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Culture Wars in Brazil: The Far-Right and Their Failure to Protect Cultural Heritage

Abstract

Far-right politicians in Brazil are attacking and censoring cultural heritage and enacting policies that go far beyond cultural heritage. These politicians are also dismantling the structural frameworks that protect, secure, encourage and enable cultural heritage at a time when it is experiencing serious and systematic crime threats. This is despite legal obligations in the Brazilian Constitution to protect it. In addition, these politicians are missing opportunities in the sector from which they could benefit hugely, as could the Brazilian population and the cultural heritage. Instead of waging 'culture wars', politicising security, and failing to adequately protect cultural heritage, a viable alternative is to govern the cultural economy.

Keywords

Art crime, cultural economy, cultural heritage crime, culture wars, Brazilian cultural heritage

Introduction

This article draws on empirical research conducted in Brazil in 2019 to examine how Brazilian politicians at federal, state and municipal levels are failing to sufficiently deal with cultural heritage crimes in the face of a wide range of serious and systematic threats, and the use of cultural heritage in fraud and corruption. Instead, they are dismantling the sector and the frameworks that protect cultural heritage. Concurrently, many of these politicians, especially

the federal government, are spending considerable time and effort to voice disapproval of cultural heritage, even labelling some as criminal, and enacting policies not experienced since the military dictatorship (1964-1985). Additionally, these politicians are missing opportunities in the sector from which they could benefit significantly, as could the peoples of Brazil and the cultural heritage in the country.

Cultural heritage locations are 'sites of persuasion' (Dubin, 2006:478) and are significant for maintaining, encouraging or restricting the plurality of memories of Brazil's diverse peoples and, therefore, it is no surprise that they are important sites in concocted culture wars (Kerr, 2018a, dos Santos, 2003, 2005; Schneider and Atencio, 2016). With a long history of cultural production being used to contest or reinforce power in the country (Calirman, 2012; Pelegrini, 2015), Brazil is an ideal case study to examine contested cultural heritage governance and culture wars, and the effects they can have on the protection of cultural heritage. Furthermore, lessons learned from this case study are relevant when considering these issues internationally. This article uses Hunter's (1991) definition of culture wars as fights between the 'impulse towards orthodoxy' from 'the impulse toward progressivism' (Hunter, 1991:42, 43).

After providing some background and discussing the methods employed, the article analyses how cultural heritage is under attack and the impact of this on its security. It then explores the current dismantling of the cultural heritage sector and the politics of security. Lastly, it considers the potential for an alternative approach: governing the cultural economy.

Background

There are discussions in the Anglophone academic literature about whether ‘art crime’ or ‘cultural property crime’ or ‘cultural heritage crime’ are the most appropriate terms to employ (Balcells, 2019; Kerr, 2018b). In the Brazilian context, ‘cultural heritage crime’ is the best term to use and the definition for what constitutes cultural heritage is taken from the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, Article 216:

‘Article 216. The Brazilian cultural heritage consists of the assets of a material and immaterial nature, taken individually or as a whole, which bear reference to the identity, action and memory of the various groups that form the Brazilian society, therein included: 1. forms of expression; 2. ways of creating, making and living; 3. scientific, artistic and technological creations; 4. works, objects, documents, buildings and other spaces intended for artistic and cultural expressions; 5. urban complexes and sites of historical, natural, artistic, archaeological, paleontological, ecological and scientific value’. (Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil 1988, 2008:106)

Although there have been criticisms about the inclusion of ‘immaterial’ or ‘intangible’ heritage (Carlan, 2012:62), it is important to acknowledge that these forms of heritage, as well as cultural artifacts, represent cultural heritage according the Constitution. When this article refers to cultural heritage, it is line with the Constitution’s definition.

The world’s fifth largest country, Brazil is rich in cultural heritage. There are 22 World Heritage sites that include large cities such as Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro, as well as the historic centres of towns and cities such as Salvador de Bahia (UNESCO, 2019). In 2016, there were 3,648 museums in Brazil, preserving more than 75 million cultural objects, employing over 25,000 professionals, and receiving more than 80 million visitors. 65% of these museums were public sector museums (de Lemos, 2016).

Despite the large number of museums, research in 2010 showed that about 70% of Brazilians had never been to a museum or cultural centre (Porto, 2015). However, Brazilians visit cultural locations abroad in huge numbers. For example, in 2011, 410,000 Brazilians visited the Louvre Museum in Paris (Porto, 2015).

It is important to highlight that much of the cultural heritage which has been preserved represents the elites rather than those who have traditionally been marginalised in Brazilian society such as Afro-Brazilian people, Indigenous people and the poor (Funari, 2001). Indeed, cultural heritage locations such as art museums have often reinforced power relations (dos Santos, 2002, 2005; Funari, 2001). However, as democratic rights and representations of Brazil increased in the country between the 1980s and the late 2000s, cultural heritage locations such as art museums had a role in this growth and some encouraged a plurality of memories (dos Santos, 2003; Schneider and Atencio, 2016). Presently, some of these locations are battlegrounds for who controls the representations of the Brazilian populace (Kerr, 2018a).

