or artistic production, regardless of form and date of origin, whether it is a book or a videorecording, part of a cultural heritage (Ninkov et al 2019).

Within libraries it is not uncommon to produce cultural and artistic programs, which later become a testimony of the cultural life of a certain time or period, of a community, or of a location. Seen in this way, libraries not only preserve cultural heritage, but they partake in creating it as well. Furthermore, they provide access to the cultural heritage through inter alia digitization, programs, lectures, workshops, printed brochures, and catalogs (Ninkov et al 2019).

Burning a library and destroying material heritage is not only the destruction of a collection of books, but also an attempt to obliterate the culture and the memories of the library and its community (Nyns 2016). In other words, destruction of libraries entails the obliteration of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage that the libraries have preserved.

Fabian (2016) points out that libraries have a physical presence. Active libraries are filled with life and vitality. A sense of belonging conveyed through rooms, and through the authenticity, emotions, and ambiance of the books. The collection of a library mirrors the culture of the contemporary society that it is within and its history. Creating a new library collection is to create a new tradition as the collection's history and context changes with the recreation (Fabian 2016). Similarly, by destroying the books, the culture's history is lost, and therefore the continuity between the culture's past and future is broken. To deprive a culture of its books is the same as to take away its collective memory (Orlean 2018).

### 2.4.2 Community Building

To better understand why libraries may be strategically targeted, we must first understand what libraries offer their communities.

As believed by Scott (2011), public libraries are democratic equalizers and provide services to their communities that they, oftentimes, cannot get elsewhere. Libraries – specifically public libraries – play a key role in providing the opportunity and resources for people to acquire knowledge. Libraries contribute to educating the population as they promote social inclusion and equity through the services they provide such as access to information, computer access, resources in various languages and formats, and services to residential homes, prisons, and hospitals. Public libraries are considered the only institutions or places that promote the value of equitable access, and equitable access creates a sense of community ownership (Scott 2011).

Scott (2011) reports that many libraries are working to broaden their community's cultural understanding and awareness of the world through programs, discussions, and displays. In this sense, libraries are responsible for introducing and exposing their users to other values, interests, and preferences, so that they may re-conciliate themselves with the existence of the aforementioned. When a library is destroyed, so is a people's opportunity to interact with other cultures and exchange opinions. It is in this way that libraries are seen as essential for a democratic society, ergo a threat to those who oppose democracy and democratic values.

## 2.5 Libraries and Cultural Heritage as a nation's Narrative

Cultural heritage institutions, and thereupon libraries, may play a significant role in the defining of a nation. In that way, cultural heritage affects the narrative of a nation.

When discussing the importance of cultural heritage, Weiss (2019) states that cultural heritage is the source of the narrative of the history of a country. It is what makes the past visible and thus, strengthens the cultural and historical awareness of the country. Through cultural heritage people connect with each other and develop a sense of belonging (Weiss 2019). The formation of a common culture and cultural heritage is crucial for a national identity as it creates a sense of community. If cultural heritage plays a key role in the creation of a national identity, but only one group of people's cultural heritage is preserved and represented nationally, then the national identity becomes biased against the group of people who have the privilege of having their heritage preserved and nationally represented. In this way, the national identity benefits only one group, i.e., the group whose culture is nationally represented. It is in this sense that I argue that cultural heritage influences a nation's

narrative. That is, a nation's story is dependent on the nation's ability to represent its people's cultural heritage.

According to Roman (2016), the reason libraries are amongst the first victims of violence, war, and state sponsored repression, is because they play a leading role in the national identity and community life. The free exchange of knowledge and ideas is a critical and important matter for the democratic mission (Roman 2016). Libraries are considered safe spaces with unrestricted access to books and journals. Open exchange of information and ideas are encouraged in libraries, which may be seen as a threat by those who seek to control, censor, or tamper with knowledge and information.

The destruction of libraries often plays a clear strategic role: to destroy a group's cultural and historical heritage which bears witness to centuries-old identity and coexistence between groups (Ovcina 2016). The national and university library of Bosnia and Hercegovina, which was destroyed during the siege of Sarajevo in 1992, held documents written and printed in various languages inter alia Latin, Greek, Turkish, old Slavic, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Italian, French, Russian, German, and Hungarian. The destruction of the library symbolized destroying the witnesses to the Bosnian Herzegovinian multiculturalism (Ovcina 2016). It is a symbol of forcing a nation into a new identity, without regard to the opinions of its people and the impacts of the erasure of multiculturalism. The destruction of relics of the past can be considered a kind of self-mutilation of the memory (A. Assmann 2016).

Based on this statement, there is a parasitic relationship between war and culture – one built on a desire to control a group of people and their collective narrative. However, the relationship may also be understood as one of opposing forces. Sure enough, Ovcina (2016) argues that the terms war and culture are interlinked in a discourse: While war brings suffering, destruction, and havoc, culture brings spiritual enjoyment and enrichment – whether it is architectural, literary, musical, artistic, or within other aspects of culture (Ovcina 2016). Yet, it remains that while culture does not necessarily entail war, war always entails some kind of cultural havoc.

A. Assmann (2016) points out that war not only involves violence on combatants and civilians, but also on cultural heritage. Culture always plays an implicit role in war. In imperial wars, the goal of the war is to conquer other states, but the way culture is involved is that the culture of the opposition acts as a trophy: incorporated,

exploited, and exposed as a symbolic representation of the superior power. In religious wars the goal of the war is to destroy the blasphemous opposition, in which the war on culture is to eradicate the rival's religious traditions. In colonial wars, war itself acts as a tool to scramble for new territories and material resources, but under the guise of a civilizing mission culture and religion are forcefully exploited and exported to the colonial power (A. Assmann 2016). As such, all wars entail, if not explicitly then implicitly, a strategical eradication of culture.

Larsson's findings show that the destruction of the Iraqi cultural heritage may be viewed with the optic of Said's theory *Orientalism* (the way in which the Orient (east) is seen as backward and uncivilized in relation to the Occident (west) (Larsson 2005). In addition, the destruction of cultural heritage in 2003 can be seen as a war strategy to further emphasize the prejudiced opinion that the destruction was a result of the uncivilized state of the Iraqi people, thus shifting the blame of the destruction onto the victims.

Larsson (2005) writes the following in one of her discourse analyses:

He [a neoconservative academic] believes that the Iraqis are fundamentally violent, unbalanced and in need of a guiding hand. The problem is that they [Iraqis] do not allow themselves to be governed but [instead] misbehave. [...] The intellectual treasures, which bear witness to the region's past as a great power, are ignored in order not to disturb the image of the moral backwardness of the Orient, which in the process gives the West [Occident] the power to rule and set.

*Larsson, 2005, p. 60.*

Larsson (2005) finds, in her research, a perceived arrogance (in media) of the Bush administration towards the Iraqi cultural heritage, the international conventions, as well as towards the Iraqi peoples, which she suggests can be interpreted as part of a dehumanization of the Iraqi population in order to justify U.S.'s need to rule the country. To demonstrate the act of dehumanization that took place, she refers to the arrogance and the lack of empathy that the journalists (who wrote of the topic of the destruction of the Iraqi cultural heritage) felt the Bush administration exhibited regarding the looting and destruction of the national cultural heritage institutions (Larsson 2005). Is this lack of empathy an act of ignorance or a strategic portrayal to further impact the two nations' narratives in the incident: The U.S.-led invasion as an innocent and benevolent act of help, and the destruction of cultural heritage in conjunction with the invasion of Iraq as a consequence of the uncivilized Iraqi people's own actions and reactions?

## 2.6 Conclusion

The literature review in this section is broad and touches upon various themes. This conclusion aims at summarizing the key concepts and their importance to the analysis of this thesis.

The synthesis in one of the previous sections shows the complementarities between different definitions and theories around culture as dependent on people. Cultural memory, alongside European definitions of cultural heritage, explain how culture is essentially socioculturally constructed and impacted by peoples' collective perceptions. Not only are cultural memory and cultural heritage heavily reliant on a collective ability to remember and define, but the definitions also evolve and change overtime. More importantly, cultural heritage, and by extension cultural memory, play an active role in defining a nation's narrative. Precisely because cultural heritage helps define a nation's narrative, the cultural heritage institutions, among which are national libraries, become targets of war.

