

Article

Endangered Urban Commons: Lahore’s Violent Heritage Management and Prospects for Reconciliation

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Abstract

The debate on urban commons yields relevance for shared histories and heritage in divided and post-conflict societies. Albeit memory is always subjective, heritage management tends to engender a linear view of the past that suggests a preconceived future development. Where the past is denigrated to prove the impossibility of ethnoreligious communities’ coexistence even though they have lived together peacefully for centuries, it risks corroborating us-them divisions for posterity and undermines reconciliation and peacebuilding. In this historically informed article, we argue that urban change in Lahore since 1947 has gone hand in hand with the purposive destruction of the common heritage shared by India and Pakistan. This interpretation of the past for the future reflects different forms of violence that surface in heritage management. Based on empirical data collected on heritage practices in the Old City of Lahore, Pakistan, we analyse the approach of the Walled City of Lahore Authority towards heritage management. Our focus on ignored dimensions and objects of heritage sheds light on the systematic denial of a shared history with Hindus and Sikhs before and during the 1947 partition of British India. This partial ignorance and the intentional neglect, for instance, of housing premises inhabited once by Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities, prevent any constructive confrontation with the past. By scrutinising the relationship between urban change, nostalgia, memory and heritage, this article points out that heritage management needs to be subjected to a constructive confrontation with the past to pave the ground for future reconciliation.

Keywords

evacuee property; heritage; housing; Lahore; memory; nostalgia; Pakistan; shared history; structural violence; urban commons

Issue

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1. Introduction

Lahore is the capital of the province of Punjab and Pakistan’s second-largest city, with an estimated population of more than 11 million people. Its expanding urban agglomeration lies close to the Pakistan-India border. Barely ten kilometres separate Lahore from the Indian Punjab and about 30 kilometres from the city of Amritsar in India. Yet, residents of both Punjabs have been barred from regular contact across a nearly sealed border for decades. The division of Punjab, result-

ing from the partition of British India in 1947, put an end to the coexistence of ethnoreligious communities in an unprecedented “population exchange.” Following episodes of intercommunal violence and destruction on both sides of the 1947-created border, the massive out-migration of non-Muslim communities to India depleted Lahore of nearly half its population (Talbot, 2006). Vacant premises, including dwellings previously inhabited by Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities, as well as religious buildings, were occupied and allocated to in-coming Muslim populations as evacuee properties

(Talbot & Singh, 2009; Zamindar, 2007). While the dislocation and transfer of populations affected questions of housing and home(lessness) (Moffat, 2022), the creation of the Pakistani nation-state also resulted in the selective preservation of cultural heritage in Lahore, the wider Punjab, and beyond. These issues have even amplified throughout the past decades, characterised by sustained population growth and urban transformations. In this article, we demonstrate how distinct patterns and paces of interrelationship between housing, urban change, and heritage have evolved in Lahore and argue that the legacy of India's and Pakistan's shared past has been systematically marginalised. Given a sense of urgency resulting from the gradually fading memory, the inevitable passing of the generation that experienced Punjab at the (pre-)partition time, and the progressive decay of (im)material sources of memory, the question is to what extent heritage practices in Lahore can contribute to preserving the shared past with India as (in)tangible urban commons.

To investigate the quality and extent of practices and discourses of urban heritage in the city of Lahore, and, in particular, in the inner Old/Walled City, we reflect on critical dimensions of a shared past's heritage with India and how it manifests (or not) among Lahorites as well as in policy and heritage practitioners' circles. To do that, we elaborate on the conceptual linkage between endangered common heritage and peacebuilding (Section 2) and subsequently (in Section 3.1) introduce how Lahorites' relation to heritage as a common good is contested and ambivalent against the backdrop of a difficult post-colonial inheritance and urban transformations. With ensuing material and functional changes as well as shifts in meaning, urban transformations have also contributed to exacerbate current critical issues (Harrison, 2013; Winter, 2013) that impact and extend outwards from heritage, such as housing, overburdened infrastructures for services provision, as well as social and religious divisions. We argue that the wider framework for these developments is enforced through institutional violence at the city scale in Lahore, encompassing the changing heritage and conservation legislation, master plans, and other planning provisions that mainly focus on mega-projects (Section 3.2). For the Walled City, we distinguish two paces of urban transformation that embody different forms of violence against heritage: the slow violence by neglect (Section 4.1), and the fast-tracked heritage management of the Walled City urban rehabilitation projects, which exerts a non-negligible amount of cultural violence (Section 4.2). Countering both are acts of collective resistance against institutionalised practices of amnesia, initiated by civil society and carried out by residents in Lahore inside the Walled City but, importantly, also beyond. These indicate the existence of a third pace of urban transformation based on the recognition of heritage as commons, a critical engagement with conventional heritagisation and the evolution of alternative heritage-making. We discuss the

involved potentialities of these bottom-up initiatives as elements of a wider (care) approach in the framework of urban future-making (Section 5). We conclude that the large-scale erasure of a shared history with India, the attempt to destroy Punjab's common cultural ecosystem, and the avoidance of any constructive confrontation with the past reflect forms of structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990), prevent social healing, and undermine reconciliation between Punjabis in India and Pakistan (Section 6).

Methodologically, our insights are based on long-term observation of heritage processes in Lahore. We have collected documents and photographs and established an archive over the last decade. As part of ethnographic fieldwork, we have also conducted semi-structured and narrative interviews since 2012.