Regarding the protection of cultural heritage, there is a long history of cultural heritage crime in Brazil. The historic experiences of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous peoples offer many cases (Querin, 2020). Other examples include records showing the theft of religious cultural goods in the nineteenth century (Miranda, 2012). In the 21st century, many well-known thefts have occurred across Brazil in sites such as museums, palaces, churches, cathedrals and libraries (Costa and da Rocha, 2007; Knauss, 2007; Manini and Greenhalgh, 2016).

The stolen objects have included paintings, religious art, drawings, prints, candlesticks, maps, sculptures, books, photographs, monuments, plaques, coins and decommissioned machine guns. The objects have been valuable nationally and internationally in artistic, cultural,

heritage, historical and financial terms (stolen works include those produced by artists such as Dali, Matisse, Monet, Picasso and Portinari). The economic value of the materials used in the works has been significant as well. For instance, objects made of metals such as copper, gold and lead have been targeted (Knauss, 2007; Manini and Greenhalgh, 2016; Miranda, 2012).

A lack of data makes it difficult to propose an estimated figure for the scale of the crimes in Brazil and we should be wary of trying to create such a figure. This point relates to the billion-dollar figures proposed in the Anglophone and Lusophone literature for the global extent of cultural heritage crimes. Although usually well-intended as they aim to draw attention to the extent of the crimes, the figures often lack empirical evidence and should therefore be treated with caution (Kerr, 2018b; Salvo, 2010). What is clear is that globally the scale of cultural heritage crimes is extremely significant and the crimes can have links with many other illicit activities (Chappell and Hufnagel, 2014; Kerr, 2018b). This is certainly the case for Brazil.

In Brazil, the scale of the crimes is immense. For example, when arguing that cultural heritage had become 'an organised crime playing field' (Knauss, 2007:176) in Rio de Janeiro, Knauss (2007) described the situation as one 'of general looting of the cultural heritage of Rio de Janeiro' (Knauss, 2007:176,177). Concerning the state of Minas Gerais, Miranda (2012) highlighted that 60% of the state's religious cultural heritage objects were no longer in their place of origin. Some of the crimes have been planned and sophisticated (Manini and Greenhalgh, 2016; Miranda, 2012). For example, Miranda (2012) explained that in Minas Gerais 'highly specialized and fast-paced gangs' (Miranda, 2012:11) were targeting specific cultural heritage for rich collectors and major antique dealers.

The level of organisation is unsurprising as globally there is a long history of criminals who are organised being involved in cultural heritage crime (Franca, 2018; Mackenzie, 2011, 2019). In Brazil, this has included theft, fraud and money laundering (Franca, 2018; Machado, 2019). The scale of the money laundering has particularly come to light during anti-corruption investigations. For example, in the Banco Santos case that began in 2005, a former owner of a financial institution was found to have laundered money through over 12,000 artworks that included pieces by Basquiat, Bourgeois, Kapoor, Lichtenstein, Moore, Picabia, Poliakoff, Tamayo and Torres Garcia. In another example, the Lava Jato (Car Wash) case, hundreds of artworks were confiscated, including paintings by Dali and Miro (Franca, 2018; Machado, 2019).

In the face of this threat, it is important to note that the Federal Constitution of 1988 gives Brazilian citizens the right to culture and, very significantly, legally obliges all federative entities to act to protect cultural heritage (Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, 2008).

Methods

The empirical research was conducted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2019 (apart from one interview that took place online in January 2020). An inductive, qualitative mixed methods approach was taken in which interviews, observations and parliamentary presentations were the main data sources. Pre-existing knowledge about cultural heritage crime in Brazil influenced the research, and a purposive sampling approach (Bryman, 2016) was used in sampling the participants and locations. This was important as it led to a suitable sample of

people with knowledge about cultural heritage and an appropriate sample of locations to observe.

10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who work with cultural heritage in Brazil. The interviewees were Heads/Directors of museums, people who work for public sector cultural heritage organisations and people who work in the private sector. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews. Universal anonymity is employed for the interviewees for ethical reasons. Key themes that provided some structure for the interviews were: *Threats to cultural heritage; the protection and policing challenges; the performance of the protection and policing; private sector involvement; the motivations in the protection and policing; and the future of the protection and policing of cultural heritage*. These themes were influenced by prior research on cultural heritage crime (Block, 2011; Chappell and Hufnagel, 2014; Kerr, 2015, 2018b). The majority of the interviews were conducted in Portuguese. Although many interviewees could speak English (the first language of the author), the offer to conduct interviews in Portuguese showed respect towards the interviewees and gave them the chance to express themselves in their first language.

Observation fieldwork was carried out at 26 cultural heritage locations in Rio de Janeiro and included repeat visits. The locations were museums, libraries, churches, a cultural centre, an art fair, public squares, and other outdoor spaces with monuments. The names of the locations have been anonymised for ethical reasons. The other main data source was parliamentary presentations that took place at the Culture Commission, Chamber of Deputies, Brasilia, on 31 October 2019. Additional information was collected from organisations' reports and online seminar presentations.

