

Towards Mobilising Intangible Heritage for Recovery and Resilience



Towards Mobilising Intangible Heritage for Recovery and Resilience

This eBooklet is a part of the research project ‘Towards mobilising intangible heritage for recovery and resilience’ seed-funded by Royal Academy of Engineering, UK (RAEng), the Frontiers for Development programme.

Editorial team

In alphabetical order

Alejandra Albuerne, UCL	a.albuerne@ucl.ac.uk
Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian, Silk Cities	f.arefian@silkcities.org
Leila Ben-Gacem, Blue Fish Consulting	leila@bluefish.me
Derya Deniz, Ozyegin University	derya.deniz@ozyegin.edu.tr
Marlon Era, De La Salle University	marlon.era@dlsu.edu.ph
Rohit Ranjitka, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust	rohit.ranjitkar@kvptnepal.org
Zeynep-Gul Unal, Yildiz Technical University	zeynep-gul.unal@icomos.org

Research assistants

In alphabetical order

Zeynep Ece Atabay, Yildiz Technical University
Diba Deihim, Silk Cities
Maryam Eftekhari Dadkhah, Silk Cities
Ehsan Fatehi Far, Silk Cities
Maria Carla Jayme, De La Salle University
Ali Puya Khani, Silk Cities
Mara Cruz Michea, UCL
Mostafa Norouzi, Silk Cities
Elia Quijano Quinones, UCL
Neila Saadi, University of Tunis
Padma Sundar Maharjan
Zeineb Takouti, Blue Fish Consulting
Deepak Tolange, Dhulikhel Municipality
Zeynep Unal, FMV Işık University

Pictures

© Contributors and copyright holders named in captions, 2022

Text

© Contributors, 2022

Graphic design

Ali Puya Khani

Published by

Silk Cities

How to cite this ePublication

Arefian, F., Albuerne, A., Ben-Gacem, L., Deniz, D., Era, M., Ranjitkar, R., Unal, Z.G. (Eds.). (2022). Towards Mobilising Intangible Heritage for Recovery and Resilience. Silk Cities, London, UK.

February 2022

ISBN: 978-1-8383625-1-5



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Project collaborators and publisher make no representations or warranties of any kind, expressed or implied, with respect to the accuracy of information contained in this ePublication and cannot accept legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may be made.

Table of contents

	Title	Page
Introduction	Setting the scene <i>Editorial team</i>	1
Case 1	The making of new rituals for healing and recovery in super-typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan post-disaster ground zero <i>Joycie Y. Dorado Alegre</i>	5
Case 2	The Syrian intangible heritage: post-war attempts for preservation, continuity, and recovery <i>Mounir Sabeh Affaki</i>	19
Case 3	Tunisian case study after the Arab Spring <i>Leila Ben-Gacem</i>	27
	Index	32

Introduction

Introduction

Setting the scene

Editorial team

Events such as disastrous incidents, armed conflicts, and major political changes may cause rapidly developing risks for the affected people, the built environment they live in, and the social and cultural interactions that take place there. Recently, there is emerging recognition that intangible heritage (IH) that is cultural practices, expressions, beliefs, together with traditional and vernacular knowledge and technologies, is important for safe and resilient communities. These heritage forms are integral components of local culture with potential to support individual well-being, bring communities together, offer psychosocial relief, strengthen sense of belonging and provide appropriate and provide appropriate solutions for the community needs to return to normalcy (others are using -to build back better).

However, there is a gap in resilience and disaster recovery frameworks that effectively integrate heritage, not only as a necessary consideration for more socially-responsive and sustainable strategies, but as an active tool to support human recovery processes after disasters or major changes. This eBooklet attempts to contribute to bridging the gap; it is part of a bigger collaborative research project “*Towards mobilising intangible heritage for recovery and resilience*”, seed-funded by the Royal Academy of Engineering, UK (RAEng). This publication is based on an online panel discussion, which was organised as a part of the project.

The main project was initiated with a scoping exercise to collect and rationalise evidence of the role of IH in post-disaster recovery aimed at informing the direction of future research for developing frameworks and policy. Dialogues were structured around two contemporary case studies of Nepal and Tunisia, affected by two different sudden significant events in the last two decades (2015 Nepal earthquakes; 2011 Arab Spring). Bringing together two different kinds of uncertain and complex situations facilitates a relatively comprehensive assessment of how intangible heritage is affected and used in recovery processes.

In parallel, the project also sought to initiate an international dialogue to gather experiences and learnings from recent and ongoing recovery processes that highlight the relevance of IH in these processes. To do so, an online panel discussion, held on 16th November 2021, focused on “Intangible Heritage for Recovery and Resilience”. The panel brought together a variety of fields of expertise and experiences from other cases of sudden significant events, also shared some of the findings of the main research, inviting the panellists and the audience to share insight, perspectives, experiences, and exchange knowledge. This eBooklet disseminates summaries of the discussions.

During the panel, experiences shared from the Philippines, Syria, and Tunis, exposed different scenarios and sources for disaster or sudden significant event. Representing different contexts, the three case studies provided multiple perspectives on the role of intangible heritage both in times of disastrous natural hazards and changes in the social and political landscapes. They provided insights into complex and dynamic relations between intangible heritage, resilience and recovery of the affected communities, and how IH directly or indirectly ushered recovery processes of the people affected in the communities. Importantly, the invited panellists were locals who had a first-hand experience of the major incident. They therefore offered an insider knowledge and voices of locals as well. The examples provided by the panellists show that in times of necessity intangible heritage has a remark-

able capacity for helping communities to cope with grief, damage, and change. Intangible heritage is, therefore, a valuable resource to thrive in adverse situations. It can perform diverse roles when human groups are dealing with sudden or long-term change in their living environments.

From the Philippines, Joycie Dorado shows how intangible heritage has been a powerful facilitator for healing and recovery after the typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Traditional rituals that previously were performed to celebrate faith and life in community, were *re-negotiated* to accommodate *space and time* for grief caused by the loss of loved ones. While at the same time, these *re-negotiated* rituals also facilitated collaboration between different actors, such as religious leaders, local communities and disaster response managers, to handle the aftermath of the typhoon Haiyan. Moreover, these new rituals for *healing* are still present. Exposing how it is necessary for people to remember this event and to share communally their loss. This, in exchange, nourish their sense of community and provide younger generations – who did not experience the event first-hand – with collective knowledge.

From Syria, Mounir Sabeh Affaki argues how intangible heritage can be a vehicle for reconciliation and peacebuilding. The destruction of places for collective memory and the halting of religious rituals adds to the trauma of loss, deforming the sense of place and interrupting the continuation of social life. To resume these practices provides a *sense of normality*, that for the affected people is equivalent to recovery. Thus, the case of Syria makes us look at how intangible heritage can be *activated* to become more inclusive, and it can be turned into *gathering points* to facilitate community-building.

Finally, the findings from the main research's case study of Tunisia, discussed by Leila Ben-Gacem show how in times of sudden significant events, intangible heritage offers a sense of continuity and a place for refuge. It can also be a key vehicle for local people to engage in the preservation and rediscovery of their national heritage. Moreover, the example from Tunisia reveals how political changes can result in an openness to new relationships with heritage. Therefore, offering opportunities for communities to create and actively participate in processes for their own recovery and resilience.

Although the experiences, reactions, and approaches to the recovery processes differ from each other in each case depending on features and characteristics of the events such as geographic locations, actors involved, stakeholders, and cultural attributes, what they have in common is that the community finds solidarity in their intangible cultural heritage. It appears that disasters are universal as they can happen around the globe, so is the tendency of communities to respond back together and support each other. Communities do so through their sense of belonging-with diverse rituals and practices representing them. While being extremely affected by such sudden significant events, intangible heritage also arises as a unifying source of recovery and resilience through its deeply-rooted connections to the affected community itself.

