Securing World Heritage Sites: Insurgency and the Destruction of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites in Timbuktu, Mali

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Abstract

Because of the political and religious disagreements in Mali, the protection of the country's world heritage sites (WHSs) has been a constant agenda of state-parties to the World Heritage Convention (WHC). To avoid irreversible damage and loss of these valuable national heritages, appropriate action is needed at every level for their conservation and preservation. Significant attention has been directed at understanding the relevance and benefits of WHSs to the economic sector specifically, but, there has been relatively little academic and policy research on the destruction and looting of WHSs especially in Timbuktu, Mali. This is the gap this study intends to fill. This calls for serious questions regarding what precipitated and led to the destruction of Timbuktu's cultural heritage. What is the significance of Timbuktu's WHSs to the Malians? How should government authorities respond to the destruction of the sites? Finally, against the background of the destruction of the Timbuktu WHSs, how can the WHSs be preserved and protected? This study critically interrogates insurgents' attacks on the WHSs, with the motive of developing a sustainable template suitable for forestalling potential attacks by Islamic/jihadist insurgents, or any other insurgents for that matter, in other locations in Mali, using the attacks in Timbuktu as a case study.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, UNESCO, World Heritage Sites, Insurgency, Mali

Introduction

The World Heritage Convention (WHC) is an international legal instrument that propagates the responsibility to protect world heritage sites (WHSs) famous for their outstanding biodiversity, ecosystems, geology, cultural artefacts, or historical and religious significance (UNESCO, 2012). Apart from identifying and nominating WHSs, state-parties to the convention have the responsibility to protect them for present and future generations (UNESCO, 1972). In the twenty-first century, several insurgency groups have emerged and wreaking havoc to heritage

sites in several parts of the world, thereby confronting WHSs with multidimensional challenges such as incessant terrorist attacks.

In spite of the efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to ensure the protection of historical artefacts and beliefs in recent times, there are palpable challenges creating serious concerns to stakeholders around the world. These concerns border on the incessant insurgents' attacks on cultural heritages and assaults on belief systems. In this connection, Bokkem (2017) recounts that on 20th January, 2017, Syrian government announced the destruction of part of the Roman Amphitheatre by the Daesh, popularly known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in the ancient city of Palmyra in late December 2016. She added that the same insurgent group had deliberately destroyed several WHSs in the Middle East and North Africa. Her report also indicated that Daesh destroyed over 150 WHSs between 2011 and 2015. Evidence has shown that the destruction of WHSs is not peculiar to Daesh terrorists and that it is not new in history. Moreover, Bokkem (2017) states that:

> In 70 CE, the Roman Army plundered and destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem during the First Jewish-Roman War. During Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, thousands of Chinese historical sites were destroyed to rid the country of capitalist and traditionalist influences, and 2001 also witnessed Taliban attacks on the two Buddhas of Bamiyan, declaring that the massive statues were false idols.

Since 2012, the Ansar Dine and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) insurgent groups have attacked and destroyed many cultural monuments and WHSs in Timbuktu, Mali (Voronkov, 2018). According to Williams (2018), 14 of Timbuktu's mausoleums, including those that are part of the UNESCO WHSs, as well as two others at the Djingareyber Mosque, were totally destroyed. In addition, the emblematic El Farouk monument at the entrance to the city was razed, and 4, 203 manuscripts from the Ahmed Baba Research centre were lost. Also, 300,000 other manuscripts were evacuated mainly to Bamako, in urgent need of conservation and protection.

Religion has been the perspective of the discourse on the global vulnerability of WHSs to these terrorist groups. Religion has been identified as one of the motivations for the destruction of WHSs in the twenty-first century (Jones, 2014). Many of the insurgent groups are allegedly affiliated to Islam, the religion mostly accused of breeding and promoting insurgent groups' (Schafer, 2002; Norton and Kechichian, 2009). The Global Terrorism Index (2019) states that 74% of the deaths from terrorism in 2015 were accounted for by ISIS, Boko Haram, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, which are all related to the Islamic religion.