Furthermore, while there is tacit agreement that libraries are important to culture, there is a lack of research emphasizing exactly what libraries culturally symbolize – instead, we must make those assumptions ourselves. It is based on this need to draw our own informal assumptions that I will be analyzing what the national libraries symbolize in destruction and in reestablishment.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims at explaining how the data were collected, analyzed, and used. The framework of this chapter is based on the Research Onion Model explained by Saunders et al (2007). It begins with brief explanations of my beliefs and why I chose certain methods and ends with descriptions on how I conducted the data collection and analysis.

### 3.2 Research Design

#### 3.2.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy outlines the beliefs and values that guide the collection and analysis of data in this thesis (Ryan 2018). In other words, it addresses how belief is transformed into knowledge. This subchapter aims at addressing what I, as the researcher, perceive to be truth, reality, and knowledge.

The philosophical approach in this thesis is based on interpretivism. Interpretivism proceeds from the assumption that reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed (Ryan 2018). While positivists believe that reality may be understood through factual knowledge – based on what they consider is data and experience – interpretivists believe that reality is understood through the subjective interpretation of reality (Ryan 2018). In other words, reality is understood through the experiences of the person who encounters said reality. Because people have different experiences and perspectives, they therefore have different understandings and perceptions of reality.

It is my firm belief that reality is inherently dependent on a person's cultural experiences, world views, social perspectives, and subjective understandings. Furthermore, this research is colored by the belief that epistemology is socially constructed and dependent. These perceptions of reality influenced the conduct of the research. The ways in which I have collected, analyzed, and used data, is entirely dependent on my own, previous research's, and the interviewees' personal understandings of knowledge, reality, and beliefs.

### 3.2.2 Research Approach

The research adopted an inductive exploratory approach as it began by first collecting data and then discovering themes to analyze. The goals of exploratory studies are to formulate problems and clarify concepts rather than to provide conclusive results and solutions to an existing problem (Saunders et al 2007).

As previously mentioned, the research philosophy in this thesis is based on the interpretation of gathered data, since the purpose of the methodology is not to generate so-called objective knowledge based on patterns and statistics, but rather to explore stories and perspectives. By utilizing a qualitative approach, the data collected explores the perceptions of librarians who have experienced and/or witnessed the destruction and reestablishment of libraries, while the analysis explores the symbolism of the phenomena.

### 3.2.3 Research Strategy

To answer the research question “what do the destruction and the reestablishment of libraries symbolize?” a few strategy choices were made.

While this thesis’ research approach consists of exploratory study, the practical research strategy consists of a case study of the Iraq National Library and Archive. Saunders et al (2007) describe case studies as detailed, in-depth empirical investigations of one or more contemporary phenomena in a real-world context. Although case studies allow for the development of new hypotheses and additional insights into a phenomenon to gain a better understanding of the events that led up to a phenomenon, they also have their limitations. Case study results can be difficult to replicate and are susceptible to researcher bias (Saunders et al 2007).

Given that the destruction of the Iraq National Library and Archive is a unique case and that the symbolism of it is a phenomenon that few have studied, a case study seemed an appropriate choice despite its limitations.

The case study implements entirely qualitative research, relying on interviews with knowledgeable individuals and existing theories to analyze both responses and theoretical propositions. Based on this analysis, I explore hypotheses and draw conclusions. The research strategy also involves coding, conceptualizing and thematizing data collected to provide an interpreted thematic analysis.



### 3.2.4 Time Horizon

The interviews were only held once, therefore making this research a cross-sectional one – that is, data was gathered from samples once at a specific time. As my goal was to analyze perceptions and beliefs by interviewing librarians about their experiences and opinions, there was no need to repeat the gathering of data since it was unlikely that their answers about their past experiences would have changed during the four months that I conducted this research. Had I been interested in individual changes over a period of time I would have chosen a longitudinal research method; but as I was interested in the perceptions of particular points in time (the destruction and rebuilding of the libraries), a cross-sectional research method was the most suitable.

### 3.2.5 Sampling Strategy

There are many incidents of destroyed libraries in the world. Therefore, I had to put strict limits and narrow the focus group.

The sampling method was a non-probability one, consisting of purposive sampling. That is, I assessed and intentionally selected a sampling group based on subject relevance. As the research aims to answer questions regarding the destruction and reestablishment of libraries, I needed to explore the experiences of librarians who had both witnessed destruction and worked with the reestablishment of a library. I began by first choosing a region – one with a history of destruction and reconstruction – and then sought out professionals who were active during the periods of destruction and reconstruction, as well as in the communication and reception of international aid. This method garnered two interviewees in Baghdad, Iraq.

### 3.2.6 Data Collection Methods

In this subchapter I describe the methodological approach and action plan for conducting the research, as well as ethical aspects taken into consideration. As I have touched upon earlier, the data collection method consisted of semi-structured interviews.

#### *3.2.6.1 Method Choice*

Due to the nature of the research questions, interviews were the most appropriate and convenient method. Eriksson-Zetterquist and Ahrne (2015) explain that interviews allow for the deep-diving into one or a couple of interviewees opinions on a subject. Through structured interviews and open-ended questions, the interviewees may shed their perspectives and experiences on select subjects

(Eriksson-Zetterquist and Ahrne 2015). It is the interviewees' answers that the researcher analyses, which makes the information subjective to the beliefs of the interviewees. Since the specific information I was looking for was not available in the current field of library and information science, it was most productive for this thesis to research the subjective experiences and stories of eye-witness librarians. The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions.

#### *3.2.6.2 Interview Selection*

As mentioned under the sampling strategy, the interview selections were based on the interviewees' experiences with the reestablishment of destroyed libraries. I limited the selection to the region of Baghdad, Iraq. The criteria applied enabled an interpretation of what the destruction and reestablishment of libraries symbolize.

The sample size for this thesis is small as it only consists of two interviewees. However, the interviewees had a large overview of Iraq's library and cultural heritage landscape. At the time of the interviews, one interviewee was a key figure for the university libraries, while the other was a key figure for Iraq's cultural heritage. Both were engaged in the restoration of Iraq National Library and Archive, whereas one of them was the director general during its reestablishment. Furthermore, they belong to different Iraqi ethnic groups and are of different genders, which means that they may have had different experiences of the events before and after the destruction of the Iraq National Library and Archive.

As I was interested in the subjective experiences and beliefs of Iraqi librarians during the hardships of 2003, I found the small selection of interviewees satisfactory. The small sample size enabled in-depth interviews, thematization and coding, in a way that might not have been possible had the sample size been larger. On the other hand, a larger sample size would have allowed for data saturation which in turn would have revealed patterns and shared perceptions of the events and the symbolism of destruction. However, such data saturation would have come at the expense of subjective experiences as it would have risked excluding subjective perceptions, events, and reactions unique to the interviewees – data in which I was interested.

#### *3.2.6.3 Interviewees*

The interviewees whose answers are presented and analyzed in this thesis are both operating in Baghdad. The first interviewee is Faiza al-Bayati. At the time of the interview, she was the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) representative of Iraq as well as president of the Iraqi

Association for Information, Libraries and Documentations Specialists (IAILDS). As such, she operates closely with Iraq's university libraries and librarians.

The second interviewee is Saad Eskander. At the time of the interview, Eskander worked as the Cultural Heritage Adviser at Iraq's Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities. Between the years of 2003-2015, he worked as the director of Iraq's National Library and Archives. Therefore, he operates closely with Iraq's cultural heritage.

Their professional roles have presumably affected their answers, but to analyze to what extent Iraqi political issues influenced their answers is beyond the scope of this investigation.

#### *3.2.6.4 Transcriptions and Translations*

The transcription process of the interviewees was extensive and time consuming. The translation process consisted of two rounds. The first round was a verbatim word-by-word translation from Arabic to English. Due to the conflicting linguistic differences (morphological, semantic, and syntactic) between the two languages, the primary translations made little to no grammatical sense. Therefore, a second round of translation had to be carried out.

The second translation was performed only on quotations selected for the thesis. In the second translation, I took the grammatical differences into account and reconstructed the quotations into English sentences that depicted the original Arabic meanings of the quotes. In other words, instead of translating verbatim, I changed the Arabic sentence structure of the quotes to ones more aligned with the English structure. However, there may be some translated quotations in this thesis that still use Arabic grammar and sentence structure.

I want to emphasize that the translated transcriptions that I have produced are a product of my own language-based knowledge. There is much that may have been lost in the translation process.

