

Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: The Role of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

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Biography

Brooke Rogers is a PhD candidate in the School of Political Science and International Studies at The University of Queensland. She holds a Master of International Studies (Peace and Conflict Resolution), Master of Arts (Egyptology) and a Bachelor of Arts (Anthropology). Brooke has excavated in Luxor, Egypt, as part of the Australian Centre for Egyptology *Theban Tombs Project*. She also has NAS/AIMA training in foreshore and underwater archaeology. Her research interests include the archaeology and heritage of Egypt and the Near East, peacebuilding and post-war reconstruction in the Middle East, and the impact of conflict on cultural sites and materials.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the potential role of archaeology and cultural heritage in peacebuilding in post-conflict Afghanistan. The safeguarding of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, including museums, monuments, archaeological sites, music, art and traditional crafts is significant in terms of strengthening cultural identity and a sense of national integrity. In Afghanistan, archaeology and cultural heritage can become a rallying point for former adversaries, enabling them to re-build ties, facilitate dialogue and re-design a common identity and a future together. This paper examines the practical link between peacebuilding, archaeology and cultural heritage management. An exploration of key elements of peacebuilding reveals that community-based archaeology and cultural heritage management can contribute to the expression and promotion of an all inclusive Afghan identity, and stimulate, utilise and strengthen local capacities through community mobilisation. Furthermore, archaeology and cultural heritage management can create space for dialogue between stakeholders, the inclusion of women, the utilisation of community resources, and employment opportunities, all of which contribute to sustainable peace.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the potential contribution of archaeology and cultural heritage to peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan. Peacebuilding involves maintaining and improving peaceful, functional relationships and facilitating dialogue and communication between individuals and groups who have a history of violent conflict (Lewer 1999:23). In Afghanistan, the revival of a sense of historical and cultural continuity, as well as national unity is vital to ensure that the country's reconstruction can progress in a climate of tolerance, national integrity and stability (*Securing Afghanistan's Future: Culture, Media and Sport* 2004:1). In Afghanistan, archaeology and cultural heritage can become a rallying point for former adversaries, enabling them to re-build ties, facilitate dialogue and re-design a common identity and a future together.

This paper will consider the potential contribution of archaeology and cultural heritage management through an examination of the practical link between archaeology, cultural heritage and peacebuilding. It will then explore the role of community-based archaeology and cultural heritage in the formation of a new Afghan identity, and the stimulation, utilisation and strengthening of local capacities for peace through community mobilisation with specific reference to dialogue between stakeholders, the role of women, the utilisation of community resources and employment opportunities.

PEACEBUILDING, ARCHAEOLOGY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Peacebuilding is characterised by a long-term preventative strategy aimed at eradicating the root causes of conflict in the absence of violence (Peck 1996:74). It

involves communication, consultation and negotiation at all levels of society – from grass root communities to the government (Reychler & Paffenholz 2001:12-15). Many protracted conflicts are locked in vicious cycles of violence that are often characterised by social divisions along ethnic, religious, and class lines (Jeong 2000 in Jeong 2002:5). These divisions are significant in the patterns of hostilities and violence and often dictate the outcome of peacebuilding efforts. The success of peacebuilding is therefore dependent upon the involved party's willingness to participate and implement the peace process both in the short-term and long-term. Where deep-rooted ethnic and religious tension exists, it is necessary to adopt methods and mediums that are non-discriminatory and provide commonality, purpose and incentive whilst recognising diversity.

Archaeology and cultural heritage management have a defined role in an integrated, multilayered approach to peacebuilding in post-conflict communities. Archaeology and cultural heritage management have the capacity to involve people from all levels of society, strengthen long-term local capacities for peace, help change and transform the conflict pattern by creating social alliances, offer economic alternatives and create dialogue to stimulate a feeling of interdependence whilst emphasising common identity.