In many cases tangible and intangible heritage are connected and dependent on one another. Intangible and tangible heritage complement each other and form together the main basis to keep a community's spirit alive, so that it gives the community courage and willingness to respond back and recover as united to unexpected extreme challenges such as disasters. This is a case especially in areas such as historical settlements, cultural heritage sites, or cultural landscapes. These major challenges may cause the destruction and the sudden change in such settings that disrupt the relations between the tangible and the intangible cultural heritage.

Heritage keeps evolving and adapting to time to better connect the present time with past history, culture, and social cohesion within the community. When the context and conditions change after a sudden significant event, the community may explore new potentials of intangible heritage to benefit from it as a means to recover and build resilience. Disasters can potentially trigger initiating new rituals, luminous cultural practice and creative social actions for healing and recovery, while still remembering the disaster as a factual period in the ongoing life of a community and a city. This inherently refers to a fundamental question: if to remember or to erase the memory of a disaster. This question deeply influences all efforts of recovery, for example the reconstruction where it was and the way it was.

Given that this is an emerging topic, there is a need for more empirical research and theoretical and multidisciplinary efforts to explore linkages between IH, recovery and resilience. Therefore, the broader agenda of disseminating summaries of the panel discussion is to outreach a broader audience and generate further dialogues on this subject matter.

Being a part of a bigger project, this eBooklet is supplemented by two other project outputs. First is a working paper, which shares the findings of the two case studies. As an empirical research, it draws on input and information from a variety of IH stakeholders, including locals, through focus group workshops and individual interviews that provided valuable diverse perspectives and insights into this complex and overlooked issue. The case from Nepal shows that intangible heritage practices provide a way to guide communal effort; they can also help economy by accessing to work to recover tangible expressions of heritage. The case study from Tunis shows that intangible heritage can provide a source of peace within social turmoil for practitioners, while also being the target of national agendas. The case study research presented in the paper identifies some common themes that show how important intangible heritage is for people to handle change and navigate their living environments.

Second is a literature review, that identifies what the state of arts is in terms of knowledge of the relationship between intangible heritage, disaster and processes of resilience and recovery - as of November 2021. The main project attempts to establish a roadmap that lays the groundwork for future research and policy. The literature review has identified that heritage frameworks include resilience and recovery in disaster processes. However, they are from a perspective of being more responsive and inclusive of communities, but not as an active tool to actively support recovery processes. The literature review can also be understood in two ways, what is out there, and what the literature is missing.

This eBooklet, white paper and literature review, together set a foundation upon which further systemic studies can take off. They provide useful data to inform the direction of future research for developing frameworks and policy. They potentially contribute to developing research framework or international policy in using IH in disaster resilience and recovery particularly in low and middle income countries. They highlight missing opportunities for using intangible heritage as a tool in the development of recovery process that could be more socially responsive and sustainable.

Case 1

The making of new rituals for healing and recovery in super-typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan post-disaster ground zero

Joycie Y. Dorado Alegre, University of the Philippines; Leyte-Samar Heritage Society, Inc. Philippines

joyciedoradoalegre@gmail.com

In memory of

This presentation refers to Haiyan Ground Zero as post-disaster scape. It has been eight years since Super-typhoon Haiyan, locally known in the Philippines as Yolanda, ravaged the region of Eastern Visayas with its capital Tacloban City, an urban setting, as the centre. I would like to dedicate my presentation to the late Reverend Father Hector Villamil, former parish priest of San Jose district in Tacloban City, with whom I worked closely along with my colleagues in the Leyte-Samar Heritage Society during our community engagements at the time of relief and recovery. He passed away only last June. So, let us please observe a moment of silence for Father Villamil. This is also a tribute for the victims of Super-typhoon Yolanda – those who perished in the storm surge. The eighth anniversary of Yolanda/Haiyan disaster was commemorated only last November 8th this year.

Overview

My discussion draws on narratives that are imaged through a series of photographs in this slideshow. I view my recollection of the Yolanda disaster from the perspective of a survivor. I was in Ground Zero Tacloban when Yolanda struck. I live on high ground and far from the coast therefore I did not experience the ordeal of struggling through the surging of the sea that drowned and washed away thousands of people but I had borne grief and the pain of loss and the suffering of my extended families, friends and fellow inhabitants in this part of the Philippines. I will be sharing with you my perspective as a survivor, as a mother, as a friend, as an academician in culture studies, and as an artist. These are the highlighted narratives:

1. November 8, 2013, the day super-typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan came.
2. The aftermath;
3. Spaces and time for grief and mourning;
4. Negotiating rituals for the dead - Dayaw program for healing;
 - The catholic and the indigenous;
5. Tapos Ika-Kwarenta the 40th day - Paghinumdum remembering those who perished.
6. Tagmo: one year - Paghinumdum, remembering after a year;
 - Pagtayuk: candle lighting by a community of survivors;
7. Disaster space as sacred;
8. November 8, 2021, 8th year of commemoration Paghinumdum Na Liwat;
 - Creativity and spontaneity of survivor communities.

November 8, 2013 was the day that the Super-typhoon Yolanda or Haiyan struck the Philippines, mainly the Eastern seaboard of the Philippines. Secondly, I will discuss briefly about the aftermath. Thirdly, you will be looking at images of the disaster through pictures I provided here -- photographs of space and time for grief and mourning during the most difficult period of Yolanda's disaster. The fourth narrative is about my group's involvement in negotiating the conduct of rituals for the dead. This was part of a project of the government in partnership with a non-government organisation and communities. To recall, that was the Dayaw Program for Healing produced by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts". There and then, we engaged in negotiations between the Christian practices and the indigenous practices (I will be pointing that out to you midway through the narrative). The fifth highlight would be in this turning point, the 40th day since disaster struck and the death of thousands (6,500 per official government record), remembering those who perished, we call that Ika-Kwarenta, the 40th day of the funeral cycle – part of the cycle for mourning and for grief. There is also another marker in this cycle which is the sixth narrative highlight. In the local Filipino Waray language, which is dominant in our region, it is called the Tagmo the one-year cycle of remembering. The action of Pagtayuk Candle-lighting as one community of survivors is the focus ritual action of the ritual process in remembering the dead that I would be referring to and sharing with you. The seventh highlight in my discussion is the concept of disaster scape as sacred space - a concept that came in my own ruminations of the disaster experience. In our case in Yolanda ground zero, the disaster scape is the entire island – an island sphere, because we are an island community, in fact, inter-island community in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines that is constituted by two island clusters named Samar and Leyte. I view this disaster scape as sacred space. It has been sacralized with the death of thousands and with people's fervent faith in life after death, the spirit world, the sacred. And finally, the eighth highlight is the event that occurred just last week (Friday), November 8th, 2021, -- the 8th year of the commemoration and we refer to that as another occasion for remembrance Paghinumdum Na Liwat. My narration is a sharing of my own realisation of the creativity and spontaneity of survivor communities.



Figure 1.1 Location of Ground Zero Tacloban and the Eastern Visayas region in the Philippine map (source: Department of Health, Republic of Philippines¹)

¹ <http://ro8.doh.gov.ph/regional-profile/>

1.1 Geographical scope

The Philippines is an archipelagic country in Southeast Asia. It is situated west of the Pacific Ocean and consists of about 7,100 islands. Super-typhoon Haiyan, also known as Yolanda, made landfall in the Philippines at the city of Guiuan on the island of Samar on November 8, 2013 and then it reached the city of Tacloban on the island of Leyte, killing at least 6,200 people in this region (per official government report). It headed westward making five more landfalls in the Visayas group of islands, the country's central region and home to 18 million people at that time (population based on DOH report 2013).

1.2 Leyte-Samar interisland world: wealth of land and waters

Leyte and Samar islands (Leyte-Samar Island) have been joined with San Juanico bridge. The islands abound with natural resources in land and water. The traditional forms of livelihood are fishing and farming. In Leyte, people could deposit the fishing net at sea close to the shore and get fish everyday enough for a fisherman's family. Unfortunately, there are areas that illegal dynamite fishing is practised. This recklessness has caused the lessening of fish or they go farther out at sea. Fertile soil provides for the community basic food necessities -- the land is rich in root crops, vegetables. With the bounty of fish and other seafood, for their taste preference, the people here value the primacy of freshness and the pristine natural state. Root crops are made into a wide range of delicacies with coconut as a binder or enhancer. The ubiquitous coconut also yields tuba (coconut toddy) -- the favourite local alcoholic beverage.

