

THE ANALYSIS OF PROTECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ARMED CONFLICTS. CASE OF THE RUSSIAN- UKRAINE WAR

*Kudzai Cathrine BINGISAI**

Abstract. *The current study sought to contribute to the discussions relating to the destruction of cultural heritage in armed conflicts. The relationship between cultural heritage and national identity cannot be separated. The 21st century particularly 2022 has experienced the most violent and radical Russian-Ukraine war from which the spillover effects go beyond geographical borders. The study argues that at the expense of Russia's geopolitical interests, the destruction of cultural heritage is a global protection crisis. By using secondary data sources, this study sought to analyse the challenges of protecting cultural heritage during armed conflicts. The findings present that cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible is an important representation of national identity and promotes cultural diversity. The Russian-Ukraine war has witnessed the destruction of heritage sites, churches and monuments in Ukraine. From a comprehensive point of view, the study presents that regional and international organizations should establish effective efforts and rethinking for the preservation of cultural heritage. The paper argues that technological advancement has also complicated the protection of cultural heritage in global politics thereby threatening the achievement of sustainable development goals.*

Keywords: *cultural heritage, protection, armed conflict*

Introduction

This study sought to examine the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflicts with specific reference to the 2022 Russian-Ukraine war. The issue of preserving cultural heritage has been preached at national and international dialogues and it has been taken through international law interventions. The purpose of the law interventions as manifested in Conventions sought to protect cultural heritage in times of conflict. Notwithstanding the efforts to promote peace in the international system, human lives together with cultural property are on the edge of destruction. As the Russian-Ukraine war continues to mark the field of socio-economics and politics, it is therefore critical to analyse the challenges in the protection of cultural heritage. Acknowledging that the quest for the protection of cultural heritage is made complex due to Russia's geopolitical interests, the impact that the war has made so far cross-cutting socio-economic, and technological pillars should not be ignored. Nonetheless, in the complexity of preserving cultural property in times of war and the historical memory of communities, this paper sought to analyse the divergent discourses surrounding the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflicts concerning the Russian-Ukraine war.

* PhD Student at Babes Bolyai University, Romania, bingisaikudzai@gmail.com

Literature review

The 21st century has witnessed a resurgence of regional armed conflicts coupled with the devastating loss of human lives and heritage sites. Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides an understanding of cultural heritage in the form of monuments, architectural buildings and archaeological sites. It is important to note that the Convention provides that member states must preserve cultural heritage. The Convention sought to protect the World's cultural and natural heritage whilst embracing sustainable development. Likewise, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, (ICOMOS), (2002) expresses that cultural heritage can be recognized as tangible or intangible. From which tangible cultural heritage could be in the form of buildings and monuments. According to UNESCO (2015), intangible cultural heritage includes expressions such as oral stories, performing arts, knowledge and skills.

In addition, the efforts to protect the loss of such cultural heritage in times of war have seen the global community signing treaties in recognition of the importance of cultural heritage. The two Protocols (1954 and 1999) of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflicts of 1954 provide for the protection of cultural heritage. The 1954 Hague Convention article 7 provides State parties; 'to undertake to introduce in time of peace into their military regulations or instructions such provisions as may ensure observance of the present Convention, and to foster in the members of their armed forces a spirit of respect for the culture and cultural property of all peoples'

Accepting the difficulty of protecting cultural heritage in the event of war due to the demand of complex circumstances and diverging deep root causes (Cunliffe and Fox, 2022), the destruction of cultural heritage still implies the violation of the right to heritage and identity. Concerning protecting cultural property, Article 5 of the 1999 Hague Convention provides for safeguarding of cultural property including emergency removal of property to prevent destruction in times of conflict. In the same vein, the Universal Declaration of People's Rights of 1976, refers to the rights of all members including their heritage and nationality, and that it is not subtracted by other States or by individuals. Henceforth, cultural heritage is typically part of national identity (Capuano, 2022). Çağın *et al.*, (2023) also acknowledge that cultural heritage signifies national historical values and identity. Heritage on its own, according to Ashworth (2011), is historical artefacts including artefacts, events and performances which are derived from the past and interpreted for the present and future.