#### *3.2.6.5 Place of Interviews*

Despite zoom being an accessible form of communication, I chose to fly out to Baghdad in the winter of 2022/2023 and conduct the interviews there. Interesting enough, interviews held in digital formats are considered more formal, therefore making physical interviews the more informal alternative (Eriksson-Zetterquist and Ahrne 2015). The interviews were held at the interviewees' workplaces; one of

which was a university library, the other an office at the Ministry of Culture. Due to the physical professional setting, the responses may have been more professional than personal, despite the informality claimed to accompany physical interviews.

#### *3.2.6.6 Ethical Aspects of Interviews*

A cornerstone in all research is the principle of informed consent which is about mutual trust and guaranteed voluntary participation (Öberg 2015). It is about informing the interviewees about the research so that they may know how the answers will be used and be given the opportunity to refuse certain questions. However, even if the interviewees are informed about the purpose of the research project, they still do not know how their answers will be analyzed, presented, and used (Öberg 2015).

For this purpose, I sent out an interview consent form together with a brief description of the thesis, and a questionnaire consisting of prepared questions. The questionnaire served to inform the interviewees about the questions so that the interviewees could prepare their answers and decide in advance if there was a question they did not wish to answer. However, only one of the two interviewees chose to read the questionnaire in advance.

#### *3.2.6.7 Interview Consent Form*

The interview consent form included information about the interviews, such as contact-information, recording and transcription, and time (see attachment I). The form states, inter alia, that access to the interview transcript will be limited to the researcher and the researcher's supervisors, and that the interviewee may stop the interview at any time.

Before signing the interview form, the interviewees read and signed statements about reviewing notes and transcripts, consenting to be quoted directly, and given the option of anonymity. None of the interviews wished to be anonymous. Before and after the interview, the interviewees were given a brief verbal description of the thesis idea alongside the thesis's provisional title, to prepare them for how their answers might be used.

### 3.2.7 Data Analysis Methods

#### 3.2.7.1 *Thematic Analysis*

The data analysis, like the rest of the research, adopts an inductive approach. It applies a thematic analysis to process the data as the data was collected without a hypothesis; instead, the analysis is based on drawing conclusions from the data. A thematic analysis enables such conclusions to be formed because it groups bodies of data by similarities and then derives meanings from those similarities (Saunders et al 2007). Using this form of analysis, repeated patterns of meaning are derived from a data set that creates themes to interpret (Braun and Clarke 2006). For the analysis, the data codes were compiled and analyzed into potential themes. Relevant data extracts were then compiled into suitable identified themes.

As the analysis reports participants' experiences, meanings, and realities, the analysis falls into the category of essentialist thematic analysis. Moreover, it adopts a latent approach, meaning that it looks for implicit meanings in the participant's experiences and theorizes them (Braun and Clarke 2006).

The themes identified and interpreted were 1) National Identity and a Nation's Narrative, 2) Cultural Heritage, Cultural Memory, and a Nation's Narrative, 3) Representation and Multiculturalism, 4) Social Functions and Democracy.

#### 3.2.7.2 *Coding*

The coding was carried out in multiple rounds. An initial coding of the interview answers determined the subcategories seen in the literature review. Thereafter, a second coding of the interviews was conducted. Data from the interviews were divided into conceptual units and given one of the following labels: Cultural Heritage, Social Constructions, Libraries' Social Functions, or Narrative. An additional focused coding was conducted in conjunction with the rereading of the data, wherein themes were specified in a funnel technique manner. That is, the original themes were divided into secondary themes based on the contexts of the data. Among the secondary themes were the labels unity, representation, symbolism, and loss. Thence, another reduction was made which brought out the labels of a mutual national identity, symbolism, and war strategy. These were the final labels and the ones used in the results section.

The coding was done manually with color-coded notes on paper.

### 3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated the methodology of the thesis, starting with the research philosophy, and ending with the data analysis method. I have shown that I have implemented an interpretivist inductive approach, relying heavily on qualitative methods. The research is of exploratory nature, drawing statements from interviews and existing theories around libraries, cultural heritage, and cultural memory in a case study to devise a thematic analysis.

The next chapter applies the chosen methodology to thematize the data and present the results.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to examine libraries as expressions of cultural heritage and the significance of the destruction and rebuilding of libraries. To do so, the two Iraqi librarians, Faiza al-Bayati and Saad Eskander, were asked about their experiences and perceptions regarding these matters. This chapter presents the findings thematically in three categories: Unity, Symbolism, and War Strategy.

### 4.2 Findings

#### 4.2.1 Unity

This category discusses replies relating to the ways in which national libraries function as unifiers. This section begins by discussing libraries' roles in creating a mutual National Identity and concludes with notes on Diversity and Representation.

##### *4.2.1.1 A Mutual National Identity*

There is a recurring argument among scholars – such as Weiss (2019) and Roman (2016) as introduced in the literature review – that cultural heritage institutions unite people, and the interviews show this clearly. A common perception is that libraries unite their patrons and create a sense of belonging:

Libraries unite people, and that is because [the library] exposes [patrons] to other people's intellectual views and [invites to] discussions among them and the exchanging of ideas, especially if it is [about] national literature, because [the national literature] unites its people.

*Faiza al-Bayati*

National libraries unite people in the physical space when they unite people socially, as well as through the cultural heritage preservation work when they unite peoples' histories. It is from this unification of histories that a national identity is derived. One of the interviewees, Saad Eskander, asserted that a national library must present the country's diversity and provide all citizens with information about their identity, whether it is about backgrounds, languages, religions, or geographical locations. When cultural heritage institutions, such as national libraries, safeguard these identities, they support the creation of a mutual national identity – one that emerges from the interactive processes between diverse groups of people.

Libraries play [a role] in creating a mutual language for all Iraqi citizens. It [The national library] builds bridges between the Iraqi people. The national identity is derived from that [meeting]: That the Arab meets the Kurdish culture, and that the Kurd meets the Arabic culture,

and that the Christian meets the Muslim [culture], and that one geographical area meets another geographical area. The culture of a nation is an interactive process, and not one [given] by force. [...] The national identity came in conjunction with the modern nation. But these [pre-national] identities, if interlinked consensually and not by force, create a national identity. The national libraries play a big role in the aspect of creating a national identity: [the library] creates a mutual memory.

*Saad Eskander.*

In the interview, Eskander gives a description of how the national library helped librarians from distinct parts of the country to develop relationships during the sectarianism. He recounts how the national library brought together librarians from segregated areas for an educative project in Baghdad. In the beginning, the librarians did not interact with each other for the fear and distrust that the Sectarian War had instilled in them. As part of the project, the librarians had to share the same hotels, bus trips, and meals. By the end of the educational project, they had established relationships with each other, exchanging emails and taking pictures together.

The most beautiful thing I remember is how [one person] was afraid of [another] person, and at the end [of the project] bridges of trust and deep relationships were built [between them]. It is one of the achievements of the national library.

*Saad Eskander.*

National libraries thus unite not only patrons but also librarians - especially in times of conflict.

#### *4.2.1.2 Representation and Multiculturalism*

This theme shares similarities with the category about a mutual National Identity. However, as I consider a diverse and representative collection to be an important topic, I have given this subject its own separate subcategory.

Many modern nations in South Asia and North Africa are defined by borders drawn by other empires without regard to the ethnic groups living within those borders. The modern nations are therefore made up of a variety of ethnic nationalities and peoples who share mutual borders. Therefore, it is important that the history of each group is included in the national collections so that the national identity represents all ethnic groups in that nation. Both interviewees stress the importance of representing national ethnic groups in the collections. The national collection acts as a witness to the multiculturalism of a nation and may also encourage students to research the history of other ethnic groups or identities:

Because the collection is a national collection, it presents the diversity of the culture of Iraq, and [provides] the Iraqi students [with information] regarding their identity: background, religion, or geographical location.

*Saad Eskander.*



When talking about Iraq's National Library and Archive joining the World Digital Library, Eskander explains that he made sure Iraq's multiculturalism was represented.

We spoke about the multicultural representation of the national collection, so I diversified [the digital contributions]: I uploaded Kurdish materials, I uploaded Arabic materials, [and] I uploaded Assyrian materials, to show the world that Iraq is multicultural.

*Saad Eskander.*

Representing a national collection as diverse shows that the nation and its national identity are multicultural and made up of a variety of cultures and languages – just like the collection itself. Following the example provided by Ovcina (2016) the national and university library of Bosnia and Herzegovina, too, held documents in a variety of languages that displayed the nation's multiculturalism. Thus, to demonstrate a nation's multiculturalism, the multiculturalism must be represented in the national cultural heritage collection.