The index brings to the fore the discourse about the connection of Islam to insurgency and the security and protection of WHSs all over the world, especially in Mali. Of interest in the discourse, however, is the destruction of some Islamic WHSs by terrorist groups who ironically profess Islam as their faith. For example, the Djingareyber Mosque and the 4,203 manuscripts from the Ahmed Baba Research Centre were all Islamic artefacts and monuments destroyed by terrorist groups in Timbuktu, Mali, by acclaimed Islamic jihadists and propagators (Williams

2018). While analysts are still trying to fathom the religious and political bona fide of known Islamic jihadists who attack Islamic WHSs in Timbuktu, Jones seems to have complicated the discourse. Jones (2014) has speculated about Daesh's plans to launch attack on the Ka'aba in Mecca. The Ka'aba is one of the significant and ancient WHSs of the Muslims, and it is held by them as the most sacred mosque in the world. Lending some substance to the speculation, Abu Turab Al Mugaddasi, a Daesh member, was quoted as saying "If Allah wills we will kill those who worship stones in Mecca and destroy the Ka'aba. People go to Mecca to touch the stones, not for Allah" (Jones, 2014).

Most studies that have emerged on the activities of the insurgent groups in Mali and on the impacts of insurgency around the globe, have concentrated on human and material losses, with scant attention given to the attacks on WHSs, especially in Timbuktu, Mali. The main focus of this study is on the WHSs and the phenomenon of 'New War'- that is, insurgency. The study will explore the jihadist attacks on the WHSs and their motive of promoting and developing a template for Islamizing the world. The destruction of Timbuktu WHSs is the case study.

The study is divided into five parts. The first part presents the main academic perspectives of inquiry as to what constitutes the new war and Islamic religious insurgency -the Islam as an accused of insurgency perspective; and the geostrategic politics of Islam against the WHSs. The second part offers a historicized analysis of the rise of religious indoctrination that eventually culminated in radical Islamism which bred insurgent groups driven by extremist religious passion unleashing violent attacks on the WHSs in Timbuktu and northern Mali. In the third part, the study examines three significant points of view on the WHSs (religious, economic and social), stressing the importance of the WHSs for the development of Timbuktu. The fourth part examines the implications of looting and destruction of the WHSs. And the last part critically synthesizes all the foregoing perspectives and attempts to answer sticky, attendant questions. Finally, based on the experience of the destruction of Timbuktu's cultural heritage, the study will explore how cultural heritage can be preserved and protected in Africa? And, of course, this study explains the causes, patterns and implications of the destruction of Timbuktu cultural heritage and how the Malian government should respond to protect the relics of the cultural monuments of the ancient city.

Setting the Framework

In spite of the fact that different scholars (Booth, 2001; Duffield, 2001; Berdal, 2003; Berdal, 2011) have developed diverse opinions against the new-war thesis, the theory is very relevant to this study. The theory is relevant because it explains substantially the mode of operation of the insurgent groups and the likelihood of sustained insurgency as a form of new war in the contemporary world. Moreover, it provides relevant information on the features of insurgency for consideration by stakeholders concerned with the responsibility to protect world heritage sites (WHSs). Such information is relevant to the extent that it prepares the stakeholders for the challenge of a prolonged war on artefacts, monuments, archives, museums and other forms of tangible and intangible WHSs, with strengthened determination to mitigate the attacks or, if

possible, to stop the attacks of the insurgent groups from wiping out human history in many societies.