1.3 Pasundayag nga maribhong: exuberance in the celebration of life

The people here are a merry lot -- a social gathering is marked with singing accompanied by a guitar and dancing. Kuratsa is the most popular folk dance. It is a courtship dance as well as a wedding dance. It is also performed in community fund raising events. The Tinikling dance, once declared as the Philippine national dance, portrays the rice birds evading traps in the rice fields. This originated in Leyte. The people of Samar is known to be mat weavers of the finest kind. The mats of Basey, Samar are handwoven by women and are admired for their beautiful -- geometric weaving patterns and floral embroidery. The people in the islands of Samar and Leyte are known to be fun-loving and exuberant in expressing joy.

The devotional practice of faith is very pronounced. In Tacloban, the patron saint is the Santo Nino (the Holy Infant Jesus). The fiesta celebration combines prayer and the vivacious display of celebration through festivals. There are three festivals during the fiesta -- Tacloban is the only city in the Philippines with three festivals for one fiesta: Sangyaw the Festival of Lights (organised by the Tacloban City Government), and the complex festival combining the Pintados and the Kasadyaan Festival of Festivals (organised by the Provincial Government of Leyte). These festivals are held with street dancing and stage dancing. Dance and music are the manifestations of the people's elan vital. However, this very vibrant community was ravaged by the Super-typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda.

1.4 Super shock! Spiral winds and the surge from the sea

Historically, Haiyan or Yolanda is categorised as the strongest typhoon (with sustained winds at 196 mph and wind gusts of 215 mph) that made landfall until this record was superseded by Typhon Goni in 2020.

Residents were all shocked. In this region, people grow up with at least two typhoons every year but this was something else with the strong howling spiral winds and the surges from the sea. For the first time after 100 years, in our lifetime, we never knew about the sea surges. Figure 1.2 shows a part of the devastation in Tacloban city.



Figure 1.2 A neighborhood at Magallanes Street, Tacloban City in the Yolanda aftermath (source: Department of Health, Republic of Philippines²)

The waves and currents in the surge caused ten ships to be cast ashore. The ships ran aground, smashed houses, and killed families trapped inside their homes. Deaths caused Kasakit, the pain of loss. How do we deal with this pain? Our beloved drowned and died in an instant. The dead bodies lay among the debris. The stench of death was all over. Since this is a coastal community, houses, buildings, and even concrete structures were wrecked.

People were confused. What happened? What brought this? Where would you go? Go looting for food and medicine, line up, stand in a queue for several hours to receive relief goods or go search for the missing beloved. If found, they are dead. I have close friends whose families have died. A family lost 11 members -- mother, aunt, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces; and there was another family with 21 members, young and old.

Looting began in the early period after the disaster. It became rampant and widespread in typhoon-hit Tacloban City due to delays in delivery of relief goods by the national government. Relief was not enough for everybody at the time needed. Survivors have been forming long queues in the worst hit areas to collect food and water.

And the stories of missing persons, dead bodies unnamed and unidentified pervaded in survivor conversations. There was no clear protocol for the dead nor a clear system for the management of the dead. A former student of mine found his parents' dead bodies in a hotel where they were booked for supposed safety. They got trapped and drowned. He lay them together on the ground and left them while he went in search of a vehicle to transport them back to their home. When he returned, his parents' corpses were gone – taken by the city truck to be buried in a mass grave in the city outskirts. He could no longer find them.

1.5 The last bastion: faith

What would anyone do in circumstances like this? Sudden loss of the beloveds and the immense grief could drive weaker mortals to insanity. The last bastion for inner strength was faith. Women or mothers carried religious images, the practice of their devotion to the deity that they believe in became more intense in a, largely Catholic community. Figure 1.3 is Palo Metropolitan Cathedral that at that time was newly renovated, Yolanda's strong winds blew off all the roofs. Still, people remained steadfast in their faith.

1.6 Festival tweaked as ritual for healing and recovery

I got involved in a government project, the Dayaw festival for indigenous peoples. Instead of a celebration, we had to "tweak" it for healing and recovery. Therefore, we organised funerary rituals and cultural programs related to healing or psychosocial trauma processing. For the funeral mass, we event organisers posed this question to ourselves: How do we deal with the empty space in the church? In a funeral mass, there is supposed to be a body in a coffin at the altar. Therefore, we consulted Reverend Father Hector Villamil (former parish priest of San Jose Tacloban city). I was working closely with my colleague in the Leyte-Samar Heritage Society, particularly the president of the group at that time, Interior Designer Leo Almeria. We discussed with Father Villamil about the symbols and ritual acts that we would present and perform. We were concerned with the conduct of indigenous practices. We were able to decide the appropriate symbols with Reverend Father Hector Villamil. He allowed the performance of the indigenous breaking of a pot -- an act believed to cast away the shadow of death or cut the chain of death in the bereaved family and in that case during the disaster aftermath, the bereaved community of survivors. But he advised that this be done outside the church. We respected his decision.



Figure 1.3 Palo Metropolitan Cathedral roofless in the aftermath (source: Shibani Mahtani³)

3 https://s.wsj.net/public/resources/images/AI-CE909_PHILCH_P_20131119054615.jpg

At the onset, there was nobody in the community other than the parish priest to lead and coordinate with us because people were in quandary about basic needs and were confused about relief goods and loots. Fortunately, I met an old friend who was queueing for something she did not really know what. She agreed to help organise her friends, her fellow mothers so together they helped put things in order. We scheduled a Holy Mass on the 40th day which is a significant day in the funeral cycle. We included symbolic props for the funeral ritual -- a table, floral wreath, candles, and clay pot which is an indigenous object. We put these things together but there were no dead bodies, no coffins. These were missing. The dead that were found had already been buried somewhere by the shore or somewhere else. We designed the props to be set up so that there would be something to represent the dead in that empty space by the church altar. We also included an earthen jar where the names of the dead would be placed. These names were written on ribbons that were displayed and on pieces of paper that were dropped into the jar. It is important to name the dead so their souls can be prayed for.

During the Holy Mass, people cried. My own tears flowed. We, organisers, could not help but also cry. It was a collective expression of community in grief all together in that moment. The congregation of the bereaved offered flowers and dropped into the jar the paper tags on which were written the names of their beloved dead or the missing beloved. After the Mass, my friend, Laura Agosto, who lost her husband and grandchild brought the clay pot to the front church yard and broke it there. The breaking of the pot symbolises the casting of negative energy or particularly as mentioned earlier, the cutting of the chain of death (Figure 1.4). Also, it is a way of letting the soul of the dead go. So, the breaking of the pot cuts the connection between life and death, or the connection of the body and the soul because the body is now lifeless. We had ribbons written with the beloved's names displayed on a board at the church entrance so they would be remembered. We had counted about 1,600 dead and missing people named on ribbons on that 40th day in this district of San Jose in Tacloban. More names were added in the successive days.



Figure 1.4 Laura Agosto, at the church yard, carries the clay pot to be broken, a funeral practice believed to cast away the shadow of death. (source Leyte-Samar Heritage Society, Inc.)

People were busy in search of family, friends, and relief goods. They were queuing up for whatever was offered by agencies, organisations, and the government. There were many who left their homes, took free flights on military planes to find refuge in Manila, Cebu, or other cities/towns in the Philippines. It was an exodus of Yolanda survivors. There was almost no space nor time to grieve. Thus, we thought of providing the space and time for the funerary rituals other than the workshops to process the trauma of loss.

1.7 Lubnganan ngan tigaman: graves and memorials

Graves and memorials would later be set up at the church yard. Later, parishioners would come up with beautiful grave markers such as those at the cathedral grounds in Palo, Leyte -- stone slabs and angel sculptures. We call the identifying slabs the lapida with the name of the dead inscribed on them. Oh, there were a row of lapidas with the same family names. In one cemetery in the north of Tacloban, there were no names and nary a corpse buried in the ground under the cross. Eventually a name was assigned and inscribed on each cross. These crosses just represent people who have died even if their remains were not there. The dead bodies have been buried in mass graves and many have not been identified. The matter of identification of corpses even became a controversial issue among government agencies.