This is especially relevant for Iraq where there is a prominent level of urban segregation, as seen empirically. While one city is made up largely of Christian Assyrians, another is made up largely of Shia Arabs, and a third largely of Sunni Kurds. It is my understanding that there is a conflict of interest between the capital's heritage workers and the residents of the segregated cities. While the citizens want to create their own Iraqi identity: one limited to certain ethnic groups, languages or cultures, the cultural heritage workers believe that an Iraqi identity cannot and must not be limited to an ethnic group, a language or culture, etc. Since the land that Iraq is on has been part of great empires (Mesopotamia, Babylon, Assyria, Persian Empire, Roman Empire, Macedonian Empire, Abbasid Caliphate, Ottoman Empire, among others) the Iraqi cultural heritage is thus very multicultural, consisting of various cultural identities and histories. As such, the Iraqi heritage is as much Christian, as it is Muslim, as it is Jewish; As much Assyrian, as it is Arabic, as it is Kurdish, as it is Armenian, as it is Turkic, and so on.

Eskander explained that the Iraqi cultural ministry has been focusing on representing the Iraqi Jewish culture as well. The Iraqi Jewish heritage is something that al-Bayati also discusses when talking about the Iraqi cultural heritage.

Regarding the Jewish Iraqi heritage, al-Bayati claims that the Jewish history in Iraq dates back 3,000 years to the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who brought the Judeans as captives. Iraqi Jews constitute thus one of the world's oldest and more historically significant Jewish communities. However, the loss of the artifacts that

represent the Iraqi Jewish heritage means that the current Iraqi national identity is not fully representative of the people considered to be Iraqis.

The Jewish people have lived in Iraq for more than 3,000 years. That means they are Iraqis. [...] So, the Jewish heritage became [part of the] Iraqi heritage. [That is why] the Zionists stole many documents belonging to Jewish Iraqis and took them to Israel – because they believe [the documents] should be in their custody and should not stay in Iraq.

*Faiza al-Bayati*

She goes on to explain that a substantial number of Iraqi documents and artifacts were looted from Iraq in 2003 and found in many other nations. She believes that the artifacts strengthen and legitimize other states and refers to Israel as an example of such a phenomenon. Conversely, the loss of Iraqi Jewish documents and artifacts weakens the Iraqi national identity, as it loses what represents the Jewish heritage as part of the national identity. Moreover, the loss of artifacts paired with the lack of representation alienates Jewish Iraqis from the Iraqi cultural identity. This demonstrates how the lack of representation in the national collection causes a group of people to be nationally underrepresented and alienated, as is the case with Jewish Iraqis and the Iraqi Jewish heritage, which has been part of the Iraq history for 3,000 years but whose artifacts have now been lost to Iraq.

The findings under this subcategory regarding representation and multiculturalism show that representation, and the lack thereof, not only reveals a nation's multiculturalism but also conceals it.

## 4.2.2 Symbolism

This theme presents the symbolic interpretations from the interviews. Based on the answers in the interviews, libraries symbolize cultural identities and knowledge of self, as well as resistance.

### 4.2.2.1 Identities and Knowledge of Self

The modern nation has two symbols: the national library that authenticates the production of culture and knowledge, and the national museum that [represents] the memory of the ancient history.

*Saad Eskander.*

Based on this statement, it is evident that national libraries are understood as something that authenticates and produces national culture and knowledge, but more than that, it symbolically legitimizes a modern nation, since cultural heritage constitutes a collective identity, as explained by Weiss (2019). When asked what we lose when we lose libraries, al-Bayati said the following:

We lose everything: we lose our identities: our history: our cultures.

*Faiza al-Bayati*

With reference to al-Bayati's reply, libraries symbolize identities, histories, and cultures. They symbolize what people define themselves by. Furthermore, libraries and the cultural heritage they preserve, constitute identities with the help of which future generations will understand themselves. It is in that way that cultural heritage and libraries may impact identities and the perceptions of self.

[Destruction impacts future generations] Because they will not find any documents pertaining to their origins, or their history, or their culture, or their education. Everything will be gone.

*Faiza al-Bayati.*

Thus, the destruction of cultural heritage symbolizes the destruction of identity. If collective memories are eradicated, then so are the collective identities based on said collective memories. That is why libraries must be resilient – to prevent the complete eradication of collective memories.

#### *4.2.2.2 Resistance*

With the fall of the dictatorship in Iraq came the incineration of books and documents regarding the dictatorial regime.

I kept Saddam's books, I kept the Baathi party's manifestos. [When] They began burning the books, I chased them away. I told them 'It was a sick period in our history, we must remember and study it. We cannot burn [the books] and believe it is gone; its traces remain, [so] we must preserve it.' [...] All of Saddam's Books were on display [in the national library]: my point was that Iraq is not afraid.

*Saad Eskander.*

Because these ideas exist, these consequences happened, but we must deal with them. Not eradicate them. The burning [of such literature] is to flee. The preservation is to deal with [it], so that you can learn a lesson. That was our philosophy in the national library, we refused the extirpators to enter the building.

*Saad Eskander.*

Preserving banned books symbolizes resisting the books' expressions. Even if a book is destroyed, the idea that enabled its creation is not. That is why Eskander thinks that such books should be preserved – to be able to investigate and understand how things turned out the way they did. Furthermore, the preservation of banned books in national libraries signal that the people and the librarians are not afraid of the past. Libraries and librarians symbolize resistance – or so believes Eskander. For al-Bayati, preserving banned literature serves an educative purpose:

Future generations need to know what the different political ideas of people throughout the ages were: the beliefs of the political parties, their principles, what ideas were favored or not favored [...]. All of this is a national heritage that must be preserved regardless of our

differences of opinion because future generations have the right to know why a certain political regime was overthrown or what ideas were opposed.

*Faiza al-Bayati*

While Faiza al-Bayati believes that political parties' books and documents should be preserved so that future generations may look back on them and understand the historical and political development of a nation, Saad Eskander believes that they should be preserved so that future generations may draw lessons from them: what enabled and normalized the crimes against humanity, i.e., the ethnic cleansings and wars that took place in the 70s and 80s. Regardless, both agree that the books and documents must be preserved so that people may study them, instead of running away from them. The act of keeping them, regardless of their usage, is what symbolizes both resistance and resilience. Furthermore, Saad Eskander believes that librarians play a vital role against war and conflict:

A librarian, or an archivist, or anyone who works with culture, has a weapon to resist terrorism and the sectarianism that is tearing the country apart.

*Saad Eskander.*

Since sectarianism is a political or cultural conflict between groups of people, the continued work with culture, especially national culture, symbolizes resisting that which is tearing a nation apart. When it comes to terrorism, keeping the libraries open may symbolize resistance against the terrorists' agendas. If terrorists & sectarianism want to divide people & disrupt their everyday lives, then the librarians become symbols of resistance as they continue to unite people via cultural heritage and by doing their jobs as usual:

The best way to combat terrorists is by normalization of culture. Cultural and educational institutions must not close their doors. [...] [because] what do terrorists want? They want to disturb peoples' everyday lives: [They want to see] a child who doesn't go to school, a reader who doesn't read, a person who doesn't visit the museum, a person who doesn't go about his daily work and perform his craftsmanship, so the best way to face [terrorism] is to insist that [life] is normal.

*Saad Eskander.*

In the face of destruction, libraries and cultural institutions become a beacon of light, as they symbolize new beginnings and hope.

#### 4.2.3 War Strategy

As touched upon in the literature review, destruction of libraries and other cultural heritage institutions can be strategies to wage war against another nation's culture or to strengthen one's own nation's culture. This is something that also appears in the interview responses.

There are places that enemies always target. They are the national libraries, the archive centers, and institutions that preserve manuscripts, and these [...] institutions are what enemies target the most.

*Faiza al-Bayati*

The events of 2003 are known; There were attacks on most academic and cultural institutions, from the libraries to the [...] museums, but the institution that took the most damage was the House of Books and Documents [Iraq National Library and Archive], as it was burned twice.

*Saad Eskander.*

From the above statements, we know that cultural heritage institutions were particularly vulnerable to the wars and political unrest. It is not surprising that it is so, but the question is what purpose does destroying cultural heritage institutions serve?