Further, the incessant attacks on WHSs around the globe can be subsumed under Mary Kaldor's new and old war theoretical perspective (Kaldor, 2012; 2013). She propounded the new and old war thesis after the Cold War in furtherance of the debate on the dynamics of insurgency in the contemporary world. The 'new war' thesis was fully articulated in her work titled 'New and Old war' in 1998, which was later expanded over the years (Ritta, 2010). Marry Kaldor classified war into new and old and put insurgency in the 'new war' bracket. From Kaldor's categorization and perspective, insurgency attacks on WHSs represent a new phase in warfare, especially in Africa. Modern conflicts approaches defy the basic logic of conventional wars which relies on specific rules of engagement (Kaldor, 2012; 2013). Kaldor (2012; 2013) posits that, unlike the old war, the 'new war' is between the state and non-state entities, citing the wars waged by the Talibans, Ansar Dine and Al-Qaeda terrorist groups in their respective theatres.

Many scholars from diverse fields of study have keyed into the 'new war' paradigm (Malesevic, 2012). Malesevic (2012) finds agreement among those scholars that violent insurgency in the post-Cold War era has changed from the old mode. He adds that the thinking in some segments of the research community on the protection of the WHSs is that the 'new war' has changed considerably, from the old to more of a civil war rather than inter-state low-intensity conflicts, and massive destruction of ancient historical monuments and archives are at the receiving end. Supporting the argument, Kaldor (2006) argues that what the world gained in the reduction of the spate of interstate wars owing largely to the blunting of politically-induced ideological edges has been lost to the emergence of 'new war' actors on the horizon. She further states that these new actors are neither formally organised military groups nor armed rebels, but largely irregular groups like jihadist groups (Kaldor, 2013).

On the other hand, some critics have punctured the arguments of Kaldor in the new war thesis, relying on empirical evidence (Duffield, 2001; Berdal, 2003; Berdal, 2011; Ritta, 2010). Some of the critics pointed out that nothing significantly 'new' about any of the factors said to be the features of 'new wars' (Ritta, 2010). Malesevic (2012) posits that research emanating from the new-war paradigm has proved highly beneficial in highlighting some distinctive features of civil wars during the 1990s which involved the looting and destruction of tangible and intangible heritage assets. However, he added that subsequent inter-disciplinary empirical research has seriously challenged many of the claims of the new-war thesis. For example, With reference to Kalyvas, (2001; 2006), Malesevic (2012) opines that sometimes inter-state and intra-state wars share similar features of destruction and looting. This argument challenges the characteristics of the new war as presented by Kaldor. In fact, the old paradigm was also brutal, violating the conventional rules of engagement as much as the new war, which even in some instances is financed from neighbouring states and global powers as was the case with old wars (Malesevic, 2012; Ritta, 2010). Reinforcing the same position, Malesevic (2012) further referred to Lacina and Gleditsch (2005) claiming that there is serious decline in the number of destructions and

lootings in the new wars compared to the old. Moreover, he supports the argument by Ritta (2010) where he said: Kaldor's (2013) previous assertion that the far higher proportion of non-military to military casualties is 'perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of new wars' is, in statistical terms, not justified by historical records. One critical study concluded bluntly that there is no support for the claim that the ratio of lootings and destruction has increased significantly in the 'new wars' period.

Jasiukėnaitė (2010) and Kalyvas, (2006) posited that the term "new war" and the assumption that war has undergone transformation is doubtful. He clarifies that Kaldor's (2012) conclusion that new wars are a kind of antithesis to the old, Clausewitzian war thesis is unacceptable. He however added that it is not easy to define the Clausewitzian era, as acknowledged by Clausewitz himself. Jasiukėnaitė (2010) went further to add that the majority of the characteristics attributed to the "new" form of organised violence, such as destruction and lootings for financial motives, indicate the changing character of war at best, not a change in the essence of war itself. He also disagreed with the argument that territorial sovereignty and the autonomy of state are no longer viable and considers it as the weakest part in the "new wars" discourse. John (2013) argued that the institution of war was in decline and likely to go extinct if the trend persists with the emergence of 'new war' structures; he describes modern warfare as the "criminality of looting and destructions of ancient materials based on small bands of greedy elements".