To this date, seven memorial monuments have been built. In Santa Rita, Samar, the monument is shaped as a giant hand with fingers so configured that it also resembles a tree (Figure 1.5). The tree is significant for survivors because many of them climbed trees and held on tightly to their branches, thus, they were saved from the strong winds and water currents. The giant hand also refers to the hand of God that gave refuge to survivors. Another monument in Tanauan, Leyte is a modern abstract design showing water waves and figures of people and volunteers helping in the rescue and relief efforts. It was designed by Kublai Mil-lan, a Filipino sculptor based in Mindanao, south of the Philippines, who was commissioned by the local government of Tanauan, Leyte. This beautiful and graceful monument, covers more than 60 feet in width and about 14 feet in height – simulating the dimensions of the waves of the sea surge.⁴ The memorial of Tacloban City is also patterned from spiral currents of the sea surges. Another Tacloban city government monument project is the actual ship, M/V Eva Jocelyn that was cast ashore in the barangay (village) of Anibong, Tacloban. The ship is now a tourist destination in Anibong, Tacloban.



Figure 1.5 The memorial in Santa Rita, Samar (source: FAQ.ph⁵)

4 The main structures are two spiral curves measuring 14 feet, the estimated high of the storm surge that pummelled this town.

5 https://faq.ph/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/12211096_10154407804493146_216173530_o-1024x683.jpg

1.8 Pagtayuk: candlelight ritual for spirits to find their way through darkness

On the first year anniversary, people lighted candles on graves and along the streets. This was a very spontaneous act among the people but was highly organised by private groups in coordination with the church and the barangay or local village councils. The first year anniversary was followed the following year by a very special visit of His Holiness Pope Francis. It was very significant to be visited by someone very important and who cared. Pope Francis flew in through another storm and officiated a Holy Mass on ground zero. His Holiness Pope Francis delivered an extemporaneous homily during Holy Mass on his visit in Tacloban in January 2015. Papal blessings upon the survivor pilgrims and the super typhoon-ravaged homeland uplifted the disaster community. The damaged homeland of survivors and of their dead was blessed. In fact, everything around as the physical space, the ground that is “ground zero” has been sacralised by the physical presence and the blessings of the Pope (Figure 1.7). I see this as the narrative of making the disaster scape sacred.



Figure 1.6 People, young and old, lighting candles along the streets and public places. (source: GMA News Online⁶)

What happened after eight years since Yolanda struck? Recently, on November 8, 2021, the 8th year of commemoration, the events that include candle lighting manifested the creativity and spontaneity of survivors (Figure 1.6). People installed makeshift altars and made new rituals or perhaps, we can say, they tweaked the traditional rituals. They lit the candles along the streets because in their memories, there were corpses that laid there. Therefore, the dead are remembered in the very spaces upon which they were laid before they were buried. Other than the “islands” on the streets, the ship that was cast ashore has also become a monument where candles are lit. Flowers were offered there, and people including tourists lighted candles and said prayers.

⁶ <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/regions/632351/mayor-says-tacloban-city-has-risen-from-yolanda-devastation/story/>



Figure 1.7 Tens of thousands of pilgrim survivors welcomed His Holiness, Pope Francis and attended Holy Mass officiated by him amidst another storm in January 2015. (source: Butz Eguia)

I recall the first year Yolanda disaster anniversary, on the tagmo, when the massive candle lighting all started. Going around the city, seeing people offering flowers, lighting candles, displaying photographs of the beloved dead, praying on the streets, and attending Masses in churches, joining concerts in parks and plazas, and amidst candlelit smoky atmosphere, I sensed an emotion that I have never felt before. I personally felt the grief as well as the relief. We were commemorating death and disaster, remembering the dead and praying for their souls to rest in peace at the same time we were giving thanks for our lives as survivors as well as celebrating our resilience. It was a very strange, beautiful uplifting feeling on the first time that the commemoration took place. It was like the merging of All Souls' Day and New Year's Day. Solemn, sombre, with a tinge of sadness and feeling gladness. We have had these memorial activities for eight years since then. Altars are set up by the road, Holy Masses are held outdoors, prayers, floral offerings ang pagtayuk or candle lighting are done for the dead. The ship that ran aground is now a monument where people pray with flower offerings and candle lighting. This year, even during the Covid-19 pandemic, these activities are done but people keep distance from each other to abide by the community health protocol.

Although there are organised efforts done by the barangay (village) council, there are also spontaneous activities by the residents themselves. The memorial monuments as well as makeshift altars display the names of the dead. Totally, the official count is 6,200 fatalities but we think the number of victims are more than the official figure. So, in worst typhoon-hit areas people light candles where the dead were supposed to have been laid down. The streets are lighted up; but now, with the loosening of the lockdown restrictions, people have fun going outdoors. This year, I observed many young people strolling, families picnicking and children playing at the Astrodome memorial park. In Barangay Paraiso, district of San Jose, a makeshift altar displaying the images of Jesus and guardian angels was installed by the roadside. In addition, a list of the dead was written on a board for the public to read. Placards with written dedications, flowers and purple ribbons stood by the roadside. These are pretty props and are made more visually attractive by the moment by moment shifting colours of the lighting that was cast on the altar and the board with the names of the

dead. After candle lighting and praying for their neighbours who died in the storm, people socially interact with each other. They placed tables and chairs by the roadside. They lounge around and chat with each other until the wee hours of the night.

Another interesting example of a candle lighting remembrance ritual took place on an “island” in the intersection of the streets also in San Jose district. Candle lamps were made from brown paper. These were also adorned with artificial orchids. They were placed on this spot at this street intersection where dead bodies were laid at that time of the Yolanda aftermath before they were brought by trucks to be buried in mass graves. The statue of Saint Joseph here was surrounded by candles and flowers. People came with their own candles, they set them up and lighted them there, and quietly, they prayed.

In Barangay San Joaquin, Palo, a town near Tacloban, a multiple candle installation made of iron was fabricated and positioned adjacent to the granite monument at the parish church yard. Candles were set up among flowers at the base of the granite walls on which the names of the dead were inscribed. Beside the chapel there, the new sculptured image of the ‘Lady of Hope’ stands. At the base of the image, candles were also lighted. “Our Lady of Hope” is a new aspect of blessed Mother Mary officially declared and blessed by Pope Francis during his visit. This phenomenal image is based on the narratives of survivor children, who told their common story of survival -- that a woman saved them from drowning in the waters. The first statue was designed and sculpted in Yolanda’s debris wood by Willy Tayug, a famous Filipino sculptor of religious images. The image is that of Mother Mary carrying Baby Jesus in the act of saving a child.

In Tanauan, Leyte, where the memorial monument shows water waves and figures of people and volunteers, people lighted candles all around it. At the back of the sculpture is a transparent board with a dedication passage and the list of those who perished in the storm. A candle rack stands near this structure. People came to light candles, lay flowers, and pray (Figure 1.8).



Figure 1.8 The modern styled memorial monument surrounded with candlelit vigil lamps in Tanauan, Leyte (source: Samlito C. Abueva)

The act of pagtayuk or candle-lighting is a traditional old ritual yet made new in the context of the Yolanda disaster commemoration. The set of actions manifested by the people -- lighting a candle, offering flowers, praying, building altars, displaying the names of the dead -- constitute the process of remembering as coming to terms with such an extreme life-changing event. It facilitates the healing and recovery of disaster survivors. The performance of these rituals including the preparation process are made special (as Ellen Dissayanake has propounded about ritual and art) as gifts to the loved ones who have gone and joined the realm of the divine. The people's spontaneous actions in the sites where the dead were placed, blessed and prayed over and sacralise these spaces. These spaces revert to their quotidian state after the day of commemoration. After another year, for a day, it is transformed once again into sacred space. The rituals continue every year. The calendar of rituals comprises a cycle of remembering towards continuous recovery. While memories of the loss of human lives remain, disaster survivors of Super-typhoon Yolanda, see glimmers of hope that they are able to kindle and rekindle the flames of faith to rise and overcome the tragedy. Thus, they carry on with celebrations of life and love through the creative, delicate, intimate and luminous symbolic expressions of the indomitable Filipino Visayan spirit.