In terms of peacebuilding, archaeology and cultural heritage management are neutral capacity-building strategies which can contribute to the development of trust, build confidence among communities and create conditions for sustainable peace (Suhrke et al. 2002:xii). The *UNESCO Declaration Concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage* 2003 recognises that heritage is an important component of the

cultural identity of communities, groups and individuals, and especially of social cohesion (UNESCO 2003a). According to UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura (2003), 'culture can play a key role in consolidating the peace process, restoring national unity and building hope for the future'.

Peacebuilding involves participatory development work that listens to people, supports community initiative and empowers local people. Archaeology and cultural heritage management can create space to facilitate discussions that aid the restoration of trust, social capital and civic capacity. Furthermore, they can help cultivate and nurture participatory governance and consensus decision-making within community settings. They also have the potential to include non-traditional decision-makers in the development process.

Galtung acknowledges that one of the goals of peacebuilding is to address the practical implementation of peaceful social change through socio-economic empowerment, reconstruction and development (1975:282-304). As well as providing opportunity for social cohesion, public participation is vital for long-term individual and community economic advantage. Meskell considers ancient monuments, sites and cultural material positioned at a powerful nexus between ethnoscapes and finanscapes (2002:289). Tunbridge and Ashworth also recognise that 'the spiritual significance of heritage in social, cultural and political terms cannot be divorced from its economic significance, since both operate (actually or potentially) in the same space' (1996:33). Meskell therefore sees the role of archaeology and cultural heritage management as crucial in peacebuilding with the potential for linking cultural heritage, national

modernity and employment ventures to establish a social and economic foundation on which dialogue can be facilitated and peace encouraged (2002:289).

PEACEBUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan, there is a need for a strategy to enhance people's capacity for non-violent interaction and conflict resolution (Strand, Berg Harpviken & Suhrke 2002:4). Mohan Das recognises the need for programmes and projects that seek to encourage profound social change in societies emerging from conflict (2002:2-3). These include programmes or projects that promote cultural identity and focus on empowerment and participation through dialogue, gender, socio-economic development and conservation, all of which 'entail shifting mind sets, behaviour patterns and possibly challenging traditional/cultural norms and practices' (Mohan Das 2002:2-3).

Archaeology and cultural heritage can be utilised as bonding vehicles to aid reconstruction and strengthen peace (Dupree 2002:977). Community-based archaeology and cultural heritage management aims to involve local people in the investigation and interpretation of the past (Marshall 2002: 211; Moser et al. 2002:220). Through actively involving individuals and communities in the process of investigation, interpretation, presentation and conservation of sites and cultural material, archaeology and cultural heritage management can be an effective tool for community building and empowerment (Uunila 2003:43).

Cultural Heritage, Modern Ethnicity and Conflict

Afghanistan is endowed with a rich cultural and historical heritage that encompasses archaeological sites, oral traditions, historical objects and monuments, as well as

music, poetry and crafts (Betlyon 2004:12). Since 1922, official excavations have uncovered over 2,800 known archaeological sites, hundreds of historical monuments, and thousands of unique cultural and historical objects relating to different periods of pre- and proto-history, with an estimated tens of thousands yet to be discovered (Dupree 2002:982).

Knobloch suggests that Central Asia has been, from ancient times, a melting pot of nations and cultures (2001:5). Afghanistan lay at the centre of an interconnecting zone between East and West where traders, conquerors seeking empires, intellectuals, missionaries, artisans, nomads, pilgrims and political exiles came together. Its unique cultural heritage reflects a history marked by the complex indigenous encounter with Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Achaemenid Persia, and Alexandrian Greece, all of which contributed language, oral traditions, legends, customs, monuments and priceless artistic artefacts.

Among Afghanistan's many treasures are the Kanishka/Zoroastrian site of Surkh Kotal, the Nine Domes Mosque of Haji Piyada (ninth-century), and the Minaret of Jam (twelfth-century). It also boasts the walled city of Herat which includes the Friday Mosque, the Musallah complex with its minarets and the Gawhar Shad Mausoleum, the Mir Ali Sher Navai Mausoleum, the Gazargah Shrine and the Shah Zadehah Mausoleum, and the fourth and fifth-century Buddha statues in the Bamiyan Valley that were destroyed in March 2001 by the Taliban.