The Iraqi [identity] consists of Babylonian, and Assyrian, and Chaldean, and Abbasid, and Ottoman [history]. Iraq is what we call the cradle of civilizations. That is why the [other external] nations that want to wage war on Iraq always have a goal of stealing what is the most precious to [the Iraqi peoples]. [...] As long as the oppressor has the means to plan [theft] and knows how to steal [artifacts], they will be stolen.

*Faiza al-Bayati*

When nations declare war, they strike what is most valuable to the people to hurt them deeply. Here Faiza believes that the most valuable thing to the Iraqi peoples is their cultural heritage and identities. When asked what it meant for the Iraqi people to see the library destroyed, Faiza replied as follows:

The Iraqi people were deeply hurt by the looting and burning of the contents of the library [in 2003], [...] and they know that this was a plot by the coalition [the occupation administrated as part of George W. Bush's Global War on Terror] to destroy the Iraqi heritage and erase its history and plunder all the culture of the Iraqi people so that the Iraqi peoples will not find nothing to indicate their origins and heritage – and so that their documents and history are lost so that they cannot be proud of their history and heritage. And so that other peoples can easily exploit [Iraq] and exploit its riches and resources: plunder and steal and transfer them to [other] countries.

*Faiza al-Bayati*

Waging war against culture has more consequences, and perhaps even goals, than solely strengthening one's own nation's culture: that is, destroying and erasing other nations' identities. al-Bayati implies that destroying cultural heritage not only erases a people's origin, heritage, culture, and history, but it is also a strategy to weaken and exploit other countries and their pride in their cultural heritage. In her response, there seems to be a connection between a nation's pride in its own cultural heritage (or lack thereof) and a nation's vulnerability to exploitation. According to her, when other nations wage war on Iraq's cultural heritage, they seek to strip the

country of all traces of its history, thus weakening its right to claim what rightfully belongs to the nation and its people.

### 4.3 Conclusion

The presented results show that national libraries, through their cultural heritage work, aid the creation and development of a national identity. For that reason, they are also targets of war: that is, to eradicate a culture and weaken the state of a nation by robbing them of a national pride, sense of community, and cultural identity. Lastly, the reestablishment of libraries symbolizes resilience as it demonstrates people's refusal to give in to the destructive powers threatening to eradicate their nation's collective culture.

In the next chapter I will analyze and discuss the meanings of these findings.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1 Introduction

The point of this thesis was to examine the cultural implications of libraries – their destruction as well as their restoration – on contemporary culture and cultural identity. To answer the research question: what do the destruction and the reestablishment of libraries symbolize? I have asked two librarians who have witnessed the destruction and reestablishment of libraries to share their experiences with me. This research has focused on the implications of national libraries and their roles on a nation's perceptions of itself. The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings by coupling the results with existing literature. This chapter begins by outlining the key findings. I then present an interpreted thematic analysis of the findings. The chapter concludes by summarizing the findings.

### 5.2 Key Findings

The results showed that national libraries play a leading role in bringing people together. More so, they symbolize identity and knowledge of self. The destructions of libraries thus functions as war strategies with the goal of destroying identity. In the following subchapter, I will couple the answers from the interviewees with the existing research presented in the literature review to clarify for what the destruction and the reestablishment of libraries symbolize.

### 5.3 Interpretation of Findings

As argued in the literature review, culture always plays a role in war (A. Assmann 2016). Whether it is to use the opponent's culture as a trophy or exposing and exploiting the opponent's culture, it results in the humiliation of the opponent, the weakening of their national pride, and the strengthening of the attacker's own nation – both symbolically and materially (i.e., the exploitation of resources). Because cultural heritage constitutes cultural memory, and cultural memory constitute cultural identities, cultural heritage becomes, therefore, a target in war as a means of destroying identity.

To recap previous sections, cultural heritage is divided into two categories: tangible and intangible cultural heritage. While the tangible cultural heritage in national libraries consists of inter alia documents, books, manuscripts, publications, and

catalogues, the intangible cultural heritage in national libraries is the programs, discussions, and services that librarians offer to their patrons. Libraries thus play many roles in their communities regarding the preservation and creation of cultural heritage. It is therefore not surprising that libraries are targeted in war.

While the results presented findings from the interviews about what libraries provide to their communities, nations, and patrons, this section analyzes what libraries symbolize in destruction and in reestablishment by linking the findings with existing literature.

### 5.3.1 What the Destruction of Libraries Symbolizes

#### *5.3.1.1 Cultural Heritage, Cultural Memory, and a Nation's Narrative:*

As explained by Virkus (2019) cultural heritage may be understood as socio-culturally constructed, particularly intangible cultural heritage as it is entirely reliant on people's collective memories. Intangible cultural heritage affects sociocultural identities because it is through them that we understand ourselves, both collectively and individually (A. Assmann 2010).

When those parts of the cultural heritage disappear or change so too do our perceptions of ourselves. Intangible cultural heritage does not only entail sociocultural identities, but it is also affected by contemporary definitions around sociocultural identities. Change the definitions of sociocultural identities, and you change the understanding of intangible cultural heritage.

We may apply the same rhetoric on cultural memory. Cultural memory are objects actualized by people and institutions to bear a certain collective historical significance (Erll 2010). They may also convey cultural identities to the people who share the cultural memory (J. Assmann 2010). Thus, when a cultural memory is destroyed, i.e., an object understood as a cultural memory (here referencing a cultural heritage), so too is the cultural identity and the perception of self.

This is something that Al-Bayati confirms when she says the following regarding the destruction of libraries, cultural heritage, and national collections:

We lose everything: we lose our identities: our history: our cultures.

*Faiza al-Bayati*

Since we remember and create memories through culture, memories are thus reliant on the preservation of culture (A. Assmann 2010). If we cannot preserve culture,



regardless of if it is tangible or intangible culture, then we cannot remember. That is where the concepts of passive and active forgetting come in.

While passive forgetting is the non-intentional acts of forgetting – such as losing, neglecting, and abandoning objects and monuments – active forgetting is the intentional acts of forgetting – such as burning, destroying, and vandalizing objects and monuments (J. Assmann 2010). When culture is destroyed there is nothing left to relay our history and identity to us. Furthermore, as libraries hold literature, they hold ideas of the past to convey to the future. Destroying a culture's literature means to break the continuity between the culture's past and its future. Waging war on culture and destroying cultural monuments and institutions means to force the people to actively forget their cultural memory and their potential futures, and, by extension, their cultural identity. Destroying libraries therefore symbolizes the forced extinction of national cultural identities and their potential futures. I reason that a nation's narrative is dependent on the abilities of the nation to nationally remember and represent the cultural heritage of its peoples.

Larsson's (2005) analysis implies that there may have been a political advantage to the looting. It serves to humiliate the population of the occupied country, thus destroying their national identity. Furthermore, Larsson claims that the destruction of national identity is a strategy to control and exercise authority over a nation, a statement which she bases on Said's theory *Orientalism*.

She goes on to present a statement which asserts that it is in the interests of American imperialism to humiliate Iraq and that attacking the cultural resources that connect the Iraqi people with 7,000 years of history is part of the process of systematically destroying their national identity (Larsson 2005). It is in this way that the destruction of cultural heritage, and by extension national identity, plays an important strategic role in war, thus symbolizing the eradication of cultural and national identities.

With this background in mind, Boustany's (2019) claim that cultural heritage is intertwined with contemporary social, economic, and cultural reality becomes significantly clearer. However, a nation sent into violent turmoil does not have the luxury of focusing its resources on remembering, representing, and documenting its cultural heritage, despite the importance of cultural heritage to a nation's narrative and willpower to fight back.

### *5.3.1.2 Representation and Multiculturalism*

Cultural heritage and national collections serve as evidence of a nation's multiculturalism. Showing and unifying the cultural heritage of ethnic groups nationally, symbolizes the nation's perception of themselves as a multicultural nation.

Because the collection is a national collection, it presents the diversity of the culture of Iraq.

*Saad Eskander.*

To destroy a national collection is thus to destroy what proves the nation's multiculturalism. An example of this loss and its effects on perception of self, is the National Library of Bosnia and Hercegovina, which lost that which represented its multiculturalism when its diverse collection was destroyed. The destruction symbolized the loss of the witnesses to the nation's multiculturalism (Ovcina 2016). This is a phenomenon that Iraq's National Library and Archive saw when it lost that which represents its Jewish cultural heritage.