There were limitations to the research. First, it can be argued that interviewing 10 people is a limited number. Second, all the observations were conducted in Rio de Janeiro and not throughout Brazil. Third, there was subjectivity in the sampling approach. Fourth, the interviewees' answers could have been influenced by self-promotion. Despite these limitations, gaining access to the interviewees was difficult and therefore 10 was a significant number in the context, especially as all the interviewees are experts in their fields. Also, conducting the interviews enabled a deeper understanding than most other methods could have. Although the observation data was limited to Rio de Janeiro, it provided useful triangulation (Bryman, 2016), particularly as Rio de Janeiro is one of the areas most affected by cultural heritage crimes. Concerning interviewees' self-promotion and the potential effects of it, the critical approach taken in this research was similar to Mackenzie's (2019:844) approach that seeks the 'underlying narrative' behind what is being said rather than the 'underlying truth'.

Threats to cultural heritage

Prior to examining the politicians' attitudes and policies, it is important to consider the current threats faced by cultural heritage objects and locations. The research data highlighted that the current known threats include theft (particularly metal theft), trafficking, fakes, fire (intentional and unintentional), other damage (intentional and unintentional), and fraud. The most vulnerable locations are religious buildings such as churches, chapels and cathedrals; outdoor cultural heritage such as monuments; and empty large buildings such as historic farm estates and palaces. Other locations such as museums, galleries, libraries, archives and private residences are also targeted (Interviews, 10/10/2019, 15/10/2019, 30/10/2019,

14/10/2019, 15/11/2019, 14/01/2020; Observation Research 2019; Culture Commission, Chamber of Deputies, 31/10/2019; de Mello, 2017, 2018). Observation research supported the interview and Parliament data, especially concerning systematic thefts from public monuments (particularly of plaques). For example, metal had been removed from monuments at Locations 11, 14, 16, 19, 21, 22 and 25. A detailed list of the main stolen or vandalized historical assets and public monuments in Rio de Janeiro was given to the author and it provided more evidence of these systematic thefts (de Mello, 2018). An interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation highlighted that it was easy for people to sell on the stolen metal to scrap dealers. They pointed out that a scrap dealer who buys this metal was located close to our interview in the city centre (Interview, 30/10/2019). An ex-Minister of Culture, Deputy Marcelo Calero, drew the attention of Parliament to recent data from the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN)¹ that showed 1,644 listed objects/property had been recorded as missing on IPHAN's database since 1997, and only 130 had been recovered, with Bahia, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo the most affected states. Calero said:

‘In Rio de Janeiro, we are experiencing some trauma regarding the loss of cultural heritage. Very unfortunate situations that catch our attention. It is irreparable for our history, our memory and our culture’. (Calero, Culture Commission, Chamber of Deputies, 31/10/2019)

An interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation emphasised that:

‘Unfortunately, in Brazil the thefts are systematic’. (Interview, 30/10/2019)

¹ Acronyms used in this article relate to the organisations' names in Portuguese.

‘Systematic’ is the same word Knauss (2007:180) used to describe the situation in Rio de Janeiro in 2007 when he referred to the ‘recurring situation’.

According to the interviews and the Parliament presentations, the crimes are enabled and carried out by a large range of factors and actors. These include thefts carried out or enabled by insiders that work at the locations; lack of inventories; corruption within and from outside the locations; lack of effective management; lack of effective administration; lack of effective co-ordination and information sharing within the field; lack of motivation and attention by workers, for example security guards agreeing amongst themselves to only work on specific days; lack of regulation of the markets, especially the antiquities market which has insufficient standards, supervision and guarantees that could help to prevent crimes; lack of effective laws and regulation that enable crimes such as the sale of cultural heritage for scrap metal; lack of cultural heritage awareness from those who work outside the field; lack of funding from governing bodies and the private sector; lack of consistency in funding; lack of engagement and care for cultural heritage among many Brazilians; and money laundering becoming easier to commit through cultural heritage than more ‘traditional’ methods (Interviews, 10/10/2019, 15/10/2019, 30/10/2019, 2/12/2019, 14/10/2019, 16/10/2019, 15/11/2019; Presentations by Calero, Mattos, Andrade, Rolim, Culture Commission, Chamber of Deputies, 31/10/2019).

An interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation highlighted that the challenges in protecting Brazil’s cultural heritage resemble those faced by equivalent organisations in other countries (Interview, 14/01/2020). While this is the case concerning some areas of prioritisation and resourcing (Block, 2011; XXXX, 2018b; Oosterman and Yates, 2020), what currently differentiates Brazil from many other countries is that the overall

challenge is significantly greater because at federal, state, and municipal levels many governing far-right politicians are focusing disproportionately on the display and content of specific cultural heritage while they dismantle the frameworks that provide protection and support for cultural heritage.