Today, Afghanistan comprises a multiethnic, multilingual society which is both ethnically and religiously diverse. The population consists of approximately 29

million people made up of a number of ethnic groups including Pushtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Aimaqs, Turkomen, Baluch, Nuristanis, Pachais, and the smaller groups of Kirchiz, Kazakhs and Arabs (Tarzi 1991:483). Small scattered communities of Mongols, Hindus and Sikhs also exist and spiritual beliefs include Sunni, Shia, Ismaili, Sikh, Hindu and Jew.

Historically, there has been a degree of inequality between Afghani ethnic groups, as well as discrimination based on ethnicity, religion and gender (Karlekar 2004:6). Ethnic divisions have reinforced ideological differences between traditionalists and the more fundamental Islamic groups, as well as between Sunni Muslims and the Shia minority (Williams 2000:2-3). Protracted war and instability has led to an increase in ethnic and religious polarization, tension and conflict (Karlekar 2004:6). Ethnic and religious tension has also resulted in the deliberate destruction of religious and other culturally important structures and artefacts for the purpose of 'cultural cleansing' and funding the Afghan war economy (Brodie 2003:10).

Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and Afghani Identity

For the last 23 years the people of Afghanistan have not only witnessed the destruction and devastation of a nation, but also a constant decay of the very identity of an Afghani – Afghaniyat, Afghanhood (World Bank Development Forum 2002:4). Dupree acknowledges that conflict in Afghanistan has produced irredeemable social, cultural and physical damage and that there is a need for the strengthening of traditions so that identities may be affirmed in the midst of anarchy (1998:5). This includes the development of sustainable institutions based on an understanding of the

Afghani people, their history, and the dynamics of their society, including beliefs, culture and traditions (World Bank Development Forum 2002:7).

Dupree suggests that the cultural variations evident among the modern ethnic mosaic only add richness to the overall culture of Afghanistan and thus form an integral part of the Afghan cultural identity (2002:978). The *Securing Afghanistan's Future: Accomplishments and the Strategic Path Forward Culture, Media and Sport Report 2004* acknowledges that 'cultural diversity is both a prerequisite and a manifestation of a pluralistic society. The diversity of cultural expressions and practices found in Afghanistan are a living legacy of the country's rich multicultural past' (2004:3). Malik indicates that a stable and peaceful Afghanistan could be brought about by lessening inter-ethnic tensions by evolving economic and cultural mutualities and implementing participatory systems that allow pluralism based on 'unity in diversity' (1992:892,901).

Archaeology and cultural heritage management allow a degree of transparency and openness that assists in reconciliation and fortifying the peace process in fragmented communities (Mohan Das 2002:6). Their neutrality and ability to provide 'space' encourages equality of all Afghani persons who choose to participate regardless of ethnicity, gender, and social hierarchy. Indeed, sites, museums and other cultural institutions can act as systems for cultural empowerment, dismantling cultural barriers by providing a neutral space for inclusion and expression of all members of society (Bapat 1997:6).

Community Mobilisation

The dynamics of peacebuilding are intrinsically related to ongoing human interactions, perceptions and the coordination of peacebuilding efforts need to consider multiple actors with diverse demands (Jeong 2002:5,12). This is particularly significant in Afghanistan where there is a need to consider the divergent socio-cultural and religious context of the local community and to ensure the satisfaction and the needs of individuals as articulated through their grass root identity groups (Reychler & Paffenholz 2001:98). It is therefore necessary to provide mutually inclusive and beneficial alternatives that can be adopted into peacebuilding to transform the socio-cultural and economic environment that engenders adversarial relationships.

Given the richness and visible nature of cultural heritage, there is an opportunity in Afghanistan to bring together ethnic and religious groups and encourage them to participate in inter-community dialogue (peacebuilding) through community-based archaeology and cultural heritage management. Peacebuilding efforts inclusive of archaeology and cultural heritage are a means by which individuals and communities can become actively and co-jointly involved, moving attention away from contributing conflict factors by directing action into socially and economically productive alternatives (Brodie 2003:16).