References

- Aguilos, Ramon Stephen B. (2014). Super Typhoon Yolanda: A Story of Pain and Hope. CBCP Monitor, 15 (5), B3 and B7.
- Alegre, Edilberto N. (1994). *Pinoy na Pinoy – Essays on National Culture*, Anvil Publishing Inc., Metro Manila.
- Alegre, Edilberto N. (2020). *Biyaheng Pinoy – A Mindanao Travelogue*, AteneoDe Manila University Press, Quezon City.
- Alegre, Joycie D. (2015). Ethnopoetics of Resilience: Haiyan/Yolanda Ground Zero Philippines in Pasquale Miano, ed., *Heritage, temporality and materiality*, (pp. 213-223). Naples, Italy: University of the Philippines Diliman and University of Naples Federico II
- Alegre, Joycie D. (2015). *Lunop- Haiyan Voices and Images*, Leyte-Samar Heritage Society,

Inc. and National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Manila.

Alegre, Joycie D. (2010). *The Waray Culture of the Philippines*, Unpublished Manuscript of research commissioned by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Available at www.academia.edu

Bankoff, George & Borrinaga, George Emmanuel. (2016). *Whethering the Storm: The Twin Natures of Haiyan and Yolanda*. In Button, Gregory and Schuller, Mark (Eds.), *Contextualizing Disaster* (pp.44-65). New York and Oxford: Berghahn.

Barthes, Roland (1977). *Image-Music-Text*, Hill and Wang, New York.

Barthes, Roland (1983). *Mythologies*, Hill and Wang, New York

Benjamin, Walter (1969). *Illuminations – Essays and Reflection*, edited and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books.

Benjamin Walter (1986). *Reflections – Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, edited and with an Introduction by Peter Demetz. New York: Schocken Books.

Borinaga, Rolando (2015). *Supertyphoon Yolanda (Haiyan): The New Milestone of Our Lives*. *The Journal of History*, 61 (January-December 2015), 236-261.

Campbell, Joseph (1988). *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday.

Clifford, James. & Marcus, George E. (1986). *Writing Culture- The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Covar, Prospero R. (1998). *Larangan – Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture*. Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts.

Covar, Prospero R. (1998). *The Filipino, his culture and society*. Translated from Tagalog by Romina Santos. In *Philippines- archipelago of smiles* (pp.119-127). Paris and Manila: le cherche midi editeur and S.O.S. Incorporated.

Demetrio, Francisco, S.J. (1981). *Myths and Symbols Philippines*. Manila: National Bookstore.

Dissanayake, Ellen. (1992). *Homo Aestheticus- Where Art Comes From and Why?* New York and Toronto: The Free Press – Macmillan, Inc. and Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Inc.

Eguia, Butz. (2015). *The Yolanda Encounter – of Hope and More Marikina, Philippines: Australia and New Zealand Association of Employment Providers of the Philippines, Pilipino Manpower Agencies Accredited to Taiwan, Inc. and Philippine Association of Agencies for Kuwait, Inc.*

Eliade, Mircea. (1968). *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper and Row.

Eliade, Mircea (1969). *Images and Symbols – Studies in Religious Symbolism*. Translated by Philip Mairet. New York: Search Book.

Eliade, Mircea (1975). *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*. New York: Harper and Row.

Foucault, Michel. (1980). *Power/ Knowledge – Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Col-

in Gordon, (Ed.). (Leo Marshall, John Mehan and Kate Soper, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

HAIYAN: One year On – From Emergency to Recovery. (2014). World Vision International.

Hirsch, Eric & O'Hanlon, Michael. (1996). The Anthropology of Landscape – Perspectives on Place and Space. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pagaduan-Lopez, June Caridad et al (2009). Manual for Trainers Enhancing Capacities in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies and Disasters. Manila: Center for Community Oriented Medical Education, College of Medicine, University of the Philippines and Health Emergency Management Staff, Department of Health.

Schechner, Richard. (1985). Between Theater and Anthropology. Foreword by Schechner, Richard (1985) Performance Theory. New York: Routledge.

Scott, William Henry. (1995). Barangay - Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society. Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Taussig, Michael. (1987). Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man - A Study in Terror and Healing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Turner, Victor. (1982). From Ritual to Theater. New York: PAJ.

https://doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/publications/2013PHScompressed_0.pdf

<https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/2013-state-climate-record-breaking-super-typhoon-haiyan>

<https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/2013-typhoon-haiyan-facts>

Acknowledgments

Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian, Ph.D.

Jocelyn Y. Dorado

Samlito C. Abueva

Danica Ybanez

Marcelo Gerardo Dolina Ruiz

Butz Eguia

Alegria O. Ferrer, Ph.D.

June Pagaduan Lopez, Ph.D.

Abbey Pasano del Puerto

Lakan Uhay D. Alegre

CNET- PSR and Balik Kalipay Center, Inc.

Leyte-Samar Heritage Society, Inc.

National Commission for Culture and the Arts

Case 2

The Syrian intangible heritage: post-war attempts for preservation, continuity, and recovery

Mounir Sabeh Affaki, University of Coimbra, Portugal; Czech Technical University, Czech Republic
mouniraffaki@hotmail.com

Overview

Syria has a rich cultural heritage that refers to its strategic location in the heart of the Middle East and to the diversity of its inhabitants. However, the Syrian War has had significant effects both on the tangible and intangible heritage with the destruction of historic centres – the incubators of cultural practices – and the demographic change due to deaths and displacement. This text provides an overview on the Syrian cultural heritage and how it was affected by the war. It then presents recent attempts to restore it and preserve its continuity, acknowledging its value towards social recovery and resilience.

2.1 Syrian semography and population density

Syria has a diverse cultural heritage associated with different regions, religions, and ethnicity. It has a population of over 20 million, mostly concentrated on the western coastal part, the capital Damascus, the commercial capital Aleppo, and the Euphrates valley (Figure 2.1). The density falls at the centre where the Syrian desert is. Syria's population is described as a mosaic of different cultures and ethnicities (Figure 2.2). Pre-war data reported that the majority are Sunni Muslims. In addition, there are other affiliations of Islam, Christianity of different sects, Druze, and Jewish communities. While the main cities of Aleppo and Damascus feature a religious mix, there are less mixed regions including a Kurdish concentration to the north, Alawites by the coast, Ismailis in the city of Salamiyeh near Hama, Christians in Wadi al-Nasara, and Druze to the south, near the Lebanese and Jordanian borders.

2.2 The components of Syrian Cultural Heritage

Prior to the war, 16 living languages could be found. Arabic is the official language, featuring original dialects. Kurdish (Kurmanji dialect) is spoken by almost 9%. In addition, there are Armenian, Turkish, and other minority languages including the classic Aramaic and Syriac, the former being spoken in the village of Maalula, and the latter as the liturgical language of Syria Christians. Also, English and French are taught at school.