2. Endangered Common Heritage and Agonistic Peacebuilding

The protracted conflict with India, which includes four Indo-Pakistani wars (1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999), has exacerbated national identity politics largely responsible for the silencing of, and non-engagement with, common heritage with India. This article starts with acknowledging mutually shared urban heritage between the citizens of Punjab as inherited (im)material sources of cultural identity that manifest in the built environment and meaning of place in the Walled City of Lahore. Urban heritage is understood as a form of residents' (in)tangible "commons," as a "social production and representation of a meaningful and mutually shared past in the present" (Frank, 2015, p. 336). On the one hand, the idea that urban heritage can constitute a form of "urban commons"—which has (re)surfaced in heritage studies only recently (Benesch et al., 2015)—entails an understanding of heritage as place-based shared (im)material sources of the past, collectively construed and managed in the present by the community, to be preserved for the future. On the other hand, the idea that heritage is often "contested" (Graham et al., 2016) or "dissonant" (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996) demonstrates that heritage can be shared and divisive simultaneously. However, the exploration of this ambivalence has often remained suppressed given the hegemony of the "authorised heritage discourse" (Smith, 2006) with its origin in Eurocentric Western heritage studies (Winter, 2012). Our study deviates from this type of discourse of the past by drawing on shared heritage as a tool for struggle (Ristic & Frank, 2020), reconciliation (Macdonald, 2009), peacebuilding (Björkdahl et al., 2017; Walters et al., 2017), and diplomacy (Winter, 2015). Given the cross-border perspective of our research, treating heritage as commons ties in with Winter's notion of "heritage diplomacy" as an agent of change, whereby the sharing of cultural and natural pasts constitutes a means of "exchanges, collaborations and forms of cooperative governance" (Winter, 2015, p. 1007).

Thus, we ask if and how Lahorites mobilise heritage practices as commons for (common) future caretaking. Thereby, urban heritage is conceptualised as the product of a continuous collaborative process of debate and contestation about what constitutes a mutual past, be it disputed or accepted, outstanding or traumatic, that ought to be preserved in the present to jointly care for the future. This conceptualisation of heritage relates to peacebuilding and reconciliation studies' notion of "agonistic remembering" in contrast to antagonistic modes of heritage-making (Bull et al., 2021; Lähdesmäki et al., 2019, p. 71). It entails considering shared and contested heritages as two sides of the same coin, thus, underlying tensions may result in increased conflict, or cooperation and engagement between residents within and across the India–Pakistan border. Such an approach allows reflecting on "conditions of possibility" for heritage practices to be mobilised as agonistic peacebuilding tools to undermine often prevailing antagonistic modes of remembering.

The recent "revival of the commons" in urban contexts has drawn attention to different sets of community-led urban practices and imaginaries with emancipatory potential (Stavrvides, 2016). From this perspective, urban commoning processes, encompassing the conceptualisation, co-production, and collective management of shared urban resources, are often considered bottom-up "projects of resistance" (Petrescu et al., 2016, p. 718). A "commons" approach thus yields relevance too in the study of shared histories and heritage in divided and post-conflict societies. New heritage practices are continuously generated through changing heritage formations that evolve out of a combination of changing materialities as well as different temporal and meaning-orders (Harrison, 2015). Hence, from a commons lens, shared heritage constitutes an urban resource that local communities and their networks (e.g., academia and civil society initiatives, and potentially related public or private actors) can mobilise and manage to improve their present and future well-being. Although structural forms of violence and underlying ideological forces might continue to persist, local communities embody the potential to become agents of change in memory preservation and cooperation for future caretaking. This approach relates to existing conceptualisations of heritage future-making (Harrison et al., 2016) that consider heritage as a dialogue of human and non-human actors about the inherited past experiences and learned practices under current pressing social, economic, political, and ecological issues toward assembling future realities (Winter, 2012).

To reflect on the valorisation of Lahore's heritage from the perspective of urban commons, diplomacy, peacebuilding, and reconciliation, we position ourselves at the crossroads of critical heritage discourse, which stresses the need to unpack alternative forms of heritage, including unofficial/unrecognised heritage related to excluded communities (Ristic & Frank, 2020) and values-based heritage approaches (Avrami et al., 2019)

that aim to bridge academia and practice. The assessment of values, i.e., understanding which qualities render heritage meaningful to people, constitutes a central goal in heritage management practices to assess the significance of heritage in a specific context. It involves unpacking the different attributes, the tangible and intangible features of heritage that embody those values while evaluating their integrity (whether or not these values have remained to give heritage meaning) and authenticity (to what extent the identified values still represent accurate stories about the past in the present). While the question of significance has underlined heritage conservation and management practices for a long time, and recent approaches have brought a value-based and participatory focus to the fore, there is often still a significant disconnect between traditionally ascribed heritage values—such as historic, aesthetic, and economic—and broader societal values that more clearly recognise conditions of possibility and struggle for communities. Furthermore, heritage practices need to be continuously reconciled with changing notions of value to address contemporary societal issues—such as human development but also social justice, promoting understanding between different communities, as well as the recognition of trauma (as heritage; Ashworth, 2016) and the need for reconciliation and healing (Macdonald, 2009).

3. Violence in Common Heritage (Non-)Preservation

"We still recall the days when Lahore was feted as the 'Paris of the east,' where people of different communities lived in harmony on account of their common heritage, historic legacy and Punjabi culture" (Nevile, 1993/2006, p. 177). Lahore is hence more than one city. It encompasses what appears to the eye and also the "imagined city" that becomes visible through tangible and intangible traces (Khalid, 2018), e.g., folk tales and narratives of the past, ramshackle Sikh and Hindu temples, and British colonial remnants—buildings, road names, statues and monuments, but also an inherited bureaucratic set-up and a world-view of interreligious differences. The built environment carries the imprints of this elusive city in a dynamic relationship that links urban transformations (i.e., the city's changing morphology and its transforming societal, political, and economic context) to a constant and purposive un- and re-making of urban heritage. To what extent urban transformations have an impact on Lahore's urban heritage is a matter that has only recently started to gain academic attention (see Moffat, 2019, 2021; Sadana et al., 2022).