What is obvious in these arguments is that the new forms of war which include insurgency are more involved in the destruction of tangible and intangible heritage assets than conventional warfare, which was usually between nations with specific rules of engagement. The 'new war' thesis as argued in this context defies any rule of engagement, thereby making it very destructive and unpredictable. The level of destruction, most times, is better imagined. The insurgents are untrained military miscreants who are usually directed by their dangerous instincts and motives.

This brings us to the issue of the consequences of such wars on the WHSs. Insurgent groups in their bid to achieve their aims look in the direction of WHSs as important targets, worthy of destruction if only to make a point for their weird religious and political ideologies. The rampant nature of the 'new war' puts the WHSs at perpetual risk in the Sahel and sub-Saharan African region, especially in Timbuktu. In fact, the destruction and looting of the monuments and artefacts of vulnerable WHSs have been a good source of financing the deadly activities of the insurgent groups (Brosche et. al, 2017). The veracity of this theoretical position will be demonstrated in what follows.

Upshots of Attacks on Timbuktu's WHSs

The Malian city of Timbuktu emerged a full-fledged international and UNESCO-recognized world heritage site in 1988 (Fontein, 2000; UNESCO, 2003; Arnoldi, 2014). UNESCO's considerations include: Timbuktu's holy places which were vital to early Islamization in Africa; Timbuktu's mosques as repositories of a cultural and scholarly golden age of Songhay Empire; and Timbuktu's unique and original traditional building techniques as depicted in the

construction of the mosques (UNESCO, 2009a). Timbuktu boasts magnificent mausoleums, three large mosques and sixteen cemeteries, all of which the UNESCO Heritage Committee recognized and designated on December, 23, 1988 (UNESCO, 2009b). Unfortunately, by 2008, the city had become the epicentre of activities of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), involving the kidnapping of tourists in the Sahel and sub-Saharan African region (Norton and Kechichian, 2009; Lau, 2015). In 2009, more tourists were kidnapped along the borders of Mali and Niger, and the terrorist operations culminated in attacks on a cultural festival in Anderamboukane, with many tourists killed (Novacek, et al., 2017). In these dangerous circumstances, a number of countries like Britain, France and the USA advised their citizens to avoid travelling to Bamako and northern Mali (UNESCO, 2014).

Source: *The Irish Times*: Books set ablaze by insurgents at the Ahmed Baba Institute in Timbuktu. Photo: Mary Fitzgerald

Naturally, the number of travellers to Timbuktu reduced abruptly, from 6000 in 2009 to 492 in the last few years. And as the security concern got increasingly alarming, the government of Mali, shifted the cultural festival in 2010 from Essakane Desert to the surrounding area of the city of Timbuktu (Bahrani, 2015). Late 2011, Islamic insurgents launched an attack on a hotel in Timbuktu, where a tourist was killed and three others kidnapped. In the history insurgent attacks, this was the first occurrence in the city of Timbuktu (Smith, 2014). Another city, Gao, was ensnared in insurgent attacks on April 1, 2012, and Timbuktu was seized by the Ansar Dine and the Tuareg rebels of the Malian military force that same year (UNESCO, 2014). Thereafter, a so-called Malian National Liberation Army declared the region as the liberated state of Azawad.