Political attacks on cultural heritage

Many Brazilian politicians at federal, state and municipal levels are using cultural heritage in a strategic manner. They have been accused of downgrading the importance of cultural heritage and failing to protect it adequately despite the threats it faces, while at the same time focusing much attention on specific cultural heritage in ways not seen since the military dictatorship (1964-1985) (Interviews, 30/10/2019, 10/10/2019, 15/10/2019, 15/11/2019, Calero, Culture Commission, Chamber of Deputies, 31/10/2019). Far-right politicians and groups are trying to reassign the content of some cultural heritage to the arena of crime in a way that has some similarities with Simon's (2007) 'Governing through crime' thesis and work that built on it (Baker, 2010, Crawford, 2009, Linnemann, 2013). For example, they understand the importance of the 'all-encompassing lens' (Crawford, 2009) which in its wide view includes cultural heritage (as it did under the military dictatorship), and the importance of creating suspicion of others and constructing 'victims' (Baker, 2010). Instead of providing security for cultural heritage on behalf of the Brazilian population, in a process of politicisation of security they are trying to create the impression that they are providing security for the population from cultural heritage. While Simon's (2007) thesis has some useful similarities, the extent of 'governing through crime' in Anglo-American societies has differences from what this paper considers in Brazil.

The research data show that **political focus on protecting cultural heritage from crime** is often severely lacking and the activities of the public sector organisations to prevent and combat the crimes are not being sufficiently supported. In some cases, they are being handicapped by politicians' actions and policies despite the Brazilian Constitution making the protection the responsibility of governing bodies (Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, 2008).

The following sections use research findings to analyse how and why the politicians are politicising cultural heritage and its security, and also, how and why they are **not dealing with** the crimes related to cultural heritage adequately. Additionally, the effects of this approach are examined.

Censorship

Far-right governing politicians at federal, state and municipal levels have strategically chosen to be seen to act against **cultural heritage** through attacking and trying to limit and censor some cultural heritage. A good example is the censorship of the Queermuseum: Cartographies of Difference exhibition in the city of Porto Alegre by Santander Bank in 2017 despite the Bank choosing to sponsor, host and promote the exhibition in its Cultural Institution. Santander closed the exhibition after pressure from the Free Brasil Movement and other far-right protesters who accused the exhibition of crimes that included zoophilia and paedophilia. The closure was despite the Federal Prosecutors Office stating that no crime had happened and recommending the exhibition should reopen. When the exhibition was going to be restaged at the Museum of Art of Rio in Rio de Janeiro, the city's Mayor, Marcelo Crivella, prevented it from going ahead by threatening to cut the museum's funding. The

Parque Lage School of Visual Arts in Rio de Janeiro chose to stage the exhibition instead (Interview, 15/10/2019; Fidelis, 2018). An interviewee who was closely involved spoke in depth about the events, and, in particular, about the seriousness of the Mayor censoring the exhibition. The interviewee argued that the Mayor did not have this power:

‘He can't even censor anything. He just does not need to participate in the exhibition....don't go and see it, but he cannot cut the funding...the funds are from the citizens of the city who pay taxes for him to manage and administer the city effectively'. (Interview, 15/10/2019)

The interviewee also stated:

‘For me, it was absurd in the 21st century, in 2017, we saw a mayor in an authoritative way say that the exhibition will not occur in Rio de Janeiro because people did not want it. What a lie...and fake news.’ (Interview, 15/10/2019)

This case has similarities with the actions of the Mayor of São Paulo (now Governor of São Paulo), João Doria, who accused the artist Wagner Schwartz of ‘paedophilia’ in 2017 after a four-year-old girl touched the hand and foot of the naked artist while he was performing his piece *La Bête* at the Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo. Despite the museum having warnings about the content of the piece, Doria threatened to cut its funding (XXXX, 2018a). For the mayors of Brazil's two largest cities, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, to be seen to act against what were constructed by them and their supporters as ‘troubling behaviours’ (Simon, 2007:4) is a very powerful political tool. Simon's (2007) warning to ‘expect people to deploy the category of crime to legitimate interventions that have other motivations’ (Simon, 2007:4) manifested itself here with leading politicians accusing artists, curators and directors of cultural heritage spaces of crimes in order to intervene. For example, a Parliamentary

Investigative Commission investigated the curator of the Queermuseum exhibition, Gaudêncio Fidelis, about the contents of the exhibition and he was ordered to appear before a Senate Committee that would investigate ‘the abuse of children and teenagers’ (Fidelis, 2018:145) despite the Federal Prosecutors Office’s confirmation that no crime had happened. Fidelis (2018), himself, highlighted how far-right congressmen aimed to ‘displace art to the territory of crime, where it is then debated’ (Fidelis, 2018:145). This is a clear example of how far-right politicians have been using the discourses of crime to attack cultural heritage and its production and display, and to engender a culture war.

When the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts staged the Queermuseum exhibition, a crowdfunding campaign raised R\$1,081,176.00 (about \$280,000) in 58 days from 1,678 donors. There were 40,000 visitors in a month (Parque Lage, 2019). An interviewee closely involved with the exhibition said:

‘At no time was it a battle because when you fight in this type of situation you create an aggressiveness in the minds of people... I did not want to fight. I did not fight. I said I’ll do it because I believe, because I stand for it. And I think we need to show this exhibition and parallel to this exhibition we will have a large round of debates for everyone to participate in for free.’