Several influences are transformative for urban heritage in Lahore: the pace of urban changes, the demographic structure, growing inequalities, and the effects of ideological currents on social stratification (such as the evolution of "new pious middle classes"; see Maqsood, 2017), as well as changes in identity politics from above (Pakistani Islamist politics mirrored in India by Hindu nationalism), and foreign cultural influences through

major infrastructure investment projects such as the Lahore Orange Line Metro Train (OLMT) Project as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (Rana & Bhatti, 2018; Tiwana & Lahore Conservation Society [LCS], 2017).

3.1. Lahorites' Relation to Heritage Amidst a Post-Colonial Inheritance

Lahore was one of the intellectual and cultural centres of pre-partition Punjab and a highly heterogeneous entity in terms of social, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity. The plurality of heritage that once represented its cultural uniqueness and richness was transformed and accorded different meanings already under colonial rule and after 1947. Documented transformations include for instance how the colonial Archaeological Survey of India, museums, and art schools defined cultural heritage based on religious categories instead of considering it as the articulation of culture constituted in a composite manner (P. Vandal, interview, July 11, 2022).

Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 lastingly disrupted Lahore's traditionally close ties with India and its sister-city Amritsar and reshuffled the city's social fabric. The creation of the two nation-states put the divided province of Punjab and Lahore at the heart of the conflict and the outspread of communal violence. Amid and after the mayhem of partition, it is estimated that 10 million Punjabis were uprooted and migrated to the other side(s) of the border (Talbot, 2006). According to the 1941 and 1951 census, Hindu and Sikh populations in Lahore dropped from nearly 28 and 5% respectively (other population groups, including Christians, Ad-Dharmis, Jains, and Parsees accounted only for ca. 2.5%) to less than 0.5% after partition (Ahmed, 2012). The massive population dislocation entailed not only the abandonment of properties but also the need to accommodate incoming refugees who, in Lahore alone, accounted for more than 40% of the post-partition population (Talbot, 2006). Following colonial survey practices that identified groups that were subsequently assigned differentiated religious identities, the post-partition census impacted further on conceptualisations of heritage and the wider understanding of culture. The post-colonial Pakistani state strengthened categorisations and divisions on religious grounds—i.e., references to "Sikh culture" and "Islamic architecture"—for example, by protecting exclusively "Muslim cultural heritage." We argue that this continuation of (colonial) divisive heritage categorisations and the heritage neglect of less/or no longer represented communities, constitute manifestations of institutional violence, and the purposeful silencing of common heritage.

As a result, the remembrance of the partition's violence and the previous culturally diverse coexistence is slowly fading away among Lahorites. Although Lahore shares a common heritage of violence and trauma with other Indian and Pakistani cities—which has produced an important "difficult heritage" (Macdonald, 2009) on

both sides of the border—the memory of it is threatened too by the passing of the generation that witnessed pre-partition time. This is further accentuated by the deterioration of the urban fabric that carries the legacy of this shared past.

3.2. Institutional Violence and Selective Heritagisation Amidst Rapid Urban Transformations

Whereas in the 1930s Lahore had about 675,000 residents (Talbot, 2006), its current population is estimated to be more than 11 million. This urban population growth has inevitably led to rapid urban transformations that impact heritage. From a planning perspective, attempts to steer urban change in Lahore have had a somewhat limited outcome. Different master plans have not only proven inefficient in terms of their implementation capacity but have also systematically disregarded questions of heritage. None of the master plans, from the "Master Plan for the Greater Lahore 1966" to the LDA-IDA-World Bank's "Lahore Urban Development and Traffic Study 1980" (1981–2000) and the 2004 "Integrated Master Plan Lahore 2021" (2021) have been fully implemented. Questions of heritage were scarcely addressed in all of them, with the Lahore Urban Development and Traffic Study perhaps as an exception. Compiled as a structure plan with a strong focus on services and low-income housing, it prompted subsequent studies and inventories of the historic fabric of the Walled City (Sustainable Development of Walled City of Lahore Project [SDWCLP], 1993/2009) that later came to inform today's heritage management practices in the Walled City.

While the national planning agenda "Pakistan Vision 2025 recognises culture (also, art and heritage) as a vibrant potential sector of national integration and development" (Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform, 2014, p. 40, as cited in Rogers, 2018, p. 16) and claims that the country is moving "past any negative narrative to one that is rich in regional culture and a harmonious mix of voices that have long been silenced" (Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform, 2014, p. 39), the disregard for specific heritage continues and has been made manifest during the construction of the OLMT ("Satire: Shahbaz Vows," 2016). It repeated earlier shortcomings in the construction of flyovers and underpasses and of the Lahore Metrobus project—a 27-kilometres long north-south route inaugurated in 2013. The south-west to north-east transport system of the Orange Line has reportedly threatened at least eleven heritage sites. Following the mobilisation of groups of citizens and activists, such as the Lahore Bachao Tehreek ("Save Lahore Movement" of the LCS), the popular campaign #Rastabadlo ("Change the Root"), and a petition by LCS, the Lahore High Court initially halted the Lahore OLMT Project works in August 2016 to prevent any construction within 61 m of the historic structures; however, the Supreme Court of Pakistan allowed the Punjab

government to resume construction works in December 2017, and the Lahore OLMT Project was inaugurated in October 2020 (K. K. Mumtaz, interview, December 22, 2021). Among the heritage sites affected were different church properties, a designated UNESCO world heritage site, Shalimar Gardens (Tiwana & LCS, 2017), an antique landmark with four minarets, Chauburji, (Khalid, 2018; Moffat, 2019), and a Jain temple—the latter ultimately demolished in 2016 and currently under reconstruction (Rizwan, 2022; “Violating HC Order,” 2016). The planning and construction process of the Lahore OLMT Project was marked by inherent violence manifest in the “will to improve” (Li, 2007) and to develop that resulted not only in heritage mismanagement but also in the displacement of the population affected by land acquisitions (Maqsood & Sajjad, 2021):

Among those made homeless are the refugee families of [the] Bengali Building, Jain Mandir and Kapurthala House in Purani Anarkali. Their numbers run into thousands. Uprooted in 1947, they are reliving the horror of Partition at the hands of their own government in 2016. (Mumtaz & LCS, 2016)

Additionally, several examples indicate that funding bodies and development schemes have entailed neoliberal heritage regimes (Coombe, 2013), instrumentalising its cultural value (Apaydin, 2020, pp. 59–60). One such example is Shahi Bagh, a project proposed by the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) in 2014 to develop an entertainment park in the Shahdarah locality (on the north bank of the River Ravi, ca. 3.7 kilometres from the Walled City). Shahi Bagh was conceptualised as a “modern” theme and water park that would include the restoration of five officially designated heritage buildings—three on Pakistan’s UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List—representative of the 16th and 17th centuries Mughal funerary gardens of Lahore (Rogers, 2017, p. 21).