Source: *GlobalPost*: Books set ablaze by insurgents at the Ahmed Baba Institute in Timbuktu. Photo: Eric Feferberg
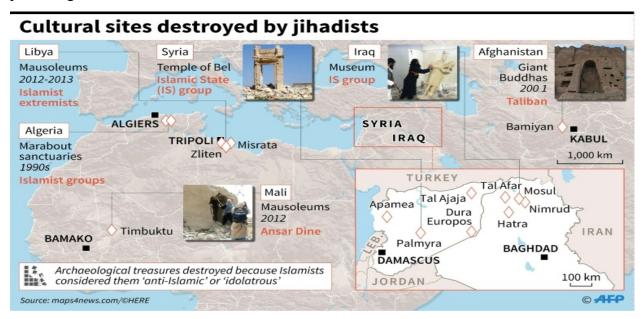
This rebel political entity was not recognized by the international community, and it collapsed after three months (Pelizzo, 2001). This was when the World Heritage Committee included Timbuktu and the Tomb of Askia on June 28, 2012 on the list of WHSs in danger in order to engender cooperation and support for the sites under the threat of the Islamic jihadist insurgents (Shadreck, 2013). In spite of that strategic move, the Ansar Dine group, the AQIM and MUJAO still unleashed a series of attacks between May 4, 2012 and July 10, 2012, looting and destroying two mosques, two historical monuments and nine mausoleums in Timbuktu (Brode, 2012). Another attack was launched in July of the same year by Ansar Dine insurgents in which more cultural treasures were also looted and destroyed along with the entrance to a 15th-century mosque called the City of 333 Saints in Timbuktu. According to the Abou Darbar, the leader of the Ansar Dine insurgent group, "we are in the process of smashing all the hidden mausoleums in the area" (Lau, 2015; Bokkem, 2017).

Historical monuments including Islamic religious monuments outside Timbuktu, all of which were WHSs, were also being attacked and destroyed (Callimachi, 2012). Many Islamic insurgents living in the city of Timbuktu in the northern region of Mali also used pickaxes to smash up any remaining mausoleums, all in ruthless implementation of a version of Islamic law. And all that was unleashed a few days after the United Nations approved a military force to take over those areas under the control of the Islamic insurgents in northern Mali (Benjaminsen and Berge 2004). Of course, the insurgents had vowed that 'not a single mausoleum will remain in Timbuktu because it is against Islam and Allah is not also in support of the mausoleums' (Ahmed and Callimachi, 2012).

Source: *UNESCO*: Bandarin -Timbuktu. Photograph: UNESCO

AQIM and other Islamic insurgent groups started occupying the city through a coup d'etat in since March, 2012, which plunged the Sahel and the sub-Saharan African region into chaos (Al Jazeera, 2012; BBC, 2013). Mohammed Alfoul had stated that 'anything that does not fall under Islam is not good and man should only worship Allah' (Ahmed and Callimachi, 2012). He further stated that armed insurgents considered mausoleums as blasphemous. Little wonder, the vandalisation of the Muslim saints' tombs in the UNESCO WHSs drove home the point just after the Islamic insurgents in Gao announced the names of two persons that they had amputated for protecting the WHSs.

Source: Pretoria East REKORD, Cultural sites destroyed by insurgents | © AFP | Alain Bommenel, Sabrina Blanchard

The governments of Mali and France responded by setting up a counter-insurgency joint force consisting of 1000 soldiers from the latter and 200 troops from the former (Barringer and Wallace, 2014; Sanni, 2014). The joint force started capturing those places in Timbuktu from the control of insurgents since January, 28, 2013 without any struggle (Kottoor, 2013). This happened because the Islamic insurgent groups had already fled from the northern region of Mali. Meanwhile, the insurgents had set the Ahmed Baba Institute on fire after removing about 28,000 Islamic manuscripts to a safe place and looting 2000 others (RadioFreeEuropeRadioLiberty, 2013; Sanni, 2014). South Africa had funded the preservation of those treasures to serve as an archive or reservoir of resources for Islamic research in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa (Barringer and Wallace, 2014; Sanni, 2014). Islamic insurgent groups later penetrated Timbuktu and carried out suicide bombing of the WHSs and other places where Islamic monuments were being preserved. The crisis has lingered, but French war planes forced the remaining insurgent groups out of the city of Timbuktu.