It is significant that, showing **their** understanding of the political context in which far-right politicians are looking for ‘battlegrounds’ in their confected culture wars, the interviewee spoke of not wanting to ‘fight’. Instead, **they were** trying to bring people together to discuss and to question, as **they** explained:

‘The exhibition was free for people to have conversations, to discuss, to question, understanding what is right, what is wrong, what is better, not necessarily showing

what is right, but people need to talk, instead of accusing the other.’ (Interview, 15/10/2019)

While the content of some cultural heritage in Brazil has been labelled as ‘criminal’ or as a ‘social problem’ by governing politicians to legitimise their actions and interventions and to increase their governance, a Director of a museum highlighted how they felt the climate of censorship of cultural heritage in Brazil now went beyond the actions of the governing politicians:

‘Now it is important to say and perhaps the government contributes a lot to this environment....now, this in society, this climate of suspense against culture, this climate of censorship, is widespread in our society. This may be more complex to extract than the role of the state’. (Interview, 15/11/2019)

In his work on methamphetamine in Midwestern US, Linnemann (2013) highlights the efforts of those in power to encourage people to feel afraid and insecure, which incites suspicion of others. In Brazil, while this climate is driven by some politicians, many other highly influential people with vested interests from agriculture, church and ‘tough on crime’ groups are also pushing this agenda. Attacking the content of cultural heritage is one tactic for how this is done. Moreover, linking crimes such as paedophilia to cultural heritage engenders a disproportionate response to a created threat (as perceived by some people) and leads to a curator being called to appear before a Senate Committee and artists being attacked and going into exile (Interviews, 15/10/2019, 15/11/2019; Fidelis, 2018). It was in this political environment that the far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, came to power in 2018 and he has encouraged it further.

With specific cultural heritage attacked as criminal or a social problem and the strength of feeling among some Brazilians so great that the security of some artists and cultural heritage locations is at risk (Interview with a Head of an art museum, 15/10/2019; Interview with a Director of a museum, 15/11/2019; Fidelis, 2018), the governing politicians have an environment in which they can spread suspicion of others while they side-line much cultural heritage and handicap efforts to safeguard it, despite their obligation in the Constitution to protect it in its many forms.

Dismantling cultural heritage

It is important to note that management and financial instability in the cultural heritage sector existed prior to the current federal **Bolsonaro** government that came to power in 2018. The Director of a museum made this point when speaking about the absence of an adequate cultural heritage policy in Brazil (Interview, 15/11/2019). Other interviewees also spoke about this lack of an adequate policy or inconsistency in policy, the lack of prioritisation from politicians, and the current shortage of resources (Interviews, 10/10/2019, 15/10/2019, 30/10/2019, 2/12/2019, 14/10/2019, 16/10/2019, 15/11/2019). An example given by three interviewees was the catastrophic fire that destroyed the National Museum in 2018. Interviewees spoke about how the fire was caused by a range of known factors such as a long-term lack of resources to maintain the building's infrastructure, and the fact that the building was managed by the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the Ministry of Education and not the Ministry of Culture (Interviews, 10/10/2019, 30/10/2019, 15/11/2019). An interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation linked the fire to an absence of a public sector policy for cultural heritage:

‘...here we do not actually have a public policy of conservation and restoration of these objects.’ (Interview, 30/10/2019)

An interviewee who runs antiques businesses argued that previous governments did not choose to preserve a lot of cultural heritage, even during times when more money was available (Interview, 10/10/2019). However, during the governments led by the Workers Party from 2002-2016, the Brazil Institute of Museums (IBRAM) was created and its funding increased from R\$20 million in 2001 to R\$200 million (about \$50 million) in 2010 (Porto, 2015). There were also successful initiatives such as a tax incentive called Lei Rouanet and the building of some new museums. Nonetheless, initiatives by these governments were often sporadic and the sector struggled with the lack of continuity, especially in funding; for example, there was always the fear that initiatives would be stopped. Although welcome in the short-term, according to a Director of a museum these initiatives did not fit the funding model required. The Director believes that there needs to be stable, permanent investment for the types of cultural heritage that require preservation (Interview, 15/11/2019). According to the Director and two other interviewees who work in the cultural heritage sector, a key reason for this inconsistent approach has been that many politicians have not considered cultural heritage to be strategically important (Interviews, 30/10/2019, 2/12/2019, 15/11/2019).

Despite the recent past in which there has been an absence of a consistent, effective cultural heritage policy in Brazil (Interviews, 15/10/2019, 30/10/2019, 2/12/2019, 14/10/2019, 15/11/2019), the present approach by far-right politicians is different. On the one hand, it involves them taking a disproportionate level of interest in the content of some cultural heritage and, on the other hand, side-lining cultural heritage further and making it and its

protection even less of a priority. While many politicians continue not to consider cultural heritage as strategically important, these far-right politicians, particularly the federal government, are strategically using cultural heritage.

A Head of an art museum thinks that the government strategy to side-line cultural heritage is worrying as **they feel** cultural heritage should be a government priority. **The Head** said that culture presents an opportunity to investigate:

‘how you can have a better future knowing better and better our past, understanding what we did wrong, what we did right, and how we can think differently to improve’.