Indeed, during wartime, cultural heritage is prone to destruction (Luce, 2023), and its attack violates the international instruments that stand for the protection of cultural property. The Russian-Ukraine war is not an exception in concerns over the destruction and protection issues of cultural heritage. However, such protection of cultural heritage in the Russian-Ukraine war has been compromised. Armed conflicts have the risk of demolishing heritage sites such as museums, galleries and monuments. The war has caused the horrible destruction of heritage sites and monuments (Bilgin and Hazarhun, 2023). Cultural heritage is an element of cultural identity, its destruction has been used by Russia as a weapon of war. Like any other armed conflict, The Russian-Ukraine war has drawn global attention as well as condemnation over the loss of both human lives and the destruction of World Cultural Heritage. Literature indicates that the Russian-Ukraine conflict has massively destroyed the cultural heritage of Ukraine (Capuano, 2022). The

massive destruction and the demolition of cultural heritage have intensified as the war continues to unravel.

Article 7 of the 1954 Hague Convention mentions that the Parties ought to generate peace strategies including joint involvement of civilizations with the aim of the protection of cultural property.

‘The High Contracting Parties undertake to introduce in time of peace into their military regulations or instructions such provisions as may ensure observance of the present Convention, and to foster in the members of their armed forces a spirit of respect for the culture and cultural property of all peoples.’ (Article 7(1) of 1954 Hague Convention)

Resultantly, the cultural heritage in times of war is on the target. To this end, as the war continues, how reality is international law protecting cultural heritage in times of armed conflicts as the effects pose terrible effects on cultural heritage protection and threats to human security? Unfortunately, it seems the international instruments and laws mandated to protect cultural heritage are challenged by the prevailing geopolitical challenges.

In addition, the Russian-Ukraine war has resulted in profound socio-economic and political effects on the global arena. The spillover effects of the Russian-Ukraine war have made the war an international concern. Likewise, Shydlovskiy *et al.*, (2023) state that the destruction of Ukraine's cultural heritage has become a global concern. Regrettably, it is sad to note the war has shaken global economies, threatened food security, and resulted in mounting fuel prices. The war has not only threatened the destruction of cultural heritage but instead impacted negatively the socio-economic sector including food security (Pereira *et al.*, 2022). One of the major consequences of the Russian-Ukraine war is Russia's aggression and attack on Ukraine's agricultural production threatening economic and food security. This includes the attack on Ukraine's agriculture facilities (Devadoss and Ridley (2024), leading to worsening the global humanitarian situation and straining global aid assistance. The war has created a global economic crisis in countries that depend on Ukraine's agricultural exports including African and developing Middle Eastern countries (Martyshchuk *et al.* 2023; van Meijl *et al.*, 2024). The war has severely impacted global food insecurity (van Meijl *et al.*, 2024), alarming an urgent need to advocate for peace and security. The delays in effective negotiation skills and Peace Plans continue to worsen the already struggling global economies and political environments.

On another critical note, both Russia and Ukraine are signatories to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC) from which Article 15 of the ICESC provides for the right to take part in cultural life, which includes the right "to benefit from the cultural heritage. In addition, Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR 1966), to which Russia and Ukraine are also parties provides that; “[i]n those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their religion, or to use their language.”

This must be understood that both parties are obliged to respect the principles of the Covenants. Amidst the international instruments, Ukraine's cultural heritage is at risk. In the same motive of protecting cultural property and promoting sustainable development, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly recognized the protection of cultural diversity from which the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030

endorsed the provision. Hence, the protection of cultural heritage is interwoven with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 11 provides for cities and human settlements to be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. However, despite being party to international instruments that promote the protection of cultural heritage, there are serious complex challenges in protecting cultural heritage due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Pereira *et al.*, (2022) state that the Russian-Ukraine war affects the realization of sustainable development goals. The protection of cultural heritage places value and importance on culture in global initiatives of sustainable development. The main question is why it has been so difficult to protect cultural heritage using laws and Conventions as a medium of transition.

Due to Russian aggression, some of the destructed monuments, museums and religious sites include the Memorial to the Victims of Totalitarianism (built in 1991–2000), the Church of St. Theodosius, Regional Children's Library (former Vasyl Tarnovsky Museum of Ukrainian Antiquities) and Ivankiv Museum (UNESCO, 2022). Making matters worse, the exact statistics of the destroyed property are unknown, recent news indicated that Russia has attacked more than 900 historical sites¹. Hence, the attack is not only between Russian and Ukrainian cultural property but also against World Cultural Heritage. In the same vein, the destruction of cultural heritage is not only Ukraine's burden instead a threat to global security including socio-economic and political instability. With the ongoing war, the major concern is the destruction of Ukraine's cultural heritage, its monuments and historical sites that served as the backbone of the Ukraine community (Gerstenblith, 2024). Unfortunately, efforts to promote the protection of cultural heritage and existing legal instruments seem to stand isolated and distanced from achieving the mandate.