In a reverse trend of heritagisation, former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan inaugurated the first visa-free border crossing between Pakistan and India in November 2019. The so-called Kartarpur corridor connects Dera Baba Nanak in Indian Punjab’s Gurdaspur district to Pakistan’s Narowal district, where one of the holiest shrines of the Sikh religion—the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib—is located. Because of this facilitation of pilgrims’ cross-border mobility, the corridor has received much media attention and gained traction in scholarship (Bainiwal, 2020), though its potential to contribute to peacebuilding remains contested (“Why Kartarpur Corridor Is Unlikely to Defuse India-Pakistan Tensions,” 2019). Together with the (controversial) erection of a statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Lahore Fort in 2019—later vandalised and removed from the public space—Kartarpur corridor represents the incrementally changing relationship of the Pakistani state with Sikh heritage and history. Though, amid the rise of Hindu nationalism in India’s current government (to the detriment of other

religious communities), this development and valorisation of Sikh heritage in Pakistan represents a political counterpoint (Khalid, 2021).

4. Heritage Management in the Walled City

The Walled City, or *anderoon shehr*, is a locality of particular significance in Lahore. Characterised by a distinctive urban form of compact neighbourhoods (*mohallas*), clusters of houses and organic narrow streets, alleyways (*galis*), residential cul-de-sacs (*koochas*), and specialised bazaars (*mandis*), the historic city also carries the inheritance of a shared past between Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Muslim, and Christian communities that once coexisted. This manifests, for instance, in the remaining buildings of different architectural styles, names of places, and syncretic festivals (*melas*). Residential buildings dating primarily from the early 19th to the early 20th century still exhibit some decorative and fragile designs on their facades, as shown in Figure 1.

Over the decades, the Walled City has undergone drastic urban changes. Socio-spatial transformations have slowly and significantly altered its social and built environment, as shown in Figure 2. As in other historic towns in Pakistan (Rogers, 2018), overcrowding, poor infrastructure, traffic congestion as seen in Figure 3, noise, and air pollution, as well as shortcomings in land management and the uncontrolled land use shift from residential to commercial areas, have contributed to the degradation of the urban fabric and the out-migration of residents (Sohail, 2020; SDWCLP, 1993/2009). In contrast to Lahore’s overall growing population, the Walled City’s population has been gradually on the decline, diminishing from reportedly 200,000 inhabitants in the 1970s to 160,000 residents at the time of the 1998 census, with recent estimates referring to around 156,000 people (van der Tas & Khan, 2019).

4.1. *Slow Violence by Neglect and Narrow Conceptualisations of Heritage*

The Old City certainly manifests inherited path and goal dependencies resulting from the British colonial politics of zoning and models of development and planning that systematically prioritised specific localities in Lahore over others (Mielke & Cermeño, 2021). Embedded in colonial legacies, post-colonial planning cultures and urban development practices in Lahore have continued to neglect the Walled City for decades, exacerbating its socio-spatial segregation. The prolonged abandonment of the Walled City continues today to trigger a sense of deprivation among residents, further intensifying as the city continues to develop beyond its south-eastern periphery following precast “modern” visions of development, housing, and lifestyles (Cermeño, 2021). While the city expands south-east in exclusionary housing estates, Lahore’s old city houses that once exhibited facades with elaborate embellishments, carved wooden



Figure 1. House in the Walled City with decorative designs on its facade. Photo by Katja Mielke (2012).

doors and *jharokas* (upper story windows projecting from buildings' walls) are gradually falling apart, as seen in Figure 4. Abandoned religious premises, such as Sikh *gurdwaras* and Hindu temples—under the custodianship of the Evacuee Trust Property Board—serve as ramshackle housing or commercial properties as shown

in Figure 5. Land use has changed significantly from residential to commercial (Figure 6). As low-income residents are unable to invest in the improvement of their houses and are increasingly threatened by the potential collapse of built structures, they often end up selling their properties to a growing “land mafia”



Figure 2. Dilapidated house in the Walled City. Photos by Helena Cermeño (2012).



Figure 3. Congested street in the Walled City. Photo by Katja Mielke (2012).

that transforms these further into commercial “plazas,” outlets, storage, and manufacturing spaces (residents of Delhi Gate area, interviews, September 28, 2015; Walled City of Lahore Authority [WCLA] officials, interview, October 28, 2015).