Timbuktu WHSs: an Islamic Repository of Knowledge

Timbuktu city in Mali provides one of the most important repositories for the conservation, management and preservation of Islamic knowledge, memory, and identity. As an eminent repository of historical, religious and cultural treasures, Timbuktu also provides a veritable platform for improving the quality of the Islamic environment, promoting social inclusion, stimulating tourism development and enhancing socio-economic development as well as a peaceful polity (Zanganeh, 2013). This widely-held view may have informed the naming of Timbuktu as one of the UNESCO WHSs, which, in northern Mali, have been invaluable to the citizens and foreigners such as tourists, academics and professional scholars, researchers, among others.

It also provides a good understanding of ancient Islamic writings and the history of the people of Mali, plus a sense of social and common identity between the Malians and the Arab world. Its important WHSs are pivotal to the spread of Islam in Africa with the vast resources available in the prestigious Quranic University of Sankore and Ahmed Baba Institute, all in Timbuktu (Huddleston, 2009). In addition, Timbuktu's WHSs are the custodians of the past, present and even the future of the development of Islam in the area, with especial reference to the need and expectations of Islamic scholars, researchers and visitors as well as the broader Islamic community. The WHSs represent the embodiment of the iches of the area's religious, cultural and scholarly heritage, as manifested in the collections of objects, ideas and other treasures in their custody, many of such assets being a reflection of the people's religious emotions, fears and hopes.

The significance of the Timbuktu WHSs lies not only in its Islamic religious collections, but also in the reflections and insights they generate around Islamic religious objects, knowledge, multiple visions, interpretations of the vast cultural, religious and historical heritage in their care. Embedded in the Timbuktu WHSs' position as treasure custodians is their potential to act as a platform for reflection on Islamic religious knowledge systems, values, attitudes and beliefs. The

WHSs have been showing the differences between multi-religious and intra-religious approaches in Islam. To think of Timbuktu WHSs as places of Islamic intra-religious dialogue requires one to question the segmentation resulting from multi-religious Islamic policies, in which the recognition of Islamic religious diversity and distinct identities often ends up reinforcing discrimination, segregation, jihadism and insurgency within the fold of Islam. Intra-religious dialogue is, on the other hand, a path of Islamic religious communication and exchange.

Following, these paths, the Timbuktu WHSs have become neutral zones, or spaces where Islamic religious folks or groups can communicate and explore one another. The major aim of the WHSs is to promote a positive exploration of Islamic religious history and cultural identity through the programmes involving a variety of local Islamic community groups. Religious experience is significant, as it links both tangible and intangible contemporary Islamic heritage, particularly personal and collective identities. This is indication of the religious values of the Timbuktu WHSs, since some Islamic scholars have identified the promotion of the growth of Islam through the facilitation of individual development through Islamic education.

Moreover, from an economic point of view, the significance of Timbuktu to African WHSs in the world is priceless, in view of Islam's historic position in the continent. Timbuktu's significance dates back to its reputation as a hub of major economic activities in Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries. That the city is, today, considered significant and prominent derives from this historic economic importance plus the presence of WHSs which are also generating considerable revenue for the survival of Mali. In addition, the Timbuktu WHSs have the greatest Islamic resources for research and innovation in Africa and the world. Timbuktu's most highly developed and original WHSs in Mali have placed the city atop other cities in the country. This status has translated into a better standard of living for the people, including tourists and researchers alike. Significantly, the WHSs in Timbuktu have continued to attract millions of visitors every year to Islamic monuments, historic centres, archaeological sites, museums and galleries, in addition to generating employment and promoting tourism and business activities in Mali.

However, it must be noted that as a result of recent insurgency activities in the cities, foreign researchers and investors normally attracted to the WHSs are now wary of coming to a country where their lives and investments are not safe. For similar reasons, Mali itself has been on a steady decline, according to data from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in 2020. The survey showed that 'the global economy grew by 3.2%, Travel and Tourism, grew significantly more at 3.9% and the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contribution is 10.4 compared to 2015 and 2016. There was increase in WTTC in 2014 (4.3%) and in 2015 (4.6%) (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). The impact of Timbuktu WHSs on the economy of Mali cannot be quantified. In short, it is argued that these WHSs play a pivotal role in the wellbeing of the Malian national economy.