Theory of conservatism

This study made use of the theory of conservatism by Wilson (1941) to analyse the complex challenges of protecting cultural heritage in an armed conflict. Wilson (1941) states that conservatism fights to conserve existing fundamental practices in society. The underlying argument in conservatism is that cultural values and institutions ought to be protected and preserved. Wilson (1973) defines conservatism as preserving traditional structures and behaviour against change. Conservatives are devotees of their cultural values and beliefs assumed by tradition and historical practices. Based on the reality situation in aggression, is there respect for conservative ideas and values in times of conflict? Hofstede (1980) expresses that it is cultural values that serve as fundamental principles of national pride. Wilson (2013) states that in times of conflict, the aggressor always attacks what is deemed important to the opponent. Conservatism perspectives posit the fears of change or uncertainty to social and habitual action. Relating to conservatism, this study aligns the protection of cultural heritage with conservatism. The situation in Ukraine calls for an increased theoretical and practical analysis of the

¹ Denys Shmyhal. All cultural heritage sites affected by Russian aggression will be included in a special state register to determine the amount of compensation from Russia. Government Portal Official Website, 29 February 2024. <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/denys-shmyhal-usi-postrazhdali-vnaslidok-rosiiskoi-ahresii-objekty-kulturnoi-spadshchyny-vnesut-do-spetsialnoho-derzhreiestru-dlia-vyznachennia-rozmiriv-kompensatsii-vid-rf>, accessed on 11 March 2024.

principles of conservatism. How can conservatism preserve cultural property with the continuous reality of bullets firing at both humanity and heritage?

As the Russian-Ukraine war ravages, there is a challenge of preserving cultural property for the present and future generations. The war is resulting in the loss of Ukrainian cultural property, heritage values and global historic development. The crisis is having to protect humanitarian and preserve both tangible and intangible property. Due to the globalization and continuous restructuring of the international system, the future of conservatism has been questioned (O'Sullivan, 2023). At the moment of writing this paper, no one knows when the bullets are going to cease, for sure, when the time comes many destructions will have been caused and who knows what it will take to heal the wounds of the Ukrainians. Is the reconstruction of heritage sites going to restore peace? Is the global world ready to handle post-trauma recovery and restoration of destructed or stolen property? The continuous effects of the Russian-Ukraine war on the destruction of cultural heritage has led to analysis and consideration of survival of conservatism due to limited safeguarding and protection of heritage in times of war. This study sought to analyze the prospects of preserving cultural heritage during the armed conflict from which the role of international institutions cannot be ignored in the protection of cultural property.

Methodology

This paper made use of qualitative data from the growing secondary data sources. The use of secondary data sources provides the researcher with a wide range of collective information (Ruggiano and Perry, 2019). Research based on qualitative secondary data makes use of already existing sources to construct new critical analysis and understanding of the concept (Irwin, 2013). Guided by the questions; what is the role and importance of international organisations in the protection of cultural heritage? What are the associated challenges towards the protection of cultural heritage and will the focus primarily be on cultural heritage amongst global changes? The study draws an empirical analysis from the growing literature on cultural heritage in the context of the Russian-Ukraine War.

Discussions of Findings

In the contemporary system, the office of international organisations has been playing crucial roles in solving global challenges. Like any other common challenge, the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine has attracted much attention across all sectors across the globe including the academia, independent actors and international organisations. The nature of the mandate of the international organizations remains widespread to promote peace, security and achievement of sustainable development. The 21st-century challenges require international institutions to provide strategic solutions to contemporary problems (Crockett, 2012). The United Nations including regional and international organisations including Australia, the United States and Britain have condemned Russia's aggression over Ukraine (Kliem, 2024). The UN Security Council has been praised by praised for its Resolution 2347 which is centred on safeguarding cultural heritage at an international level. Nevertheless, Russia's act has been declared a violation of international law on the protection of cultural heritage, such that, the ongoing experiences in the war are shocking to the presence breach of international law.