For decades, the deterioration of the Walled City has gone hand in hand with a slow-paced adjustment of the urban government framework, planning instru-

ments and heritage regulations. About 30 years after partition, the “Lahore Urban Development and Traffic Study 1980” made specific recommendations to address the conservation of the city’s historical fabric besides improving urban infrastructures. It was possibly the first planning document of its kind in Lahore to connect urban development to heritage questions. In this vein, it influenced the 1988 Punjab Urban Development

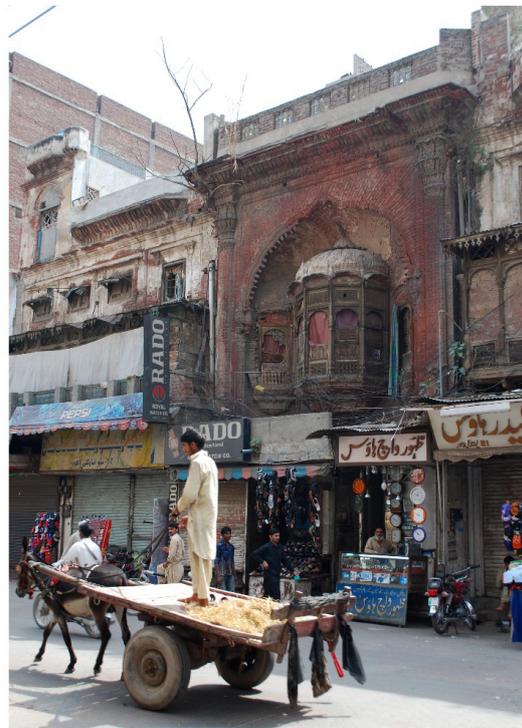


Figure 4. Carved wooden windows and *jharokas*. Photos by Helena Cermeño (2014, left, Laal Haveli) and Katja Mielke (2012, right).



Figure 5. Remaining of Hindu temple currently used as housing. Photo by Helena Cermeño (2012).

Project—a collaboration of LDA with the World Bank and the Punjab government—and within it, the 1988 “Conservation Plan” for the Walled City of Lahore (commissioned by LDA to the Pakistan Environmental Planning and Architectural Consultants). This study compiled an inventory of ca. 18,000 structures, identifying thousands of significant historic buildings—the exact number, though, differs between sources—of which ca. 1,400 were considered worthy of protection for their “historical” and “architectural” value (SDWCLP, 1993/2009). Since designation did not entail de facto immediate conservation action, a significant percentage of these historic buildings deteriorated further with time (M. Khan & Rabi, 2019). In many cases, interviewed residents often criticised LDA for their inaction concerning the deteriorating living conditions and the irregular practices or land use transformation in the Old City. At the same time, they reported having received LDA leaflets instructing them to vacate their insecure houses amid the progressive ruination of dwellings (interviews and fieldnotes, September 2015).

Along with the protracted degradation of the Old City and the few planning attempts for improvement and urban heritage conservation until approximately 15 years ago, the very limited—and limiting—conceptualisation of the authorities’ notion of heritage emerged with a narrow focus on tangible dimensions linked to historical and architectural/aesthetics values. This notion partly roots in the narrow legal frameworks in place, such as the Antiquities Act of 1975 and the Punjab Special Premises (Preservation) Ordinance of 1985 (Aga Khan Trust for

Culture [AKTC] & Aga Khan Cultural Service Pakistan [AKCS-P], 2011). Among heritage scholarly and practice circles, however, it has been well established that the tangible fabric is inseparably linked to intangible aspects that infuse meaning to the former, e.g., only the intertwined form, functions and meanings contribute to a differentiated sense of place and identity. In the following, we depict how the “fast-tracked” heritage conservation projects that commenced around the partial decentralisation of heritage management in 2011 could not capture the often-commended Walled City’s culture and way of life that imbues it with significance because of the narrow conceptualisations of heritage.

4.2. “Fast-Tracked” Heritage Conservation and Management Projects Promoting Cultural Violence

A turning point in heritage management in the Walled City is certainly the (long-term) involvement of the AKTC since 2007 (Jodidio, 2019) and later, in 2012, the creation of the WCLA—after the 2011 devolution of powers (18th Constitutional Amendment) that entailed the transfer of hundreds of listed monuments and heritage sites from the federal government to the provinces (N. A. Khan et al., 2022).

In 2006, the governments of Pakistan and Punjab signed a loan agreement with the World Bank to develop a specific “cultural heritage component” for the Walled City (M. Khan & Rabi, 2019). It subsequently led to the World Bank funding the “Shahi Guzargah Municipal Services Improvement Project” as seen in Figure 7 along

Walled City of Lahore

Land Use 2009 (residential vs. commercial areas)