Furthermore, to include the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups in the national collection is to represent all groups within a nation, thus symbolizing that the nation belongs to all its peoples. If two ethnic groups have a shared national collection and national cultural heritage, but the national collection and cultural heritage are changed to represent only one ethnic group, then both ethnic groups become affected by the change: in addition to one benefiting and the other being disadvantaged, both groups' perceptions of themselves, each other, and the nation that once housed them, are altered.

Following this logic, the destruction of libraries, which alters the national cultural heritage and collections to represent only one or a select ethnic groups, rather than all the nation's ethnic groups, symbolizes racism and injustice.

### *5.3.1.3 Social Functions and Democracy*

Libraries have the potential to increase equity and promote a socially inclusive society by providing opportunities for people to access resources and information, learn new things, and connect with others in their community (Scott 2011). This, too, is shared by the interviewees when they state that libraries allow for discussions and the exchanging of ideas:

[...] [the library] exposes [patrons] to other people's intellectual views and [invites to] discussions among them and the exchanging of ideas, [...]

*Faiza al-Bayati*

Libraries provide space for people to come together, share ideas, facilitate the conversations through programming, and promote an understanding of diverse ideas (Scott 2011). As libraries facilitate deliberation, they therefore promote democracy and democratic decision-making. To destroy a library is to destroy its ability to promote democracy. Therefore, the destruction of libraries also symbolizes a plot to destroy democracy and democratic decision-making.

### 5.3.2 What the Reestablishment of Libraries Symbolizes

#### 5.3.2.1 *National Identity and a Nation's Narrative*

In accordance with Roman (2016) libraries play a leading role in the national identity and community life. This is a rhetoric shared by the interviewees as presented in the results.

The national libraries play an important role in the aspect of creating a national identity: [the library] creates a mutual memory.

*Saad Eskander.*

Since libraries aid in the creation of a national identity, it is thus unsurprising that national libraries symbolize a nation's cultural identity. It seems to me clear that the nation's narrative changes when the libraries change – such as in the case of destruction – because national libraries, as all cultural heritage institutions do, influence a nation's narrative. If the destruction of libraries symbolizes an attempt to eradicate national identities and to change a nation's narrative, often for the worse, then the reestablishment of libraries symbolizes both the refusal to submit to the powers that threaten to eradicate their identities as well as resistance to the oppressors and schemers who aim to change their nation's narratives.

#### 5.3.2.2 *Representation and Multiculturalism*

As explained by Ovcina (2016), the destruction of libraries plays a clear strategic role: the goal is to destroy all that bears witness to centuries-old identity and coexistence between groups.

If libraries serve as institutions that unite people and present the nation's multiculturalism, and the destruction of libraries symbolizes destroying said coexistence and multiculturalism, not to mention racism and injustice, then the restoration of libraries symbolizes active brotherhood and sisterhood: Since the destruction of a nation's multiculturalism serves to further divide people, the reestablishment symbolizes standing up against the strategy that seeks to systematically discriminate and divide both people and their mutual national identity.

The reestablishment of libraries and multicultural national collections can thus be seen as endurance in the face of division and injustice. Perhaps it is on this basis that Saad Eskander argues that librarians, and other cultural professionals, play a leading role in resisting terrorism and war: for they have the power to symbolize (national) resistance to injustice.

#### *5.3.2.3 Social Functions and Democracy*

I have established that the destruction of libraries also symbolizes an attempt to destroy democracy. Since libraries are responsible for introducing different values, interests, and perceptions to their patrons, the destruction of libraries thus symbolizes the destruction of the opportunity to interact and exchange opinions with one another. Furthermore, in addition to community-building, libraries promote social inclusivity as they provide access to resources and information (Scott 2011). As such, to destroy a library is to destroy that which gives a nation equal right to knowledge and a sense of community.

Knowing that the destruction of libraries symbolizes the threat to democratic decision-making, means that the restoration of libraries symbolizes fighting for one's democratic rights and the freedom to discuss political ideas openly. Additionally, given that the destruction also symbolizes destruction of fair access to knowledge and community, the reestablishment symbolizes justice and fighting for one's community.

## **5.4. Conclusion**

In this subsection I summarize the answers to the research question "What do the destruction and the reestablishment of national libraries symbolize?"

If building a library means creating access to education, community, history, and cultural identity, and destroying a library means robbing a people of their identity, then an unbuilt library means a forgotten community and a lost culture. The act of reestablishing a library therefore means fighting for one's community and culture. Furthermore, as libraries are seen as bridges of trust that build relationships and promote democracy, the reestablishment of destroyed libraries may be seen as taking practical action to bring about political or social change. In that way, they may symbolize activism, alongside resistance against their oppressors.

Since libraries play a leading role in constituting national and cultural identities, it is not surprising that they are destroyed in acts of terrorism and wars. If the goal is to weaken a nation and its will to fight back, then it is an instinct to target that which a nation uses to strengthen itself and its identity: that is, cultural heritage institutions. By dividing a group of people and their cultural heritage, their mutual national identity is weakened. When they are divided, they will not fight together – rather they will fight one another, further weakening the state of the nation. As such, the destruction of libraries does not only symbolize the eradication of culture, but it also symbolizes the weakened state of a nation and its national identity, making the nation and its peoples more vulnerable to exploitation and segregation.

Terrorists and actors of war have clear purposes: to weaken the state of a nation, humiliate a group of people, and interrupt their everyday lives. Consequently, when libraries and librarians, and other cultural heritage institutions and professionals, resist and rebuild their institutions, they become symbols of nonviolent resistance movements.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Application

This chapter discusses the findings and ways in which the results may be applied in practice. Since I reside in Sweden and this thesis is written as part of a Swedish higher education, I have contextualized the relevance of the results for Sweden. I would like to point out that this research is of explorative inductive nature and that these conclusions are hypotheses whose reliability has not yet been assessed. Thereafter I make suggestions for further research.

#### 6.1.1 Representation and Multiculturalism

By understanding how representation and diversity play important roles in the creation of national identities, we may understand the need to promote diverse collections. As explained under results, a multicultural and representative national collection shows the nation's multiculturalism. Representation, or the lack thereof, has the power to show a nation as multicultural or monocultural. Monoculturalism is created at the expense of many ethnic groups by underrepresenting or misrepresenting their cultural identities and erasing their cultural histories. I consider this form of cultural oppression to be both consequences and main goals of the destruction of libraries.

The results show that destruction of the libraries does not have to consist of active forgetting i.e., the intentional acts of destructions such as burning or vandalizing documents. It can also consist of passive forgetting, that is, hiding, neglecting, or disregarding cultural heritage (A. Assmann 2010). National libraries have the power to represent and unite the nation's people. Therefore, libraries can be considered as strategies to combat racism: that is, by actively displaying the nation's diversity and multiculturalism.

In an Iraqi context, the results show the importance of accurately representing the nation's history and cultural diversity. For Iraq and its segregated state, there is a need for the heritage institutions to proactively represent its national collections to strengthen the national community and to prevent the recurrence of sectarian events. In a state where there is much to be gained from weakening the mutual cultural identity, it is even more important to work with unity and to protect the mutual cultural identity from being mutilated.

Placed in a Swedish context, this analysis shows the role of libraries in representing their people. It is in my opinion not plausible to blame the monocultural library collections on the fact that the modern Swedish national identity is defined as Scandinavians with Germanic origin, considering that the Swedish nationality is in a process of change.

In addition to Sweden's task of protecting its national minority groups (Jews, Roma, Sámi, Sweden Finns (Ruotsinsuomalaiset or Sverigefinnar), and Tornedalians (Tornionlaaksolaiset) (SFS 2009:724), Sweden also has a positive net migration rate (meaning more people are moving into the country than are leaving it) (SCB 2023). Thus, in a decade or two, the Swedish cultural identity and nationality will also have changed in accordance with the migration patterns and trends. Therefore, the libraries need to keep up with this development and represent this diversity in their collections. The same rhetoric may be applied on the other Scandinavian countries, as well as other nations with positive net migrations rates.

### 6.1.2 Social Function and Democracy

One thing that distinguishes libraries from the other cultural heritage institutions is their social roles. Libraries offer their patrons services to gain knowledge and broaden their perceptions (Scott 2011). They do this by adapting the transfer of knowledge so that everyone can participate in the information on their own terms. The services range from access to computers to interactive programs (Scott 2011). This thesis highlights the social functions of libraries, i.e., as providers of space and opportunities to discuss and share opinions and beliefs with one another: to connect with each other and create a sense of belonging: to use libraries for democratic purposes – that is, to exercise the right to education and to share and form one's own opinions without interference from external actors. The libraries' resistance to destruction thus symbolizes the fight for democratic rights. Subsequently, the phenomenon of reestablishing libraries can be seen as a kind of nonviolent activism for democracy. I argue that libraries play a key role in the development of democracy and the exercise of democratic rights in places where democracy and democratic rights are threatened.