The war broke out on the 24th of February 2022 (Zollmann, 2023) and this was just after the European Union (EU) - Africa Union (AU) Summit held on 17-18 February 2022 held in Brussels. The two Unions had pledged to solve common global challenges.

The EU-AU member states agreed on collaborating with a joint vision of solving global challenges in promoting solidarity, peace, security and global sustainable development (EU-AU, 2022). How capable are the global efforts in protecting cultural heritage in armed conflicts?

Although no study has investigated on efforts of the AU in promoting the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine. The African Union having fifty-five member states is mandated to promote regional and external peace and security (AU, 2015; Moolakkattu, 2010). The tragic effects of the Russian-Ukraine war have transcended geographical borders threatening global human security and the destruction of cultural property has questioned the capability of the AU to deliver a package of peace and security. One of the aspirations of AU Agenda 2063 provides for the promotion of cultural identity, values and diversity (AU, 2015). In concurrence with the UN Economy Report (2015), which states that the promotion of cultural diversity leads to safeguarding the achievement of sustainable development goals. Instead, the war has worsened the vulnerability of the Continent through soaring energy prices, fertilizers and food security (Staeger, 2023). The conflict has confronted Africa from socioeconomic security lenses providing no choice other than promoting global peace.

On the other hand, Russia's presence in Africa dates back to the Cold War era (Besenyő, 2020), due to Russia's sanctions and condemnations after the annexation of Crimea, Africa has been a priority for Russia's economic and political bilateral relations (Hedenskog and Persson, 2019). Cultural heritage connects the global world through intercultural diversity for peace (Weiss *et al.*, 2022). In addition, the AU member states sought to exercise their mediation skills between the two presidents since the effects of the war transcend geographical borders². Weiss *et al.*, (2022), state that wherever cultural heritage is destroyed in the international system the universe, humanitarian and security concerns are threatened since the global world is united through cultural diversity. It appears that Ukraine was attacked without a standby plan to protect its sites in case of emergency and mitigate incidences of looting. To what extent then can the AU partnership with external regional organisations contribute towards promoting peace and the protection of cultural heritage in conflicts? The mechanism for effective jurisdiction should be awakened to save cultural heritage destruction. There is no denying that the destruction of cultural heritage is a violation of international law. The Russian army seems to have mastered the art of destroying cultural heritage in Ukraine. It is the concern of this paper to discuss the discourses on the destruction of cultural heritage and its effects on the socio-cultural and economic environment towards the achievement of global sustainable development.

Unlike its previously mentioned counterpart, the EU is one of the major donors to humanitarian aid in times of conflict (Trebesch *et al.*, 2023). It is important to note that the aid has been in the form of military, financial and humanitarian support (Anteezza *et al.*, 2022). In the same vein, the response of the EU has also been witnessed in calling for peace and condemning the horrible actions in the case of the Russia-Ukraine war. In the same vein, Raik *et al.*, (2024) state that the EU did not support Russia's aggression on Ukraine resulting in economic sanctions and condemnation as the invasion threatened Europe and global peace. However, a comparison of unity and commitment shows much

² Jesupemi Are, Russia-Ukraine war: African leaders meet with Putin, Zelensky to 'seek road to peace', The Cable News, 18 June 2023, <https://www.thecable.ng/russia-ukraine-war-african-leaders-meet-with-putin-zelensky-to-see-road-to-peace>, accessed on 11 March 2024.

concern of the EU concerning Russia's move in Ukraine as compared to the Israel-Gaza conflict (Mros, 2024), is it because the Russia-Ukraine war is closer to home than the latter? The tension underlying the destruction of cultural heritage is centred on geopolitical interests. As such, the role of international institutions in protecting cultural heritage has been proven susceptible to the capacity to confront Russian aggression on Ukraine. It seems the Russian-Ukraine war is a complex challenge coupled with socio-economic and political global effects on the international system.