(Interview, 15/10/2019)

Owing to this, **they argue** the governing politicians should be investing in cultural heritage and **protecting it**. **The Head** spoke about how a ‘dismantling of culture’ has been happening for a few years. Although **they do** not see a direct threat of a pointed finger and ‘we will destroy’, **they see** the threats to art, theatre, cinema, dance, music, literature, and the visual arts coming from; first, the lack of investment; second, the placing of people with lack of expertise or understanding about culture into the government positions that concern culture; and, third, the reduction of the power of the Ministry and Secretariats of Culture. The threat is also to what the Head believes these cultural forms can stand for, which can be to encourage a more accepting, inclusive, plural society that can improve society rather than foster suspicion of others (Interview, 15/10/2019). Similar to the phrase ‘dismantle culture’ used by the Head, Deputy Calero spoke about ‘a Strategy to “dismantle” IPHAN’ and described it as:

‘Part of a wider strategy to dismantle the organisations of Brazil.’ ‘Government is intervening in state matters.’ (Calero, Culture Commission, Chamber of Deputies, 31/10/2019)

The labelling of some cultural heritage as criminal or a social problem is part of the culture war rhetoric. The 'need' to protect the population from it, rather than protect cultural heritage in its many forms from threats whilst also making it accessible, makes it easier for the governing politicians to side-line or 'dismantle' cultural heritage and the organisations such as IPHAN and IBRAM that administer and protect it, because the labelling enables the politicians' actions to be constructed as legitimate. An easy way to side-line cultural heritage is by not funding the organisations. The effect can be very detrimental to cultural heritage as these organisations focus on preventative measures. For example, IBRAM has a database of documents and legislation, and offers advice, guidelines and support to 3,557 registered museums as well as other museums and cultural heritage locations throughout Brazil. The information it provides covers issues that range from preventing fires and thefts to putting on temporary exhibitions (Interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation, 14/10/2019; Franco, 2018; IBRAM, 2013a, 2013b, 2019a, 2019b; Mangas, 2017).

In addition, side-lining cultural heritage makes it harder for police and customs officers who want to focus on cultural heritage to be able to do so and hinders the creation of collaborative work that produces results. This comes at a time when the work of policing agencies is seen to have improved by some in the cultural heritage sector. For instance, a Director of a museum said that police officers were more professional compared to over a decade ago and the Director believed that their investigations had advanced greatly (Interview, 15/11/2019).

Another interviewee, who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation, highlighted policing successes in the state of Minas Gerais as an example of improvements (Interview, 30/10/2019).

Despite these improvements, side-lining cultural heritage enables the conditions for other police officers to act inappropriately. An interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation spoke about a lack of desire from some police officers even when they have been given information about incidents. They also mentioned a case involving Federal Police officers not returning all the art objects recovered after a theft. The interviewee believed that a person heavily involved in cultural heritage thefts in the states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo had links with a Federal Police officer (Interview, 30/10/2019).

It is important to note that some politicians such as Deputy Calero and the ex-State Secretary of Culture, Andre Lazaroni, want to support and protect cultural heritage activities. However, the dismantling of cultural heritage by far-right politicians is already having structural effects that run counter to what many in the sector desire. For instance, while an interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation proposed that a Ministry of Cultural Heritage is required (Interview, 30/10/2019), the dismantling process has already seen the Ministry of Culture become part of the Ministry of Tourism in 2020 and cultural heritage become even less of a priority.

The need for adequate resources may seem obvious, but it is important to state because before Covid-19, Brazil was slowly recovering from a recession that began in 2014 (OECD, 2019), and, historically, when there has been a lack of public sector resources, cultural heritage has suffered. A Head of a museum explained that in the sector there is a recurring phrase:

'When there is no money, the first one that loses out is cultural heritage, and the last one to gain is cultural heritage.' (Interview, 30/10/2019)

An interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation highlighted that the amount of money required is not enormous:

‘An important point to note is that the resources needed to ensure adequate security for cultural goods are very reasonable and depend on prioritisation, whether of policies undertaken over time in all spheres of government or of private enterprise.’

(Interview, 14/01/2020)

In 2019, many state museums in Rio de Janeiro were closed or were staying open with great difficulty because of a lack of money, according to an interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation (Interview, 30/10/2019). There are also knock on effects such as pay cuts to cultural heritage sector employees who are already on low pay. This can further reduce their motivation (Interview, 30/10/2019). A Head of a museum highlighted the irresponsibility of some security guards and argued that low pay led to some assuming minimal levels of responsibility, to the extent of not showing up to work and leaving a location vulnerable (Interview, 30/10/2019).

A Head of an art museum argued that even at a time of economic pressures such as in 2019, cultural heritage should be funded adequately. They gave the example of France which they argued does not cut funding to culture even when there are wider budget cuts (Interview, 15/10/2019). An interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation spoke of their concerns at the lack of insurance for potential threats such as fire, and how this can lead to locations not taking adequate measures to prevent incidents. They mentioned overloaded wiring, outdated fuses, and a lack of fire extinguishers in buildings such as churches and museums. The interviewee wanted to underline, though, that this was not necessarily because people did not want insurance. Rather, it was owing to a lack of resources

(Interview, 30/10/2019). The fact that measures have been taken by organisations such as IBRAM to counter this through their seminars covering aspects such as fire risks (IBRAM, 2019b) and their reports to help and advise people working in the field (IBRAM, 2013a, 2013b), shows the importance of these organisations for the protection of cultural heritage and the risks regarding a reduction in their ability to support protection.