Finally, the WHSs have continued to sustain Timbuktu's fundamental role as the seat of Islamic civilization and historical heritage in sub-Saharan Africa. The Timbuktu WHSs, in recognition of

the dangers of inaction, have supported new research programmes that promote the long-term future protection and conservation of Islamic cultural assets in the Sahel, the Sub-Sahara and Africa generally. These WHSs are also important in the preservation and protection of both tangible and intangible heritage assets as well as African Islamic identity, cultural diversity, general wellbeing and wealth. However, the fragility of Timbuktu's WHSs has increased, and their vulnerability to the harmful effects of insurgent groups' activities and mass vandalism and looting has become all the more evident. And without doubt, Timbuktu's cultural landscape has changed over time, owing partly to increase in the activities of the insurgent groups and partly to the city's own inherent social dynamics in terms of size, the presence, activities, social relevance and aura of several WHSs alongside famous cultural heritage institutions.

In recent UNESCO rankings, the WHSs in Timbuktu city were placed in an intermediate position, thus underscoring their social relevance. According to analysts, large numbers of Malians are employed in WHS-related jobs, representing 2.3% of the total jobs in country (UNESCO, 2012). In Timbuktu WHSs in particular, such employment is large and at a growing rate. Evidence is presented on the socio-demographic structure in the social sector. It has been observed that, the Timbuktu WHSs have boosted productivity in the city as well as established useful connections with many international universities, and Islamic/Arabic training centres to forge ahead in promoting innovation and skills development in the context of the Islamic world. Thus, the WHSs are well primed to seek and give solutions to many Islamic religious challenges. Importantly, the Timbuktu WHSs have been serving as a veritable platform and medium for the exchange of ideas, intellectual interaction, as well as talent hunt and development, all of which are essential parts of the purpose of the WHSs.

Implications of Looting WHSs

For many, WHSs provide a necessary source of livelihood, and for others, especially neighbourhood inhabitants, they are cultural centres where they recreate and socialize. Some inhabitants engage in protecting the WHSs as the only opportunity for self-reliance, or as support to their family, or for the thrill of freedom. Even then, the looting and destruction of the WHSs have escalated, owing to high rates of unemployment, poverty, inflation and poor Islamic education and orientation. Such acts are perpetrated by inhabitants and insurgents alike. The increasing scourge of poverty and worsening economic conditions in Mali has caused a drastic rise in migration to neighbouring countries in search of better livelihood. But those with limited education, skills, funds or planning, end up in protecting and taking care of WHSs as the easiest means of livelihood. Studies reveal that the looting and destruction of WHSs have raised several social issues, especially, for vulnerable inhabitants and for the future of knowledge and leaning with both national and international dimensions. For instance, the international recognition of so many areas has been eroded as a result of this as well as exposure to harsh economic conditions and sundry vices and anti-social activities, posing security risks and projecting a disorderly society.

How Can WHSs Be Preserved and Protected?

The AQIM) insurgent groups are a serious threat to Mali's national security and UNESCO's WHSs. The Malian government should acknowledge this and work in five areas to prevent further looting and destruction of the WHSs.

Improve security for WHSs: An immediate step is to improve security for the WHSs. To begin with, the government and its security agencies should intensify operations against the AQIM insurgent groups, improve insurgency tracking systems, arrest carriers of illegal firearms and prosecute suspected assailants.