The prevalence of the Russian-Ukraine war has revealed the weaknesses of States and Non-State Actors towards the protection of global cultural heritage alongside principles of international law. The destruction and protection of cultural heritage have been a major issue of concern in conflicts. This is because the war has disclosed the complications and twists in identity conflicts (Qaisraini *et al.*, 2023; Jakupec, 2024). As previously mentioned, the Russian-Ukraine war caught the international system unexpectedly in February 2022, just after the international system had been trying to get back on its feet from the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Since the day of the invasion, the war has been considered a violation of human rights due to extensive strikes on sites and civilians. Pereira *et al.*, (2022) state that both effects of COVID-19 coupled with Russian Ukraine war are drawing back the United Nations Agenda 2030 achievement for Sustainable Development Goals. The paper acknowledged that ongoing conflict directly affects infrastructural development, climate and socio-economic environment. Inevitably, the continuous geopolitical rivalry between the two forces over geopolitical power has led to alarming regional and international concerns over the destruction and protection of cultural property.

The intentional destruction of cultural heritage is an emergency concern towards the protection of heritage sites. As the war continued to ravage, the efforts to save buildings became extremely challenging. The war continues to present complexities protection of human lives and cultural heritage. The Russian army is targeting Ukraine cities and heritage sites (Schmitt, 2022; Sapuppo, 2023). Besides the condemnation of the global world and archaeological experts, cultural heritages are deliberately attacked as a cleansing force to the destruction of Ukraine's ethnic and nationalism. As such, Russia focuses on gaining victory irrespective of the methodology that brings triumph.

An observation from the existing literature is that the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine is under siege. The concept of protecting cultural property in the ongoing Russian-Ukraine war is a complex one. Findings present that the ongoing terrifying loss of human lives and cultural heritage threatens the protection of cultural heritage. With the continuing armed conflict, the decision to protect human lives and cultural heritage has revealed complex challenges in efforts to protect cultural property. However, Matthes (2018) states that the notion of saving lives or stones cannot be separated. The author strengthened the Principle of Inseparability that the efforts towards the protection of human lives are jointly linked to efforts of protecting monuments. The UN Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017) affirms unlaw attacks on cultural heritage sites. The Law of Ukraine on Protection of Cultural Heritage (2000) provides for the saving and protection of cultural heritage for the present and future generations. The findings present that cultural heritage plays a vital role in fostering cultural identity and diversity which the war seeks to erase. As indicated in a study by (Giannini and Bowen, 2023) indicated that cultural heritage interconnects both local and international communities.

Indeed, the research findings present that the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine has been a major concern and challenge to Ukraine and the global community. Shydlovskiy *et al.*, (2023) state that the rate at which Ukrainian cultural heritage is being demolished goes way beyond 1945. EU (2021) acknowledges that awareness is the critical first step towards the protection of cultural heritage. Likewise, awareness campaigns and international bodies have been held to discuss the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine. For instance, Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online (SUCHO) provides initiatives to identify and preserve Ukrainian cultural heritage institutions. Furthermore, Culture Policy Lab shows attempts towards protecting Ukraine's culture and identity (Culture Policy Labs Report, 2023). Nevertheless, despite the existence of international instruments in the protection and respect of cultural heritage, concerning the Russian-Ukraine war, the issue has proven a complex one.

Discussing the protection of cultural heritage is a difficult task with the advent of technology and scientific advances in the world. Technological inventions have proved to be a double-edged sword since they both cause massive destruction in armed conflict and also support digitalization protection of heritage sites. The destruction of cultural heritage in an armed conflict is highly threatened. Krepinevich (1994) cited in Chin (2019) states that technology has contributed to armed military win wars. Due to the complex global arena, the development of new technology with greater capacity has caused widespread permanent destruction of buildings and heritage sites. The conflict zone is stationed with geospatial technologies and drones. Kumar (2022) states that cyber-attacks and drone surveillance have complicated the battlefield in contemporary wars. In a study by Duguin and Pavlova (2023) on the role of cyber technology in the Russian-Ukraine war, the study unravelled the reality massive effects of cyber-attacks in war. However, upon reflection, the digitization of collections is a way to preserve cultural works for the future. Priority actions have been posed by the Europeana platform in support of Ukraine and the display of digitized collections of Ukrainian cultural heritage. Furthermore, the EU (2021) states that the use of digital technology can be adopted in identifying and providing opportunities for long-term preservation. In addition, Gosart and Diadyk (2023: 4) state that SUCHO has provided digitalized technology to libraries in Ukraine in response to protecting digitalized collections of cultural objects. Technology advancement is crucial in the protection of cultural heritage for future humanitarian efforts in times of war. As such, the devotion to the protection of cultural heritage should prevail as a global concern.