Another important factor is that there is a lack of private sector investment in cultural heritage in Brazil. An interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation highlighted the lack of private sector sponsors for cultural heritage activities. They also compared the large amount of private funds from Brazil that were donated to support Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris after its 2019 fire with the campaign for funds after the 2018 fire at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro. They claimed that more money was donated by Brazilians to Notre Dame than to the National Museum and argued that this showed the private sector's lack of desire to invest in cultural heritage in Brazil (Interview, 30/10/2019). An interviewee who runs antiques businesses argued that wealthy and politically influential Brazilians lack care and consideration towards cultural heritage objects and locations:

'They can have money, they can have political situation, you know, but they have no culture. They only know what they do, their business. They don't understand about... the preservations, the things that are important....it is a very serious thing'. (Interview, 10/10/2019)

The fear of negative publicity concerning exhibitions that might be perceived or labelled as controversial can also create a lack of incentive to invest in cultural heritage. A Head of an art museum highlighted that non-conservative bodies and institutions might be less keen to support cultural heritage that can be seen to promote critical reflection owing to the potential

for protests from far-right groups and politicians and the fear of being drawn into culture wars (Interview, 15/10/2019). Santander Bank's reaction to the protests against the Queermuseum exhibition is an example according to the exhibition's curator and a Head of an art museum (Interview, 15/10/2019; Fidelis, 2018).

Despite this reason, many areas of cultural heritage such as historic heritage sites, including churches, palaces and farm estates, have also suffered from a lack of private and public sector support, especially funding, even though these locations and their assets do not appear to pose the same type of 'challenge'. Indeed, arguably, some of these cultural heritage locations and activities promote the status quo or the past. In addition, an interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation highlighted that much of the cultural heritage at risk from theft, damage and lack of preservation are these historic sites. They highlighted the urgent need for them to be protected:

'There is still a chance...It has to be done now.' (Interview, 30/10/2019)

An interviewee who runs antique businesses gave the example of the National Museum and said:

'It was part of our history. It doesn't matter if it's right or left or from empire, it's our history. It should be preserved.' (Interview, 10/10/2019)

However, the current process of dismantling cultural heritage undertaken by governing politicians leaves much cultural heritage, including the traditional, very vulnerable to crime.

Governing the cultural economy

While many governing politicians are attacking and censoring cultural heritage, and are dismantling the structural frameworks that protect, secure, encourage and enable cultural heritage, five interviewees see a way in which cultural heritage could be prioritised and the governing politicians at federal, state and municipal levels could all benefit (Interviews, 10/10/2019, 15/10/2019, 30/10/2019, 2/12/2019, 15/11/2019).

When speaking about the potential for cultural heritage and the governing politicians' lack of understanding about it, a Head of an art museum advocated that the political left and right could work together and place culture first. In doing so, everyone could benefit:

'The current government does not understand culture. They could embrace the cultural economy. The potential is massive' 'Huge opportunities for the cultural economy'. (Interview, 15/10/2019)

While people who work in the sector are concerned that people not involved in the sector are insufficiently aware of how important cultural heritage can be for education, self-identity of the population and for the cultural economy (Interviews, 10/10/2019, 15/10/2019, 30/10/2019, 2/12/2019, 15/11/2019), an interviewee who works in the sector highlighted that in recent years more people now had an increased awareness of aspects of the cultural economy (Interview, 2/12/2019). A good example is IBRAM's work in generating cooperation strategies between museums and the tourism industry which could increase the economy, enhance international, federal, state and municipal 'soft power', help protect cultural heritage, and support accessibility and social inclusion (IBRAM, 2014; Porto, 2015).

A Director of a museum spoke about how cultural heritage, especially historic heritage, needs to have more visibility or 'show off' (he switched to English for more emphasis). This relates to how Brazilians and foreigners perceive cultural heritage in Brazil (Interview, 15/11/2019).

Similarly, Mattos of the Federal Council of Museology (COFEM) spoke about the 'Collective heritage of Brazilian people. People must be persuaded about this.' (Mattos, Culture Commission, Chamber of Deputies, 31/10/2019)

If the governing politicians are willing to shift their focus away from protecting people from cultural heritage to protecting the cultural heritage, and stop engendering culture wars and dismantling the cultural heritage sector, the benefits on offer are very significant. It is worth considering that while the UK Government in the 2000s was trying to redefine government ambitions and the population's responsibilities through the category of anti-social behaviour (Crawford, 2009), it was encouraging the cultural economy. The reported scale was immense, with claims in 2010 that, first, every £1 invested in the cultural economy by the Arts Council produced £2; second, the creative industries contributed 6.2% to the UK economy; and, third, there were almost two million people in creative employment (XXXX, 2015). Although these figures should be treated with caution, what is clear is that the UK Government showed how a government can try to spread their governance (albeit in a highly problematic manner) and increase 'soft power' nationally and internationally whilst also encouraging culture (XXXX, 2015, 2018b). There was obvious exploitation from the government and other authorities in this encouragement; for example, in the use of culture for 'territorial exploitation' concerning regeneration projects (Costa, 2008). However, overall, the cultural heritage sector benefited. It is important to note, though, that the government in the UK in the 2000s was politically centre left (arguably) instead of far-right as currently in Brazil and was not creating culture wars.