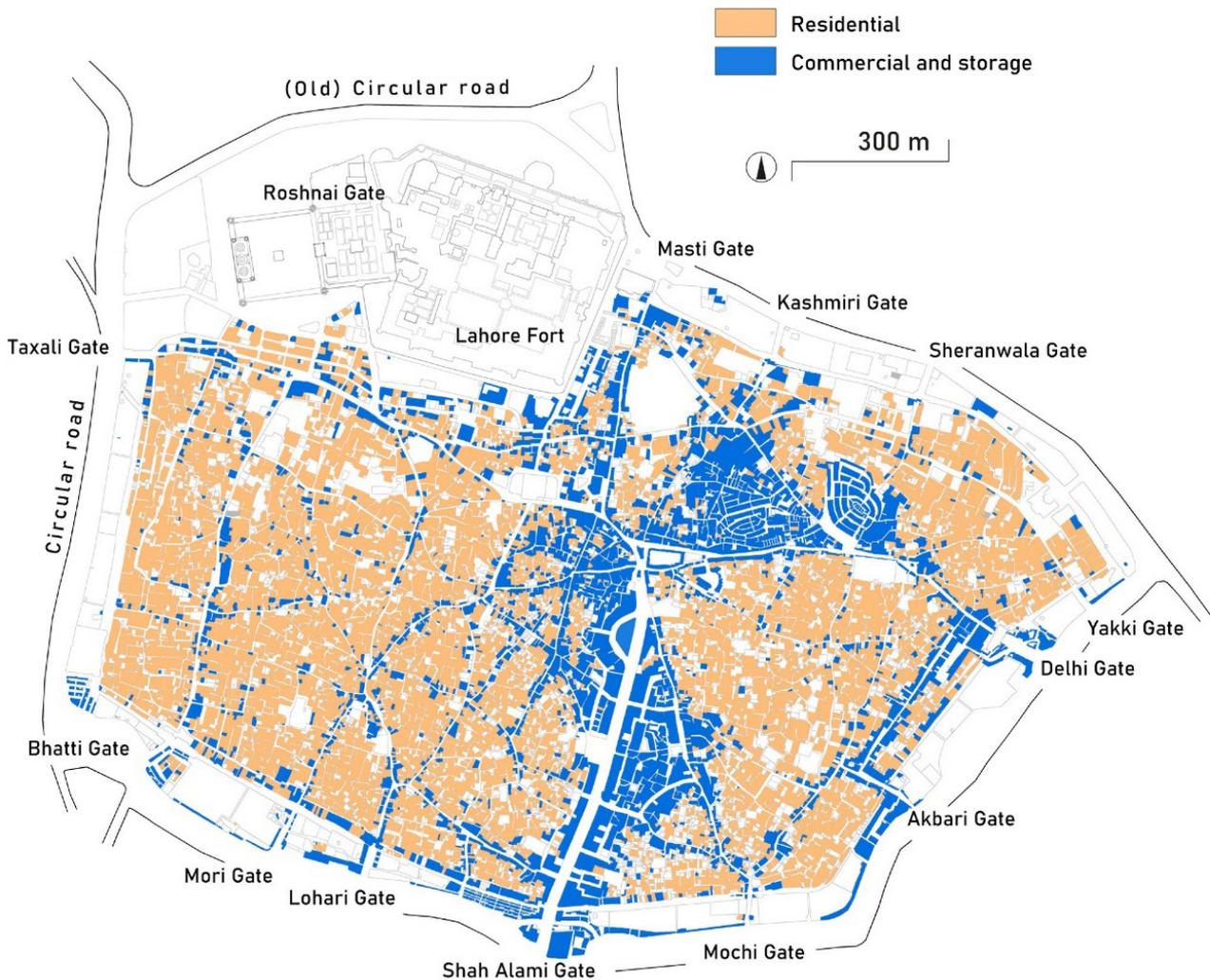


Figure 6. Walled City land use map of 2009 showing the contrast between residential and commercial/storage areas. Source: Figure by Helena Cermeño (2022) based on Jodidio (2019).

the historic Royal Trail (Shahi Guzargah) that connects Delhi Gate to Shahi Qila (Lahore Fort, a designated UNESCO world heritage site since 1981). With AKTC's technical expertise, in cooperation with its local partner, the AKCS-P, the initial "heritage-sensitive planning and development project" soon turned into an "urban conservation and rehabilitation project" (M. Khan & Khan, 2019, p. 111). Following the completion of a "Preliminary Strategic Framework" plan for the Walled City of Lahore in 2008, extensive documentation work was carried out, including, among others, the analysis of a 1907 cloth-bound survey of the Walled City (that allowed gathering information of the pre-partition Old City with a view to understanding which localities had been damaged in the 1947 riots), a socio-economic household survey (2008–2010), and a Mohalla Demonstration Project. The latter entailed the residential rehabilitation and

infrastructure improvement of the mohalla Gali Surjan Singh and its cul-de-sac, Koocha Charkh Garan (see Figures 7 and 8), which was later extended to a second street, Mohammadi Mohalla. During fieldwork conducted in these localities mainly between 2014 and 2016 (and later in 2021), we were able to interview several residents of the two designated *mohallas*, and residents of non-included neighbouring areas.

Notwithstanding the extensive infrastructural development and survey efforts undertaken particularly in one of the research sites by the AKTC and AKCS-P (and later the WCLA), in both *mohallas* and along the Royal Trail, we chronicled the continued application of a narrow concept of heritage with its main focus on the tangible dimension of the built environment and the lack of a systematic inventory of intangible cultural heritage. The selection of *mohallas* was not transparent despite



Figure 7. Walled City, Royal Trail area and Mohalla Gali Surjan Singh. Source: Figure by Helena Cermeño (2022); the maps are based on data by the WCLA, AKTC, and AKCS-P collected in Jodidio (2019).



Figure 8. Mohalla Gali Surjan Singh on the left and sign plates announcing touristic places in the Royal Trail on the right. Photos by author Helena Cermeño (2021).

the establishment of an on-site social mobilisation office and the commitment to involve the local communities at all stages of the project, from planning to implementation. The fragile participation component was accompanied by selective development, for not all houses benefited, and priority was given to improving facades. Over the years, the pilot *mohalla* of Gali Surjan Singh has come to be known as a showcase for development and a touristic attraction. Yet, it remains highly contested among residents of neighbouring quarters who criticised the disproportionate effort undertaken to develop a “few houses” and selected *havelis* (traditional townhouses with court-

yard, e.g., see Figure 9) compared to the more than 7,000 estimated residential units (one-third of the overall built structures) in need of (infra)structural improvement. The perceived neglect was particularly tangible in the Mohammadi Mohalla, where allegedly only three houses benefited from interior improvement works (interviews and fieldnotes, March 2016 and December 2021).

When the WCLA was established in 2012 and gained jurisdiction over the Walled City, it subsumed the rehabilitation and infrastructure work along the Royal Trail and accelerated the development of World Bank-sponsored heritage projects while adjusting the heritage regulatory



Figure 9. The interior of *haveli* Dina Nath on the left and courtyard on the right. Photos by Helena Cermeño (2016).

framework. This resulted, for instance, in the 2017 “Master Conservation and Redevelopment Plan for the Walled City of Lahore” and the 2018 “Conservation Master Plan for Lahore Fort and Its Buffer Zone.” After decades of neglect and expanding commercialisation, the proactive mobilisation of the heritage-development nexus had become the dominant mode of heritage management for the Walled City ever since. It has gone hand in hand with an underlying WCLA touristification plan—in which heritage tourism is primarily valued as an economic resource. Thus, a myriad of internationally funded projects since 2012 have distanced themselves from inner residential rehabilitation and rather included the preservation of selected facades and significant monuments, sightseeing tours, and sporadic cultural events (e.g., music and poetry gatherings). The monuments’ conservation practices have included beacon projects, such as preservation works in the Wazir Khan Mosque, the rehabilitation of its adjacent 17th-century chowk (urban square), the Shahi Hammam (royal baths, 2013–2015), and Lahore Fort (transferred from the Archaeological Department to the WCLA in 2014). The latter has come to include initiatives as variegated as the previously mentioned erection (and removal) of a Ranjit Singh Statue, the documentation and restoration of the Fort’s Picture Wall (2015–2019) and the rehabilitation of the so-called “Imperial/Royal kitchens” (2018–2019).