Syrian intangible heritage is commonly categorised into three domains: The first is customs and traditions (*Adat wa Taqalid*) Which includes the oral traditions and expressions, the cultural practices, knowledge about nature, traditional healthcare, and religious and social rituals and events. Some examples are traditional coffee sellers, traditional public baths, Syrian cuisine. The second is the traditional artistic expressions, (*funun Sha'biya*) including traditional music, dance, storytelling, poetry, shadow theatre, among others. The third is craftsmanship (*al-Hiraf al-Yadawiya*) such as copper work, glass blowing, Laurel soap production, Damascene Brocade, and many more

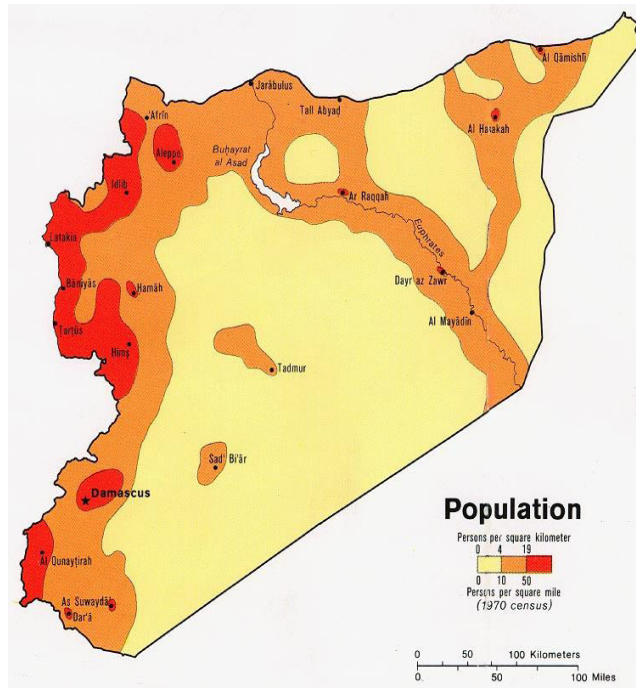


Figure 2.1 Population density in Syria: persons per square kilometre (source: NationMaster.com)

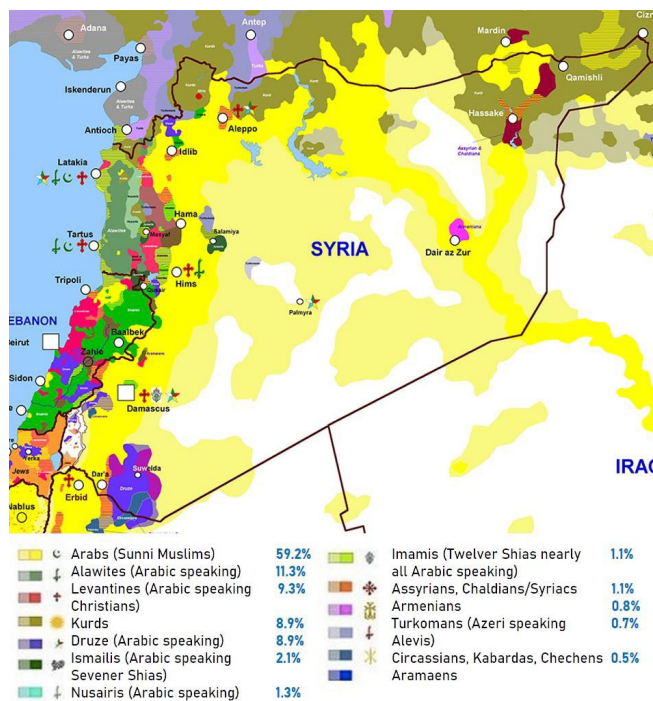


Figure 2.2 Ethnic composition in Syria per percentages (source: Michael Izady/The Gulf/2000 Project at Columbia University)

2.3 Pre-war preservation efforts

When it comes to preservation and safeguarding, several competent bodies under the Ministry of Culture are in charge, such as the Directorate of Cultural Affairs, General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, Directorate of Popular Heritage, Museums' Support and Development Unit, Directorate of Theatre and Music, Directorate of Copyright Protection, and The Heritage Revival Directorate. In parallel, several ministries, such as the Ministry of Information, Owqaf (endowments), Agriculture, Tourism, Higher Education, Economy, Social Affairs and Labour, and Foreign Affairs are involved. Also, there are NGOs such as the Syria Trust for Development, the Aga Khan Development Network, and local communities and associations such as Ain Al-Funoun and Damascus friends. These are mostly concerned in programming, training, and documentation. Nevertheless, and despite the ratification of UNESCO's 2003 'Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage', there is still no designated directory for intangible cultural heritage under the ministry of culture and no clear national strategy put in place for safeguarding.

2.4 War impact on the Syrian intangible heritage

In 2013, 97% of Syria's cultural sites were already in areas of conflict and displacement. At present, there are 710 damaged historic sites and buildings according to the 'Interactive Map of Damaged Archaeological Sites' provided by the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM). Intangible heritage was deeply affected by the war, especially because of the destruction that hit several historic centres around the country, where religious, rituals, commercial, and cultural practices took place. Syria's World Heritage sites have suffered severe damages leading to putting them on the danger list in 2013. A tentative list has also suffered from destruction, random excavation, and looting (Figure 2.3, Table 2.1).

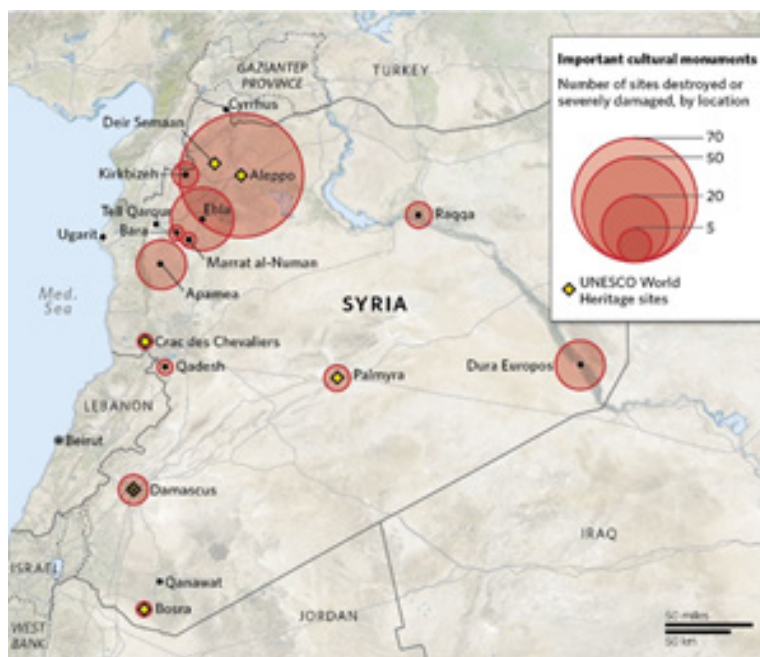


Figure 2.3 Destruction of Heritage Sites in Syria (source: United Nations Institute for Training and Research)

Table 2.1 List of destructed Syrian Heritage Sites

World Heritage sites	Tentative list
Ancient City of Aleppo (1986)	Hama's Waterwheels (1999)
Ancient City of Damascus (1979)	Ugarit (1999)
	Ebla (1999)
Ancient City of Bosra (1980)	Mari (1999)
	Dura Europos (1999)
The Oasis of Palmyra (1980)	al-Hayr Palace (1999)
	Maaloula (1999)
The Castles of Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din (2006)	Tartus: Crusaders City-fortress (1999)
	Raqqa: Rafiqah Abbasside city (1999)
The Ancient Villages of Northern Syria (2011)	Island of Arwad (1999)
	Sites of Euphrates Valley (2011)

Around 80% of Old Aleppo city was affected by the war including the Old Suq, Umayyad mosque, and the monumental Citadel. In Palmyra, temples of Bel and Baalshamin, the Monumental Arch and tower tombs were destroyed. The ancient villages became conflict zones. Archaeological repositories were stolen. Statues and tombs were vandalised and artifacts were excavated and stolen. Several monuments were affected in Bosra including al-Omari Mosque and the Pagan temple, Known as Sarir Bint al-Malek. The South-eastern tower of the Crac des Chevaliers was destroyed and its Northern facade was damaged. The city of Damascus suffered from slight damages resulting in a temporary suspension of some commercial, cultural, and religious activities.

- Spatial consequences: destruction of Historic Centres

The destruction of historic centres and the shift of attention to life necessities took a toll at cultural practices. The destruction of stores and workshops, such as the case of Aleppo, led to the suspension of commercial activities and their migration to new locations around the city. Inaccessibility to historical and cultural centres has led to the suspension of cultural events and festivals. Similarly, numerous mosques and churches were destroyed resulting in halting religious rituals.