Moreover, libraries that persist in providing their patrons with such functions may lift the spirits of the people oppressed by the power that threatens their democratic rights. Libraries' resistance as symbols of social justice may well be what causes the people to resist and overcome their oppressors. By making this claim, I argue that symbolism plays a key role in motivating people to action. For these reasons, I

believe that libraries should actively work with democracy and social justice, and not assume passive roles towards their politics, governments, or oppressors. For in desperate times, libraries may be used as a symbol to motivate people to resist oppression.

## 6.2 Further research

The current study can be interpreted as a first step in the study of the symbolism of the reestablishment of libraries. However, my results should be treated with caution due to the small sample size and limiting nature of the case study.

There are topics in my research that I have touched upon but not expanded due to the various limitations of the thesis, which would benefit from further studies. Future research could further examine the symbolism of libraries and the roles they play for a nation.

### 6.2.1 Comparative Studies

As this is a context-bound case study, the implications of the results are limited to the findings from examining Iraq's National Library and Archive. In the future it would be helpful to explore international differences in a comparative study to see how different destructions of cultural heritage institutions affect nations in diverse ways. No destruction is the same. Therefore, both the destruction and the reestablishment may also entail different consequences, perceptions, and symbolism depending on the context of the destruction. While this thesis may very well be applied in the contexts of the contemporary war between Ukraine and Russia (UNESCO 2023), it cannot be applied in all contexts of destruction. Future research may include the further testing of the hypothesis developed here.

### 6.2.2 Transnational Identities and National Cultural Heritage.

In conjunction with the current international migration movements, perceptions of identity around nationality have shifted. Is it defined by background, language, religion, passport, or places of residence? It is difficult to define what entails a national cultural heritage, when we have yet to define national identity. With regards to transnational identities (Vertovec 2007), where people have a background in one or more nations, but national affiliation with another – the question of national cultural heritage becomes difficult. Whose national identity constitutes the heritage? Is it those who live there or those who have lived there? Are neo-Americans who once emigrated from Sweden to the U.S., Swedes, or Americans? Is their national identity and cultural heritage Swedish or American?



Are Iraqis who once emigrated to Sweden, Iraqis, or Swedes? And is their national identity and cultural heritage Iraqi or Swedish?

Depending on the answers to such questions, the ways that cultural heritage institutions should work with their national collections vary. There is much to study when it comes to cultural heritage, national collections, and transnational identities, not least because the topic of transnational identities is highly crucial in contemporary political climate.

### 6.2.3 International Relations and Cultural Heritage Institutions

A topic that came up in the interviews but did not find a place within the limitations of the thesis, was the subject of how much of Iraqi cultural heritage is not found in Iraq, but instead is preserved around the world. The interviewees mainly mentioned France, Great Britain, and the United States, as nations storing and showcasing artifacts important to the Iraqi cultural heritage – ranging from the Hammurabi stele, currently in the Louvre in Paris (Louvre 2023), to the two Lyres of Ur (Queen’s lyre and silver lyre) currently in the British Museum in London (British Museum 2023).

It raises the question of whose cultural heritage is preserved. Should the artifacts remain there and be considered “World Heritage” – as in accordance with UNESCO’s definition (UNESCO n.d.), even though artifacts are not “heritage sites” – when there are an entire people who requires those artifacts to define their own cultural heritage and national identities? Did the discussion around where to store the Akkadian, the Babylonian and the Assyrian objects include the groups of people most concerned and affected? Or have others made those choices for them? I suggest that racist and orientalist biases be considered in such research. Are there implications that the land or culture of origin is inadequate in preserving its own cultural heritage?

With regards to the Jewish Iraqi heritage, some Israeli posts claim that Iraqi legislation is antisemitic, and that Iraq should not be allowed to reclaim its Iraqi Jewish heritage (Basri and Levin 2022), while, in actuality, Iraq’s legislation is antizionist, not antisemitic. In conversations with the interviewees, they express a wish to define the cultural heritage and national identity to include Iraq’s many groups, including Iraqi jews. Using claims of racism to further implement racism towards other groups is also a topic that can be studied in terms of how it prevents

the restoration of cultural heritage and diversification of national identities, and international implications.

These are topics that could be explored further in an effort to break free from the racially biased chains of colonialism and imperialism that still shackle our contemporary world.

#### 6.2.4 Racially Charged Implications of the Destruction of Cultural Heritage

In the first week of March 2023, Lund's University held a seminar on islamophobia and the law, of which misinformation and rationalized bigotry was discussed. When discussing the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Global War on Terror, Beydoun says the following:

As a consequence of demonizing the Iraqi people and being able to stage and legitimize a more than decades long illegal and baseless war [...] the objective was rational utilitarian access to resources in that country, specifically oil.

*Khaled Beydoun 28:05.1-28:22.2*

The abovementioned explanation is then used to define the intent of islamophobia as a way to demonize a people in order to gain access to inter alia economic incentives and political benefits.

It is based on this definition that I claim that the effects of the Global War on Terror played a vital role in normalizing the discourses around the continuous state of terror in South Asia and North Africa (SANA). It begs the question, did the destruction of cultural heritage – especially national libraries, museums, and archives – play a key role in the pandemic of perceiving the state of SANA nations as prejudicially confined to terrorism?

Larsson's discourse analysis (2005) showed that there were elements of orientalism in the first years of the Global War on Terror – that is up until 2005 – while I present the ways in which the destruction of cultural heritage institutions acts as war strategies. Larsson's and my thesis overlap as they are both based on the 2003 destruction, but hers is a discourse analysis while mine is a case study. Neither one of us explores the destruction of cultural heritage and cultural heritage institutions as cultural warfare strategies from the perspective of critical theory.

It would be interesting to investigate what prejudices are created and reinforced by the destruction of cultural heritage institutions in war, whether such prejudices are

widespread in the international relations between institutions, and how much they influence international power dynamics.

### 6.3 Conclusion

To find answers to these questions is of utmost importance to enable us to situate cultural heritage institutions in larger societal contexts, particularly regarding their representational and multicultural roles. As cultural heritage institutions are important to their communities – as argued in this thesis – their power and influence should be highlighted and problematized, both nationally and internationally.

## References

Assmann, A. (2010). 'Canon and Archive', in Erll, A. and Nünning, A. (ed). *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter. Pp. 97–107.

Assmann, A. (2016). The burning of books as an assault on cultural memory. In *KU Leuven, UC Louvain, the Goethe institute, and the British Council: What do we lose when we lose a library?* Leuven, Belgium, 9-11 September 2015, pp. 85–96. <https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf94/streamgate.pdf>

Assmann, J. (2010). 'Communicative and Cultural Memory, in Erll, A. and Nünning, A. (ed). *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter. Pp. 109–118.

Basri, C. Levan, S. (2022). Iraqi Jewish archives need to be returned to Iraqi Jews – opinion. *The Jerusalem Post*, 4 September. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-716232>

BBC. (2023). BBC Why did the US and allies invade Iraq, 20 years ago? *BBC*, 20 March. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-64980565>

Boustany, J. (2019). France. In *The role of libraries in promoting cultural heritage*, State of the Art report, Erasmus+.

Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3. 77-101. DOI: [10.1191/1478088706qp063oa](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa).

British Museum (2023). *Lyre*. [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W\\_1928-1010-1-a](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1928-1010-1-a) [2023-05-15]

Coker, M. Hassan, F. (2018). *In Strategic Iraqi City, a Week of Deadly Turmoil*, 8 September. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/08/world/middleeast/in-strategic-iraqi-city-a-week-of-deadly-turmoil.html>

Derez, M. (2016). The flames of Louvain: a library as a cultural icon and a political vehicle. In *KU Leuven, UC Louvain, the Goethe institute, and the British Council:*

*What do we lose when we lose a library?* Leuven, Belgium, 9-11 September 2015, pp. 25–36. <https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf94/streamgate.pdf>

Dziluma, M., Mežjāne, S., and Papule, K. (2019). Latvia. In *The role of libraries in promoting cultural heritage*, State of the Art report, Erasmus+.