The case of the Royal kitchens is particularly illustrative of a selective heritage approach and a lost opportunity to reveal alternative layers of heritage. After the premises had been appropriated and their use transformed during the occupation of Lahore Fort by the British Army, it was handed over to the Archaeological Survey of India in 1927 and ultimately remained in the custody of the Police Department, which used it until 1986 as a prison for political detainees—among them numerous renowned freedom fighters and deposed Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto. The current “entertainment” use of the restored kitchens indeed conceals this “dark side of the Lahore Fort” (Qureshi, 2018), and by doing so, it hinders alternative heritage narratives from evolving, for instance, in the form of a “museum of memories” (S. H. Vandal, interview, July 11, 2022). In this form, we argue, the repurposed use of the Royal Kitchens—as most of the state-driven infrastructure and urban conservation projects in the Walled City—constitutes a non-negligible form of cultural violence.

5. Resisting Amnesia in the Walled City and Beyond

Residents of the Old City and different civil society actors in Lahore have started to engage critically with conventional heritage-making based on the recognition of heritage as commons. Among them are passionate people in culture and heritage who are preserving and fostering different expressions of cultural heritage, such as music, paintings, crafts, etc., independent from the government

and the patronage of the WCLA or other institutions. Subsequently, in the evolution of alternative heritage formations, we see that Lahorites assign significant value for the sake of it—not just for improved housing of a few targeted benefactors. One example is the transformation of antagonistic memories—or rather fears—into agonistic memories through the exchange with and visits of former residents who come from Indian diaspora countries (e.g., the USA, UK) to the Walled City to see their or their families’ former place of living and individual houses. While in the past, such interactions carried the notion of fear and apprehension of former owners’ possible intentions to demand their properties back (Zakaria, 2015, p. 163), the passing of time and slow dying out of the generation who had consciously experienced Lahore’s partition and the connected violence and trauma, has to some extent also enabled agonistic attitudes and relations. In one instance, where a family came in at least two successive years to visit their ancestral home—a *haveli* used by the National College of Arts in connection with the cultural organisation Trust for History, Art and Architecture in Pakistan (THAAP)—at one of these visits, the organisation managing the building displayed the family’s pictures inside the house as an act of memory and endorsement. Even though the former owners’ visit was an emotional act of nostalgia in reaction to the previously experienced sharp break with the past and subsequent life in “exile”, the activists’ choice to reflect the former residents’ identities at the site turned their visits into a politically productive, future-oriented process. The activists called for the residents of the Walled City to follow suit and also appreciate the former owners with little gestures such as displaying their pictures, thus creating a common space of shared living heritage. Such acts help the formation of a popular heritage consciousness (K. K. Mumtaz, as cited in Moffat, 2021, pp. 544–545); however, it is important to stress that it cannot rely on sole engineering “from above” (by non-residents)—in this case, a civil society activists’ initiative versus action taken by residents at grass-root level.

Indeed, we cannot wholeheartedly negate a “class bias” towards heritage protection and commoning. Over time and throughout Lahore, civil society actors such as architects and planners on the one hand and academics and intellectuals on the other have introduced many initiatives. All have engaged in heritage preservation with a view to active commoning. Already in 1980, the architect Yasmeen Lari created the “Heritage Foundation of Pakistan” to document and conserve in “national registers” the traditional historic environment in Pakistan and to promote heritage for “social integration, peace and development” (<https://www.heritagefoundationpak.org/Hf>). Activists also built the website *1947 Partition Archive* where memories of the partition period are displayed and that shows, for example, how stories of India’s partition continued from 2015 onwards. Video interviews of those who lived through the experience not only tell the tales of individual

trauma but also work at preserving its memory for those who did not experience it first-hand. Written documentation also plays a significant role as a product of civil society activities—for example, the published anthology of graphic narratives curated by Vishwajyoti Ghosh (2016), “This Side, That Side—Restoring Partition” that looks at second-generation accounts of the trauma of the partition (Singh, 2015, p. 184). Other examples of platforms enabling agonistic memorisation and exchange—that constitute the basis for transformative heritage, future reconciliation and peacebuilding—include the cultural initiative Hast-o-neest (<https://www.hastoneest.com>), the so-called Citizens Archive of Pakistan, and THAAP itself (Singh, 2015; Zakaria, 2015).

In another dimension of this evolving third pace of urban transformation, there are indications of practitioners’ activist behaviour—audible and covert. In the audible version, architects like Kamil Khan Mumtaz and Yasmeen Lari have openly advocated for conscious modes of learning and unlearning through conservation practice (Moffat, 2021). Mumtaz’ own experience has been that by working with the old material fabric, its structural forms, and acts of copying, knowledge and a heritage consciousness can be produced. This requires a sensitive engagement with materialities and their context (K. K. Mumtaz, interview, December 22, 2021). Both Lari and Mumtaz, have challenged the Western-centric framework of cultural heritage and its conservation throughout their life by looking closely into the local contexts they have been working in. Like this, they also came to challenge the notion of a homogeneous Pakistani heritage or categorisation of cultural heritage based on religious distinction. As a matter of fact, the alleged idea of a Sikh, a Muslim or a Hindu heritage has been sufficiently instrumentalised for different purposes to this date. It neglects however the proportionally larger share of secular architecture (P. Vandal, interview, July 11, 2022). Thus, Lari has been propagating “unlearning” as one of her guiding work principles throughout the last decades. Another has been to closely work in dialogue with the people at heritage sites and to mobilise their sense-making and memories for active future-seeking through the memories, practices, and materialities of the past.