Factors that promote instability and protracted violence in Afghanistan include: a lack of opportunity for social participation (sense of community, trust and confidence); a lack of employment opportunities and economic surety based on a licit livelihood; the absence of personal and property security; and political instability. The inception of community-based archaeology and cultural heritage management in Afghanistan can:

create space for dialogue; involve previously marginalised groups including women; create new and optimise existing community resources; provide economic opportunity and incentive for the local community; and encourage the eventual transferral of ownership of cultural heritage management to communities.

Dialogue

Central to effective community mobilisation in Afghanistan is an open dialogue between the stakeholders – ethnic and religious communities and archaeologists. The main objective of this dialogue is to involve the entire community in the planning, implementation and evaluation of archaeological and cultural heritage programs (Erasmus in Reyhler & Paffenholz 2001:249). There is a need for archaeologists to engage in community consultation to establish a local perspective on how to undertake and utilise archaeological research that consolidates the needs of the entire community and one that seeks to alleviate socio-economic burdens and regional animosity in order to reach sustainable peace.

As external third-party facilitators, archaeologists play a key role in bringing the peacebuilding process to fruition and to assist internal parties in maintaining the peace by proposing proactive, ethnically impartial methods by which this can be achieved (Jeong 2002:4). Lederach (1997) notes that the third party may also help overcome a pre-existing climate of mistrust and suspicion by creating a space for communication based on a neutral agent that is common to and can benefit all parties. Archaeology and cultural heritage management are this space. It can be noted that inter-community consultation and assistance is also beneficial for the long-term protection and

preservation of cultural heritage. Therefore, the relationship between archaeologists and the community becomes reciprocal.

Stiefel sees the promotion of local and national ownership of archaeological and cultural heritage projects as contributing to the building of local capacities and central to restoring confidence, dignity and peace (in Reychler & Paffenholz 2001:265). Promoting local and national ownership of cultural heritage implies a transferal of control and responsibility of cultural material from archaeologists and stakeholders back into the hands of the local community.

Effective community collaboration also involves the use of pre-existing local structures and institutions to give local Afghani communities ownership of development initiatives (The Asian Social Issues Program 2001:7). The Afghani population identity primarily lies with the local community and in the past the unofficial local council or *Shura* has been traditionally recognised as a mechanism for discussion and decision-making at a local level (Suhrke et al. 2002:12-14,19-20; Tarzi 1991:487). Ehsan suggests that whilst they lie outside the formal state apparatus, establishing dialogue with and working through local *Shura* can be a highly effective tool for peacebuilding in Afghanistan, provided that the *Shura* is representative, treated as an equal partner and actively involved in the planning, design and implementation of the programmes associated with community reconstruction (2000:10; Tarzi 1991:495). This may include the overseeing of cultural heritage management schemes and associated local enterprises. Partnerships with local organisations such as the *Shura* can also provide a framework for integrating the

results of archaeological research into community plans for the future (Moser et al. 2002:229).

Furthermore, transparency and openness is essential in combating social marginalisation of Afghani ethnic and religious minorities. Meskell notes that archaeologists can avoid alienating local communities by involving people at a community level, discussing plans and findings, publicising results in a meaningful manner and creating education and museum facilities (2000:162). Ongoing reporting to community organisations as well as to the general public also allows for transparency as to how the project is evolving and encourages community feedback. The distribution of these reports to those employed as excavators also provides insight into the significance of the work taking place and serves to foster community pride (Moser et al. 2002:230).