Strengthen police capacity to curb looting of sites: In recent years, the governments of some northern African states have initiated several joint efforts against AQIM insurgent groups. In 2018, the northern provinces of Mali jointly funded a counter-insurgency operation in some communities. The operation involved security institutions in Mali including local security agencies. In 2019, the Malian army launched two other operations against AQIM insurgent groups in the northern zones. Government authorities have also negotiated peace agreements with other Islamic religious groups in their communities to reap the benefits of WHSs to the local communities. These efforts have yielded some results, including the recovery of large numbers of tangible and intangible materials looted from the WHSs. However, in the short term, and together with continued attempts to reach peace deals with Islamic clerics, the government should sustain ongoing military and other security operations. Further down the road, they should consider shifting their strategy for curbing the looting of the WHSs and other crimes from episodic military operations to steady deployment of more and better-equipped police units in rural and forested areas where AQIM insurgent groups are based. This would allow the police to respond rapidly to incidents and discourage further attacks and looting.

Improve WHSs tracking: Smarter WHSs tracking and identification systems can also curb looting of Islamic assets in the sites. UNESCO should oversee the branding, and certification of WHSs assets. UNESCO, in collaboration with the Malian government, should renew efforts to establish safer and more efficient arrangements for WHSs across the country. Adoption of so-called smart devices could also help. UNESCO should use such sophisticated devices to regularly update the WHSs Information System generate some of the information security agencies need to track insurgents and recover stolen heritage assets.

Prevent attacks on WHSs communities: The government should follow through on promises to stop armed attacks on WHSs communities, especially in badly-affected Timbuktu. To that end, national security agencies need to focus on preventive measures, including community liaison mechanisms to upgrade intelligence gathering, early warning and rapid response. A key priority is to curb the influx and possession of illegal firearms, especially automatic rifles used on WHSs in Timbuktu. The new government whistle-blower programme on illegal firearms is a promising start; it should be supported by speedily following up on informants' leads and protecting their identities. Likewise, the steps taken by the Malian government to curb illicit weapons should also be sustained.

Strengthen regional cooperation: Some dimensions of the insurgency can only be fully addressed within a regional framework. This will require Abuja to work in close coordination with neighbouring countries both to manage human and cattle movements across borders and to fight illicit arms trafficking. Following revelations that foreign insurgent groups were involved in attacks on WHSs, the African Union should compel member-countries to take steps to degrade and defeat the insurgent groups, mindful that there could be a major international crisis if they are not stopped now. To that end, the government should engage the governments of Cameroon, Chad and Niger, as well as the ECOWAS commission, to reach agreement on how to collectively monitor and combat transnational insurgent groups, in accordance with relevant international instruments including ECOWAS Protocols. It should also strengthen regional cooperation in combating insurgency.

Conclusion

This study borders on linking security studies with heritage studies, given the primacy of heritages to humanity and the threats to them as well. This study is about the destruction of WHSs by Ansar Dine and Al-Qaeda insurgents groups as well as proffering lasting and sustainable solutions to the menace in other places with potential vulnerability. Studies have emerged on the activities of terrorists and impacts of war by many scholars. Most of these studies have concentrated on human and material losses while neglecting the aspects of attacks on WHSs. Yet, WHSs are crucial to humanity. Using Timbuktu WHSs as the case study, this research focuses on the frontal attacks on WHSs during wars, terrorist attacks and other forms of criminalities, by Islamic jihadists as part of their bid to develop a sustainable template for promoting jihadism around the world. The attacks by terrorists on several WHSs have resulted in monumental looting and casualties. The looting and destruction were total in most of the places. This is devastating because the looted or destroyed heritage assets are not replaceable and where replacement is eventually made, it does not possess the substance that made it a remarkable cultural heritage in the first place. It is obvious then that the inherent motive of the new war declared by insurgent groups globally is the eradication of history as represented in the cultural heritage of the people. In pursuit of this ignoble objective, the insurgents habitually forcibly convert the people to their strange creed and ways of life, just as they systematically destroy their victims' history, belief systems, artefacts, and monuments that are reminiscent of the past which constitutes their heritage. Unfortunately, the world seems helpless, as no practical means of securing these very important aspects of human history have been identified or applied to solve the menace. Hence, the need to interrogate and find a lasting solution to the problem.

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