In a rather covert mode of heritage preservation, it might seem that even heritage consultants working in Lahore use their heritage expertise and insights from observations about heritagisation over the last decade to exclude (and thereby protect) relevant heritage places from development zones in different planning documents and master plans (informal interviews and field-notes, December 2021). Another form of silent activism is the recently emphasised focus on the preservation of Punjabi heritage and culture—a regional identity-framing that allows rejecting religiously connoted and thereby exclusionary heritage-making. Sajida and Pervaiz Vandal, the architects/activists and educationists who founded THAAP in Lahore, stress that “Pakistani archi-

tecture is a composite thing of different regions coming together; this is the way we are hoping to move forward with THAAP” (S. H. and P. Vandal, interview, July 11, 2022). A Punjabi identity portrayal entails ambiguity, as it might refer to Pakistani Punjab but also include Indian Punjab, and its cross-border trans-local dimension works in the logic of a “fuzzy concept.” It leaves open what is included in Punjabi cultural heritage and identity, when and for whom, and can be used consciously to avoid defining the boundaries of application and the fixation of putative identity traits.

Bridging educational, practical, and cultural elites’ and activists’ re-conceptualisations and preservation efforts of cultural heritage, and residents’ practices and memories of intangible heritage, our empirical research identified two main fields of (heritage place-making) activities: One is the use of theatre plays, street art, and artistic performances. The Lahore-based Ajoka Theatre Collective, founded in 1984, has been able to not only work at the Lahore level but also travel to India and throughout South Asia, engaging in “people-to-people dialogue” across the border. In this context, Moffat (2019, p. 181) made the point that “street theatre, in its agitprop form, creates a space to negotiate the relationship between pasts, presents, and possible futures in a collective, public manner.” The second field refers to traditional festivals (*melas*), that activists are currently trying to revive (S. H. and P. Vandal, interview, July 11, 2022; Naz, 2018; Nevile, 1993/2006). Basant was the most famous kite-flying spring festival in Lahore’s Old City that would spearhead a future inventory of (lost) intangible heritage. It has been banned for several years, officially because of the danger and risk to life given the knife-sharp strings of the kites in the competition. Unofficially, Basant has been criticised by religiously conservative groups for years as a non-Muslim (“Hindu”) tradition, even pre-partition. Initiatives calling for the resumption of this festival in Lahore need to be careful to prevent just another elite bias, given that its character had already begun to change from the late 1980s “from a festive but essentially family-oriented holiday revolving around food and kite flying into a media event celebrated, at the upper-class level, at huge semi-public parties attended by socialites from all over Pakistan” (McGill Murphy, 2001, p. 195).

6. Conclusion

Musbashir Hasan (1922 [to 1947] India—[from 1947] 2020 Pakistan), co-founder of the Pakistan People’s Party, once stated that he “came to the conclusion that the ruling elites of the two countries [India and Pakistan] were genuinely scared of *peace breaking out* between them” (Kothari et al., 2010, p. 5).

Despite Punjab’s shared regional identity, with its common cultural, administrative, and political past, post-partition divided political history embedded mutual (non-)relations on both sides of the border with an

ideology of difference that relies on a broad repertoire of ingredients: state-sanctioned religious practices, ethno-religious nationalism, suppressed memory, limitations of social relations even among relatives, and broad-based suspicion of the authorities in both countries against any non-state sanctioned civilian activities spanning the border. In Lahore, this involved the purposive erasure of its regional identity, its history of conviviality, but also the traumatic partition past. We consider this deletion of a shared history with India and the attempt to destroy Punjab's common cultural ecosystem as forms of structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) that prevents any constructive confrontation with the past.

Against this backdrop, in this article we sought to understand how shared urban heritage is recognised and how residents and civil society in Lahore—and beyond—(could) mobilise it to initiate conversations about future caretaking of their urban common heritage among different civil society actors, such as conservationists, residents of the Walled City, cultural activists, and with counterparts across the national border in India.

This is all the more necessary given the commodification and commercialisation of cultural heritage in the Walled City that signifies an unprecedented “will to develop” going along with touristification and the creation of images of imagined pasts for visitors. However, these activities have not proven to be sensitised towards features of intangible cultural heritage that inhabitants of the Walled City still live, for example, vernacular histories of food, spirituality, music and craft traditions. The WCLA's lack of systematic engagement with intangible heritage hinders a better understanding of the linkages between heritage and slow social change, the alterations of the social structures, changes in cultural symbols, social norms, social organisation, and value systems in the Walled City. In fact, any real engagement with its (in) tangible colonial history and legacy, as well as the past of conviviality and the trauma of partition, would entail that the state undergoes a self-reflection of its own coming to being as a nation-state—since the act of boundary-drawing through physical and symbolic demarcations can be considered as an act of physical and cultural violence in itself.

From the exploration of subaltern heritage practice in the Walled City and beyond, we learn that the produced, represented and enacted heritage practices “from below” are irreconcilable with the instrumentalisation of cultural heritage as a form of entertainment or commodity. In realising the assault on cultural heritage, a diverse range of actors have started initiatives that signal heritage consciousness, what Kabir (2013, p. 26) coined as “(partition) post-amnesias,” and therefore constitute attempts of resistance to either large-scale neglect or homogenisation drives and megaproject-violence enforced by state authorities and investors. Such bottom-up initiatives indicate that while the instrumentalisation of the post-partition memorial terrain is generally viewed critically, it also embodies a change

potential and could contribute more to fostering reconciliation across the border than difference.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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