The Role of Women

Given the desire to include all members of the community in active participation and feedback, it is imperative that community-based archaeology and cultural heritage management peacebuilding initiatives involve dialogue with and the inclusion of Afghani women. Afghan women have in the past been systematically excluded from community-related and income generating activities yet have much to offer in terms of the dissemination of Afghan heritage traditions. Anthias and Yuval-Davis recognise that women play a vital role as custodians and transmitters of cultural and symbolic aspects of the 'nation' by reproducing and raising children, passing on traditional stories and domestic duties and are often participants in national, economic, political and military struggles though mainly in supportive roles (1989:7-

10). Moghadam also acknowledges that women play a crucial role as custodians of cultural values, carriers of traditions and symbols of the community (1994:4).

The role of women as active participants in socioeconomic development has been significantly weakened by the cultural and religious ultra-conservatism that defines Afghanistan (Sonmez 2001:11,126). This has been exacerbated by the patriarchal nature of Afghan gender and social relations embedded in traditional communities and by the existence of a weak central state which has been unable (or refuses) to implement modernising programmes and goals (Moghadam 1994:81). Under the Taliban, women were systematically excluded from the public realm and had limited access to basic services and income-generating activities (The Asian Social Issues Program 2001:6; UN Gender Mission 1997). Whilst a new government has removed the formal constraints for participation imposed by the Taliban, women continue to be denied access to professional careers in the cultural sector (*Securing Afghanistan's Future: Culture, Media and Sport* 2004:7).

Sonmez recognises that 'societal restrictions impeding women's full participation in determining the future of their countries is a very significant barrier to the achievement of socioeconomic goals' (2001:136). Women's involvement in peacebuilding is essential to help prevent war, end armed conflict and rebuild societies (Jeong 2000:197; Lerche & Jeong 2002:124,131; Lewer 1999:16). Sonmez notes that the inclusion of women in development objectives is essential both to ensure gender equity and strengthen societal development (2001:114).

If community-based archaeology and cultural heritage management are to be successfully integrated into the region's socio-economic development, it is important that human resources, regardless of gender, be utilised effectively (Sonmez 2001:136). The involvement of women in decision-making and the implementation of processes concerning archaeology and cultural heritage management can provide new opportunities for women to 'try out unaccustomed roles as initiators and organisers of projects and programmes that build peace, seek justice and forge reconciliation between groups' (Lerche & Jeong 2002:133-34).

Community Resources

The utilisation of individual skills and knowledge in fieldwork and craftsmanship can also facilitate inter-community dialogue and reconciliation through active participation and economic incentive. Peacebuilding requires the structuring of intelligent alliances to engage multiple perspectives (Gerson & Colletta 2002:14). When designing peacebuilding initiatives and programmes there is a need to mobilise indigenous resources and involve local people from the outset (Cockell 2000 in Pugh 2000:21-23). Section VI of the UNESCO International Coordination Committee (ICC) recommendations on the *Safeguarding of Afghanistan's Heritage 2003* emphasises the need to promote capacity building of institutional and individual resources and knowledge in Afghanistan through on-site training involving the excavation and conservation of archaeological sites and the restoration of objects stored in museums and archives (UNESCO 2003b:7).

Although modern archaeological techniques often require specialist skills and equipment, there is still a role for public participation and employment in fieldwork

(Brodie 2003:16). Brodie notes that interpretations can benefit from the multiple perspectives which are engendered through cooperation (2003:16). For foreign archaeologists working in the field, it is beneficial to employ local community members who possess knowledge of environmental conditions, terrain and site location and who can offer multiple perspectives and interpretations of sites, excavation techniques and of the cultural significance of the material recovered (Moser et al. 2002:222; Mapunda & Lane 2004:215).

The revitalisation of indigenous economic activities can also rehabilitate social and economic structure (Jeong 2000:197). Local businesses can benefit from a reliance on their resources and services to assist in excavation and maintenance of archaeological sites and an increase in economic profit generated by tourism. An example of this activity was in 1998 when a number of Afghani religious shrines were being maintained and repaired by local communities throughout the country (Dupree 1998:7). Whilst an opportunity for economic gain, Dupree recognises that the building or repair of mosques and shrines by locals is particularly significant as it is a popular means of expressing religious piety and fulfilling community obligations (1998:7). More recently UNESCO and the Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH) jointly financed a tile-making workshop in Herat (Manhart 2004:408). There are currently 60 Afghan trainees at the workshop learning how to manufacture traditional tiles, some of which are needed for the re-tiling of the Gowhar Shad Mausoleum (Manhart 2004:408). There has also been progress in terms of a revival in the art of carpet weaving and Sufi poetry (*Securing Afghanistan's Future: Culture, Media and Sport* 2004:1).