- Demographic consequences: death and displacement

Death and displacement also affected the continuity of intangible heritage. Mortality has resulted in a break in cultural transmission with the loss of traditions passed down orally, as well as undocumented traditional skills, while displacement has resulted in a drain of the traditional craftsmen, mason workers, musicians, etc., which, in addition to the lack of demand for nonessential goods due to economic difficulties, has led to the extension of some traditional crafts, such as the traditional garment production and Qishani - i.e., the traditional ceramics factory in Damascus, was closed.

Demographic change has also affected diversity and social cohesion with the loss of components, including more than two-thirds of the Christian population and most of the remaining Jews.

- Cultural consequences: suspension, revival, and addition of cultural elements

Traditional music and dance were banned under the rule of extremists. Outside the government control, musicians were not able to participate in musical events since they are commonly sponsored by public institutions. The war has also led to drastic cultural changes that need to be observed and documented. While some traditions, such as the hawrani popular music in Daraa, usually performed at weddings, was discontinued, some were revived like Kurdish popular culture and language and the traditional methods of storing food, known as Muneh, to combat food shortages. A new phenomenon of writing songs and appropriating traditional songs with political lyrics that defy oppression or commemorate events has emerged. Additionally, new cultural components were added, for instance, the Russian language is now being taught at school. It is also expected that the recent demographic changes would soon demonstrate new patterns and sociocultural dynamics.

- Social consequences: trauma, division and social degradation

The destruction of places of collective memory, where cultural practices took place, caused a trauma related to the drastic alteration and deformation of the sense of place, and the discontinuity of social practices that once shaped a sense of a collective identity, a sense of belonging. People cannot wait to resume these, as they are associated with a sense of normality that is lost. Beside this trauma, and as a consequence to the sense that identity is targeted by other ethnic groups, sectarian social divisions floated to the surface. Heritage became associated with groups, a reason for division and a means for identification, used to exclude and discriminate. Similarly, attitudes towards heritage have changed, phenomena of vandalism, violation, and regular excavation have aggravated during the war and escalated to the deliberate targeting of historic buildings and archives as a form of punishment to adversaries.

2.5 The Syrian intangible heritage: an asset for post-war social recovery and resilience

The question that arises accordingly, is how can the Syrian intangible heritage contribute to social recovery and resilience both in the case of Syrians inside and diaspora?

Not much attention has been paid to the potential contribution of heritage to reconciliation and peacebuilding processes. This is currently one of my research interests, although my focus as an architect is on built heritage and that historic centres, being located at the heart of cities, can be employed as common grounds. They can be activated in ways to become more inclusive and turned into gathering points. The reconstruction of historic centres and the reactivation of economic, cultural, and social networks can have a major contribution to social recovery and resilience, thus should not be considered a luxury but a necessity and a post-war priority that promotes diversity and social cohesion and tolerance among different groups.

2.6 Local efforts to resume and maintain cultural practices

- Protection

During the war, there were undeniable local efforts to raise awareness among society and to safeguard archaeological sites, archives, museums, and artefacts and minimise losses and damages. UNESCO also launched a project in 2014, entitled 'Emergency Safeguarding of the

Syrian Cultural Heritage’, to monitor and mitigate the damage and loss of cultural heritage. However, there are still no legislations issued in regards to cultural heritage despite renewing the ratification of the UNESCO convention in 2011 and 2017.

- Documentation

In 2015, the Syria Trust for Development documented 100 intangible components and published 38 of them in the first volume of the book entitled ‘The Intangible Syrian Cultural Heritage’ (Figure 2.4).



Figure 2.4 The intangible Syrian cultural heritage: crafts-related skills (source: Syria Trust for Development, 2014)

- Restoration

In order to resume religious practices, which was considered essential to recovery and social resilience, priority was given to the reconstruction of mosques, funded by the Ministry of Endowment as well as local and international donors from Islamic countries and foundations. Similarly, the reconstruction of churches was carried out by local experts and funding from European churches and organisations. Religious rituals were resumed consequently, generating a sense of normality desperately needed. The ongoing reconstruction of the Suqs of Aleppo is slowly enabling some of the owners to reopen their stores and resume activity (Figure 2.5).

- Resumption

Nowadays, almost four years after the suspension of armed conflict and the reconstruction and rehabilitation of some areas, festivals and cultural events, including concerts at the Roman theatre and at Aleppo Citadel, are gradually returning to Syrian cities.

2.7 The Syrian intangible heritage in diaspora

As much as heritage has a fundamental local value, it is also used in diaspora as a means of connection, connection to roots and origins as much as to host communities, that advances integration and stability. Syrian migrants and refugees carried their cultural practices with them, such as the Syrian cuisine, music, and traditional crafts, and introduced them to their

host communities. Cultural heritage was used as a tool for integration, social inclusion, and cultural exchange.

In 2016, UNESCO funded a research project, entitled 'Survey on Intangible Cultural Heritage of Displaced Syrians'. It comprised 60 interviews conducted with displaced Syrians and members of host communities to share their experiences about safeguarding cultural heritage. The findings demonstrated that heritage preserved the sense of belonging of displaced Syrians, helped them mitigate psychological, social, and economic difficulties, and promoted intercultural communication and appreciation among host communities.



Figure 2.5 Suq al-Saqatiah, Aleppo, after its reconstruction (source: photo commissioned by author. 11.06.2020)

Case 3

Tunisian case study after the Arab Spring

Leila Ben-Gacem, Blue Fish Consulting, Tunisia

leila@bluefish.me

Overview

This text presents some results of the data collection that focuses on two areas in Tunisia as part of the main research. First, the research focused on heritage areas, shrines and their associated cultural practices; and second, civil society and preservation activism. Those two areas have been impacted by the sudden significant event of political change in 2011. In fact, during our field survey, it was also sensitive to choose the wording because there already are various disagreements, for example, some people do not want to call that event a revolution and there exist conspiracy theories as well. People think differently about it whether as a positive event or a negative one. Therefore, we choose our words carefully.

3.1 Shrines and their associated culture

To collect data, we interviewed visitors of three shrines: Sidi Mehrez, Sidi Bou Said, and Sidi Ali Lasmar. Two of them are in the Medina of Tunis, the old town of the capital, and the third shrine is in Sidi Bou Said, a city in the northern suburb of the capital. We also interacted with The Civil Societies represented by a few NGOs, I will share the results here.

3.1.1 Sidi Mehrez shrine

The first and maybe the most important shrine is Sidi Mehrez (Sidi meaning Master in Arabic). Sidi Mehrez is located in the heart of the Medina of Tunis, therefore, has not been architecturally touched through the years. In fact, it has impressive architecture. It is also part of the logo of the municipality of Tunis, maybe because it is located within the urban quarter and it has stayed open throughout the political changes and many people still visit it. Some interviewees pointed out that this shrine has been protected by the local community around it and, in fact, still the culture of donating leads to bringing food to the shrine for anyone who needs to eat. The revolution did not impact activities. People still bring Kassar and the poor come to find what meal they can find. Kassa is the name of a big pot which is used to serve meals at shrines or mosques on Fridays. It is a tradition, used to present gratitude to God (for good or bad) to the poor people that come to mosques or shrines looking for food to eat. On Fridays, the tradition of preparing a big Kassa of Couscous is common for families who have weddings, bought a new home or just to keep away the evil eye. There has also been a big talk about the Halal and Haram of visiting shrines after the revolution. Some people argue that it is policing and this is why it threatens visitors to visit some shrines. However, the Covid-19 pandemic also has impacted visitor flow further but it is still continuing.