As mentioned previously, in the wake of the Russian-Ukraine war, Ukraine's heritage sites are endangered by the armed conflict, a loss of both tangible and intangible heritage on Ukraine's side. In their study, Gosart and Diadyk (2023), identified the risk of losing cultural heritage in the Russian-Ukraine war despite efforts by Ukrainian libraries to preserve cultural heritage materials during times of war. Research findings present that it is very complex and challenging to safeguard cultural heritage in an armed conflict. Taking this into consideration, Stone (2016) identifies looting of cultural property and the principle of no strike on cultural heritage as some of the challenges placing cultural heritage at high risk in times of war. Likewise, there have been several concerns involving Russian soldiers looting Ukraine artefacts (Wille, 2022; Druhak, 2023). It can also be argued that different stakeholders and individuals have varied interests as the property is also prone to theft. Some properties have been expropriated and transferred to Russia, while in other cases, artefacts have been pillaged by Russian soldiers to keep or sell (Spinney, 2022). Unfortunately, this act of accusations of stealing

cultural objects limits the effectiveness of international law regarding the protection of cultural property and heritage. Cultural heritage looting and stealing is a major crisis in the Russian-Ukraine war. The war revealed the weaknesses and failure of international law to prevent such activity in times of war. The major question is how the international community can prevent the theft of cultural artefacts and save human lives at the same interval. How can the international system appreciate and value cultural diversity when it is prone to theft and destruction in a conflict?

Empirical evidence reveals that as the Russian-Ukraine war continues to unfold, efforts to safeguard and protect cultural property in Ukraine have been uneven. Given the ongoing conflict, it is not yet possible to assess the damage to the cultural heritage (Shydlovskiy *et al.*, 2023). The war has threatened global security-peace and security. With the massive effects of the war, why then is the prevailing low-level commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage? The war is intertwined with socio-cultural, historical experiences and geopolitical interests. Christensen (2024) argues that 21st-century conflicts have proved to be complex limiting to urgent need to tackle threats to cultural heritage protection. National and international efforts have not been able to effectively do much in preserving cultural heritage probably because of the myriad of global challenges. Russia's geopolitical interests, inaccessibility of other regions in Ukraine, global economic instability, climate change and environmental issues, and civil wars are among the global challenges. However, the effects of the war are not only felt in Ukraine but the global community as a whole. The consequences of the Russian-Ukraine war are not only based on loss of human lives instead extend to the destruction of museums, libraries and historical sites. The study presents a critical challenge in the protection of cultural heritage. Despite the effects of the war on cultural heritage preservation, the 2024 Russian elections ushered President Putin into another term in office³. The political field and aggression remain tilted to the disadvantage of Ukraine's identity protection and loss of World cultural heritage. Within this complex scenario, protection for cultural heritage in times of armed conflicts is interdisciplinary as it lies on discourses of socialism and political economy.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study sought to analyse the protection of cultural heritage in the war. The issue of cultural heritage protection has not been well safeguarded in the Russian-Ukraine war. The study concludes that despite Russian geopolitical interests, the destruction of cultural heritage stands as a war crime. The Russian army grossly violates international norms and conventions concerning the preservation of cultural heritage. As the war continues to ravage, the priorities of international communities remain being pushed towards the protection and value of cultural heritage. The paper urges the global community to establish a strategic roadmap to facilitate the protection of cultural property effectively since, the destruction of cultural heritage in Ukraine not only affects Ukraine's ethnicity instead, implicates the protection of World Heritage Sites. The destruction of heritage sites equally means destroying historical achievements and memories.

The major question remains, what can be proffered to mitigate the destruction of cultural heritage in times of war in the contemporary international system? The protection

³ Oxford Analytica. (2024). A landslide win gives Putin six more years. Expert Briefings. 18 March 2024. <https://dailybrief.oxan.com/Analysis/DB285886/Landslide-win-gives-Putin-six-more-years>. Accessed on 26 March 2024.

of cultural heritage is anchored in respect of international law. Of course, geopolitical interests turn a blind eye to law, hence, the paper recommends State Parties to consider critical analysis of the existing law and the need for amendments to the articles of international law. As it stands, despite having the law, there is a gap that ought to be filled to enhance the effectiveness and scope of the protection and preservation of cultural heritage in times of armed conflicts. The international institutions and State Parties need to stand firm in unity and implement consequences for violation of the law on the aggressor to protect cultural heritage.

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