Employment opportunities

The volatile nature of post-war Afghanistan demands flexible responses that involve risk taking and innovation. Sedra and Middlebrook recognise that ‘Until the Afghan population is presented with the economic means and opportunity to escape destitution, many will continue to be drawn to violence and the illicit economy, perpetuating the country’s seemingly interminable instability’ (2004:2). Employment is essential for reintegrating potentially volatile groups such as ex-combatants or militia and creating a sense of confidence in the future that will facilitate long-term capacity for economic development and growth (Suhrke et al. 2002:xv,112).

In many areas, the economic reintegration of ex-combatants in Afghanistan has proven difficult due to a low level of skills and formal education among ex-combatants, as well as the poverty in their home region (Suhrke et al. 2002:83). Through employment in archaeological excavations and cultural heritage management schemes, individuals are provided with a new economic incentive and are given the opportunity to acquire skills that will enhance future employment prospects (Suhrke et al. 2002:83).

Opportunities for reintegration and employment of former combatants also exist in providing security for sites and other cultural institutions through a traditional guard system. The *Charter for the Protection and Management of Archaeological Heritage 1993* suggests that locals be entrusted with the responsibility for the protection and management of sites, monuments and cultural institutions (Article 6 CPMAH 1993:3). In 2004 the Afghan Interior Ministry expressed a desire to deploy up to 500 guards for antiquities sites (Betlyon 2004:12).

Cultural tourism also represents a crucial force for social development and improving economic conditions in Afghanistan by fostering job creation, income redistribution and poverty alleviation (*Securing Afghanistan's Future* 2004:73-74). Cultural tourism has the potential to be a key instrument for peace in Afghanistan by promoting mutual understanding and connecting people and culture as well as providing tangible peace dividends that make it more difficult for former adversaries to revert back to violence (Nigro 2003:65). In the same way, tourism can strengthen Afghan communities by reinforcing a sense of pride in cultural identity and local diversity, increase community transparency and cohesion and improve the preservation and transmission of cultural traditions (Brown 1989:271; Nigro 2003:69). Furthermore, the economic gains resulting from tourism development can benefit cultural heritage and the community by justifying the allocation of significant public resources for the enhancement of cultural heritage, public infrastructure and facilities.

CONCLUSION

In a post-conflict Afghanistan, archaeology and cultural heritage can have a fundamental role to play in peacebuilding as they provide non-violent methods and means through which sustainable peace can evolve. The integration of archaeology and cultural heritage management into local communities can re-establish links between the Afghani population and their cultural history by providing a socially inclusive space for discovery and expression of identity, and develop a sense of common ownership of a heritage that represents the cultural identity of different segments of society.

Collaboration between archaeologists and the local community can facilitate the creation of conditions conducive to peace by providing a neutral space in which warring parties can engage in dialogue and encourage collective social control and responsibility for cultural heritage management. Archaeology and cultural heritage management can also create an opportunity for the involvement of groups that in the past have been socially, economically and politically marginalised. In the case of Afghanistan, archaeology and cultural heritage can provide an opportunity for the participation of women in the reconstruction process. Furthermore, peacebuilding inclusive of archaeology and cultural heritage can create new and optimise existing community resources such as excavation skills, local businesses and craftsmanship. This type of community-based archaeology can in turn enrich the discipline of archaeology. Finally, archaeology and cultural heritage management can offer economic alternatives that assist in the demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants and provide the basis for the inception of a cultural tourism industry from which socio-economic benefits for the local community can emerge.

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