Considering this, it is worth highlighting the question asked by a Head of an art museum about whether the governing politicians in Brazil could ignore the cultural heritage that makes them

uncomfortable (Interview, 15/10/2019). It could be difficult because attacking cultural heritage and dismantling the cultural heritage sector is a powerful strategy to spread their far-right ethea and many view cultural heritage with suspicion. For example, while a Director of a museum highlighted that 'Heritage provides a place for dialogues between the traditional and the contemporary' (Interview, 15/11/2019), this is not attractive for many far-right politicians who view critical reflection with deep suspicion. The key to potentially changing this in Brazil is generating a wider understanding that the benefits of the cultural economy outweigh the benefits of the current approach because; first, there are large direct and indirect employment opportunities; second, cultural heritage can generate very significant direct and indirect revenues; third, much of the cultural heritage is traditional and uncontroversial; and fourth, politicians can spread their governance by encouraging cultural heritage even if it does not represent their beliefs. These benefits are besides the requirement in law to protect cultural heritage and, therefore, to give it adequate attention and, where possible, more funding (Miranda, 2012; Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, 2008). Rather than attacking and censoring cultural heritage and dismantling the frameworks that support and protect it, governing the cultural economy is where the attention could be instead.

In addition, in Brazil there already exists a cultural economy in which many people understand cultural heritage and cultural economies. This cultural economy could thrive with more support for the people in management and leadership roles in the sector. For example, there are excellent cultural heritage locations, but many could be developed further and promoted more to local people and to tourists from Brazil and abroad (Interviews, 15/10/2019, 30/10/2019, 2/12/2019, 15/11/2019; Observation Research, 2019; IBRAM, 2014). Potentially, an increase in the number of tourists paying entrance costs could also enable more

opportunities for free entrance for local people. A thriving cultural economy can help support the protection of cultural heritage and encourage people to care for it for the worth of the object/activity itself or for the wider benefits.

Mattos (from COFEM) and Rolim (from IPHAN) made the point to Parliament that aspects of the protection and policing of cultural heritage are already in place. They just need to be developed further. They highlighted how presently there were many good proposals such as the linking of databases, increased training, the creation of a permanent framework of specialists to help the organisations involved in the protection and policing, and the efficient documentation and dissemination of cultural heritage collections. However, these all require investment (Mattos, Rolim, Culture Commission, Chamber of Deputies, 31/10/2019). The interview data support this (Interviews, 30/10/2019, 14/10/2019, 16/10/2019, 15/11/2019). For example, an interviewee who works in a public sector cultural heritage organisation spoke of policing successes in the state of Minas Gerais that resulted from the integrated work and specialised knowledge of Public Prosecutors (Interview, 30/10/2019). A good example of the success was when the Minas Gerais Public Prosecution Service, with the help of other agencies such as the Federal Police, the Civil Police, the State Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage of Minas Gerais and IPHAN identified a group of São Paulo criminals specializing in the theft of religious cultural heritage in Minas Gerais. Analysis of collected data led to the successful tracing of the geographical and chronological route of the group's activities, the modus operandi behind the crimes and the main targets (Interview, 30/10/2019; Miranda, 2012). The governing politicians' dismantling processes and the politicisation of security threaten this type of success.

Conclusion

This article has shown that cultural heritage in Brazil is suffering from systematic thefts and damage and is used in other crimes such as fraud and money laundering. This is despite the work of public and private sector organisations, locations and individuals to protect cultural heritage. The threats exist at a time when far-right politicians in Brazil are attacking and trying to censor specific cultural heritage, and are dismantling the sector. Constitutional obligations to protect cultural heritage are then ignored. However, there is an alternative. Although the author would like the far-right politicians to govern cultural heritage effectively for the intrinsic value that the cultural heritage can provide for Brazilian society and other societies internationally, and because of the requirement to do so in the Brazilian Constitution, it would be naïve to hope this would be a strong enough argument for the politicians. Instead, this article argues that approaches to persuade far-right politicians to govern cultural heritage sufficiently are to demonstrate, first, the different ways that a thriving cultural economy can provide very substantial financial gains, and, second, the opportunity to spread their governance irrespective of the cultural heritage content. As the data show, cultural heritage presents many opportunities for them and, rather than attack, censor and dismantle the cultural heritage sector, they could embrace it for their own benefit and govern the cultural economy **adequately**. Moreover, it is a model for all politicians in Brazil, not just those from the far-right. In addition, governing the cultural economy could be the model for other governing politicians in countries that are currently choosing to engage in culture wars and failing to support and protect cultural heritage sufficiently.

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