Eriksson-Zetterquist, U., Ahrne, G. (2015). Intervjuer. In Ahrne, G. and Svensson, P. (red.) *Handbok i kvalitativa metoder*. Malmö: Liber, pp 34–53.

Erll, A. (2010). ‘Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction’, in Erll, A. and Nünning, A. (ed). *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter. Pp. 1–15.

Fabian, C. (2016). War and post-war trauma: lessons for cultural heritage today? In *KU Leuven, UC Louvain, the Goethe institute, and the British Council: What do we lose when we lose a library?* Leuven, Belgium, 9-11 September 2015, pp. 55–62. <https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf94/streamgate.pdf>

Fadhil, M. (2015). Isis destroys thousands of books and manuscripts in Mosul libraries. *The Guardian*, 26 February. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/26/isis-destroys-thousands-books-libraries>

Beydoun, K. (2023). *Khaled Beydoun - Islamophobia and the Law* [video]. <https://youtu.be/ARHsYt9FpZ8> [2023-05-18]

Khan, A. (2021). Hidden Pentagon Record Reveal Patterns of Failure in Deadly Airstrikes. *New York Times*, 18 December. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/12/18/us/airstrikes-pentagon-records-civilian-deaths.html>

Larsson, S. (2005). Gamar över Bagdad: En analys av berättelserna om vad som hände med Iraks kulturarv.

Louvre (2023). *Stéle*. <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010174436> [2023-05-15]

Lynx Qualey, M. (2015). ISIL torches Iraqi history in Mosul. *Aljazeera*, 27 February. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/2/27/isil-torches-iraqi-history-in-mosul>

Mallinder, L. (2023). Undaunted young Iraqis yearn for change: ‘These people who died will inspire people to go out again’. *The Irish Times*, 16 January. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/middle-east/2023/01/16/undaunted-young-iraqis-yearn-for-change-these-people-who-died-will-inspire-people-to-go-out-again/>

Ninkov, J., Marinković M., Jovičić S., and Kundačina B. (2019). Serbia. In *The role of libraries in promoting cultural heritage*, State of the Art report, Erasmus+.

Nyns, C-H. (2016). The Hydra library: destroy it and you will get two of them. In *KU Leuven, UC Louvain, the Goethe institute, and the British Council: What do we lose when we lose a library?* Leuven, Belgium, 9-11 September 2015, pp. 23–24. <https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf94/streamgate.pdf>

Orlean, S. (2018). *Biblioteket*. Stockholm: Atlantis.

Ovčina, I. (2016). What did the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina lose after 25/26th August 1992? In *KU Leuven, UC Louvain, the Goethe institute, and the British Council: What do we lose when we lose a library?* Leuven, Belgium, 9-11 September 2015, pp. 77–82. <https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf94/streamgate.pdf>

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (2004). Iraq: Archives, Libraries Devastated By War, Looting. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1053832.html>

Roman, S. (2016). Supporting libraries in societies under pressure: the British Council experience from 1934 to 2015. In *KU Leuven, UC Louvain, the Goethe institute, and the British Council What do we lose when we lose a library?* Leuven, Belgium, 9-11 September 2015, pp. 109–116. <https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf94/streamgate.pdf>

Rubin, A.J. (2023). 20 Years After U.S. Invasion, Iraq Is a Freer Place, but Not a Hopeful One. *New York Times*, 18 March.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/18/world/middleeast/iraq-war-20th-anniversary.html>

Ryan, G. (2018). Introduction to positivism, interpretivism and critical theory- Nurse researcher. 25(4), pp. 14–20. doi:10.7748/nr.2018.e1466.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2007) *Research Methods for Business Students*. 4th Edition, Edinburgh Gate, Harlow: Financial Times Prentice Hall.

SCB (2023). *Invandring och utvandring 1970–2022 samt framskrivning 2023–2070*. <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningsframskrivningar/befolkningsframskrivningar/pong/tabella-och-diagram/invandring-och-utvandring-efter-kon-och-fodelseland-samt-framskrivning/>

Scott, R. (2011). The Role of Public Libraries in Community Building. *Public Library Quarterly*. 30. 191-227. 10.1080/01616846.2011.599283.

SFS 2009:724. *Lag om nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk*. Kulturdepartementet.

Smirthwaite, G. & Kjellsson, S. (2019). (O)jämställdhet i hälsa och vård: en sammanfattning. Sveriges kommuner och landsting. <https://skr.se/skr/tjanster/rapporterochskrifter/publikationer/ojamstalldhetihalsaoc-hvard.64519.html>

Stanford Central for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) (2021). *The Islamic State*. [https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state#highlight\\_text\\_12400](https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state#highlight_text_12400) [2023-05-15]

UNDP (2023). *Reading and rebuilding: Mosul University Library*. <https://www.undp.org/arab-states/stories/reading-and-rebuilding-mosul-university-library-0>

UNESCO (n.d.). *World Heritage*. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/about/> [2023-05-15]

UNESCO (2022). *Ukraine: Over 150 cultural sites partially or totally destroyed* [Press Release], 23 June. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ukraine-over-150-cultural-sites-partially-or-totally-destroyed>

Vertovec, S. (2007) Super-diversity and its implications, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30:6, 1024-1054, DOI: 10.1080/01419870701599465

Virkus, S. (2019). Estonia. In *The role of libraries in promoting cultural heritage*, State of the Art report, Erasmus+.

Weiss, D. (2019). The Netherlands. In *The role of libraries in promoting cultural heritage*, State of the Art report, Erasmus+.

Wright, R. (2017). Mosul's Library Without Books. *New Yorker*, 12 June. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/mosuls-library-without-books>

Zafirov, M. (2014). The crisis in Iraq: Was the rise of ISIL a surprise? The legacy of Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime facilitated the success of ISIL in Iraq. *Aljazeera*, 25 December. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/12/25/the-crisis-in-iraq-was-the-rise-of-isil-a-surprise>

Öberg, P. (2015). Livshistorieintervjuer. In Ahrne, G. and Svensson, P. (red.) *Handbok i kvalitativa metoder*. Malmö: Liber, pp 55–66.



# Attachments

## I. Interview Consent Form



**LUNDS**  
UNIVERSITET

### **Interview Consent Form**

Research project: A master's thesis on libraries and their preservation of cultural heritage, with a focus on Iraq.

Research investigator:

Research Participants name:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Due to ethical reasons, we would like the interviewees' explicit agreement to being interviewed and are informed of how the information contained in their interview will be used.

The interview will take 1-2 hours. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

This consent form is necessary to ensure that the purpose of your involvement is understood and that the condition of your participation is agreed on. Would you therefore read and sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- The interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced.
- I can request a copy of the transcript or other data collected during the research interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.
- The transcript of the interview will be analyzed by Surrah al-Himidy as the research investigator.
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to Surrah al-Himidy and academic supervisors with whom she might discuss the research process.
- The actual recording will be destroyed after completing the research.

- Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval.

Quotation Agreement

I also understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly <b>only</b> if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

**All or part of the content of your interview may be used only in a master’s essay written within the framework of the ALM-master’s program of Lund’s university. The master’s thesis will be archived and digitally accessible to the public.**

By signing this form, I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don’t have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time.
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above.
3. I have read the Information sheet.
4. I don’t expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

.....  
**Participant’s Printed Name**

.....  
**Participant’s Signature** **Date**

.....  
**Participant’s Signature** **Date**

### Contact Information

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact the researcher:

Surrah al-Himidy

Tel:

E-mail: [SurrahAlhimidy@gmail.com](mailto:SurrahAlhimidy@gmail.com)

You can also contact Surrah al-Himidy's supervisor:

Björn Magnusson Staaf

Tel:

E-mail: [Bjorn.Magnusson\\_Staaf@kultur.lu.se](mailto:Bjorn.Magnusson_Staaf@kultur.lu.se)

What if I have concerns about this research?

If you are worried about this research, or if you are concerned about how it is being conducted, you can contact the program manager of ALM, Lund University, Lund, Sweden, with the email-address:

[Bjorn.Magnusson\\_Staaf@kultur.lu.se](mailto:Bjorn.Magnusson_Staaf@kultur.lu.se)

Lund University  
Master's programme in ALM  
Faculty of humanities and theology



JOINT FACULTIES  
OF HUMANITIES  
AND THEOLOGY



LUNDS  
UNIVERSITET