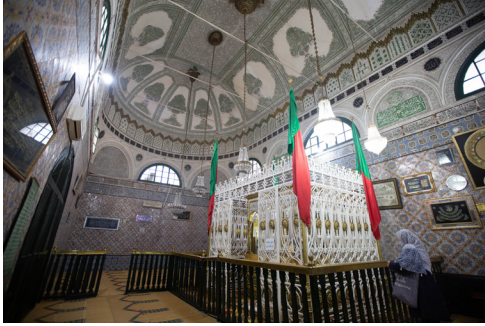


Figure 3.1 Sidi Mehrez shrine (source: NOKTA)

3.1.2 Sidi Bou Said shrine

The shrine of the city Sidi Bou Said has been tremendously impacted. It has been completely burnt right after the major events in 2011, and the identity of criminals was never found. It was a massive shock because the small town of Sidi Bou Said is known to be picturesque, touristic, and calm, where everybody has to go when they visit Tunis. The burning of the shrine was a big shock to everyone and a crowd of people marched from the shrine to the presidential palace in Carthage to request for the protection of the shrines. In fact, it was 100 per cent civil society that reconstructed and painted it, and put it back as it used to be and protected it until today.



Figure 3.2 Sidi Bou Said shrine (source: author)

After the 2011's events, some political orientations felt threatened by the shrine culture. There has been a growth in the Salafism since and this questioned the religious rightness of visiting shrines. Previously, there were many cultural activities, but Salafists made everything haram (religiously prohibited) so less people come but the tradition of Kassa is still alive. It is almost a way of life with its own mysticism, music, and donating. However, it was a whole philosophy that is today becoming more and more official rather than a belief according to many interviewees. For some interviewees, spirituality and way of life is slow-

ing down. People are more like spectators today of these traditions with no spiritual feeling, which is not sustainable.

Today, young people live on their phones and there is not much spirituality on the internet. Some interviewees also mentioned that they are using shrines more for political reasons and many said that it is part of their heritage and their ancestors, and they feel obliged to protect it. It can be argued that what Tunisians gained from such major political change is 'freedom of expression' and shrine activities often have personal or political motives.

3.1.3 Sidi Ali Lasmar shrine

Sidi Ali Lasmar shrine is located in the Medina of Tunis and is famous for a dance called Stambali which has Black African origin. This sufi shrine is of a saint of Black African descent. There were dedicated prisons for the Black community of Medina, and this is one of them. Thus, the building had many lives. Many interviewees highlighted that several shrines in the Medina are unknown, some were even sold during Bourguiba's era. Because after independence, the government needed money and sold many shrines which became private property. A family bought Sidi Ali Lasmar Zaouia and partly destroyed it, now the shrine guardian wants to restore it the way it was originally. It was sold for 150,000 dinars, however, today, the community acclaims it back to restore it. This is, however, complicated. Currently, Sidi Ali Lasmar followers are trying to revive the way the shrine used to be.



Figure 3.3 Stambali dance in Sidi Ali Lasmar (source: Stambali Association)

Sufism has many Tarika's or schools, sufies were saints that followed the Prophet Mohamed and showed the path of the Quran as a way of life. In 2013, some people rushed into the shrine, beat the shrine guardian and called him 'grave worshipper' and he 'escaped' for three years in France and did not return until 2016. He is now leading an NGO that is for the protection and preservation of the whole culture around the Shrine including the Stambali dance.

3.2 The impact of 2011 events on civil society

There were no noticeable independent civil society activities before the events of 2011, as most of the NGOs were linked to the government and they worked closely with it. Interestingly, the socio-political space emerged from those 2011's events led to the explosion of associations acting in many fields in different parts of the country taking over many critical issues, especially, heritage issues.



Figure 3.4 Civic social activities in Medina of Tunis (source: author)

3.2.1 ASM Tunis

Among interviewed NGOs for the main research ASM Tunis was of special interest because it was initiated in 1967 and it is mainly for the preservation of the urban and built heritage of the Medina of Tunis. They have a close collaboration with the municipality of Tunis and, in fact, before 2011 events, their funding came mainly from the municipality. Of course, after the 2011, it was not the only actor like before. There is a new civil society landscape and new NGOs with new spirit and purposes, and this makes it slightly difficult for this one to keep its previous position. Therefore, ASM Tunis tried to collaborate with other civil society actors. However, it has long history of highly bureaucratic way of work, which is a challenge to maintain now given the new atmosphere.

3.2.2 Carthagina

The second interviewed NGO is Carthagina. It was initiated after the 2011 events. It is a group of younger people who are contributing to revive historical urban spaces by identifying existing heritage, artisan workshop experiences, and urban photography. While they are passionate about heritage, they look at it in a fresh way and use storytelling about intangible heritage. That makes it more accessible to everyone because previously heritage was elitist and preservation work was a governmental matter. Thus, the new generation take on their role of preserving and documenting. For example, MedinaPedia as an important project has been led by the Carthagina association. The group created more than 300 articles on Wikipedia about different historical buildings in the Medina of Tunis in several languages. They have even created some Wikipedia pages on buildings that have ceased to exist. Also, they created QR codes for signs on buildings that can be scanned to identify the language of your phone and take you to the Wikipedia page to find out about the buildings. This is a fresh

approach and a new way to preserve and to keep heritage alive.

3.2.3 Collectif Creatif

Another youth NGO is Collectif Creatif that was initiated in 2016. Their objective is not traditional preservation but they are trying to reinterpret the historical urban space, for example, through the light festival and collaborative studios to attract a new dynamic life that keeps the historical urban culture alive. Moreover, Collectif Creatif encompasses uniting many civil initiatives with no legal framework, to help them handle administrative procedures to start an NGO, and challenges with the municipality.

3.2.4 La Rachidia

Another interviewed NGO that is important which was initiated in 1934 is La Rachidia. It was aimed for the preservation of traditional music, in fact, it was founded at the time of the French occupation, when it was no longer trendy to listen to Tunisian music. The NGO was started out of the fear that Tunisians would lose their musical heritage and today it is famous for preserving and organising classes, especially in Tunisian Andalusian musical heritage. The NGO finds it challenging today to adapt with the new civil society scene of creative and innovative youth NGOs and some collaboration attempts have been initiated but it was difficult to sustain with the previous privileges they had and today's more attentive civil society.



Figure 3.5 Musicians and a dancer at Stambali. (Source: Stambali Association)

Index

The page numbers are hyperlinks.

A

Aleppo [19](#), [22](#), [24](#), [25](#)
Aleppo Citadel [24](#)
al-Hayr Palace [22](#)
Anibong [11](#)
Armenian [19](#)
Arwad [22](#)

B

Barangay Paraiso [13](#)
Basey [7](#)
Black African [30](#)
Bosra [22](#)

C

Candle lighting [5](#)
Carthage [28](#)
Catholic [9](#)
Covid-19 [13](#), [27](#)

D

Damascus [19](#), [21](#), [22](#), [24](#)
Daraa [23](#)
Dayaw [5](#), [6](#), [9](#)
Disaster [IV](#), [5](#), [16](#), [35](#)
Dura Europos [22](#)

E

Eastern Visayas [5](#), [6](#)
Ebla [22](#)

F

Filipino [6](#), [11](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#)

H

Haiyan [IV](#), [2](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [15](#), [16](#), [35](#)
Hama [22](#)
Historic building [23](#)

Historic centre 23

I

Intangible heritage 2, 21

J

Jews 22

K

Kasadyaan 7

Kurdish 19, 23

Kurmanji 19

L

Leyte 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17

Lubnganan ngan tigaman 11

M

Maaloula 22

Mari 22

Medina of Tunis 27, 29, 30

Mindanao 11, 15

Mosque 22

Muneh 23

N

Nepal 1, 3

O

Owqaf 21

P

Paghinumdum 5, 6

Paghinumdum Na Liwat 5, 6

Pagtayuk 5, 6, 12

Palmyra 22

Pasundayag nga maribhong 7

Philippines 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16, 17

Pintados 7

Post-war 19

Preservation 21

Q

Quran 30

R

Raqqa 22
reconstruction 23
Recovery I, IV, 1, 5, 17, 35
Resilience I, 1, 15, 35
Rituals IV, 5, 35

S

Salafism 28
Samar 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 17
Sangyaw 7
Santa Rita 11
Santo Nino 7
Sarir Bint al-Malek 22
Shrine 27, 28, 29
Sidi Ali Lasmar 27, 29
Sidi Bou Said 27, 28
Sidi Mehrez 27, 28
Stambali 29, 30, 31
Sudden significant events 1, 2
Sufism 29
Super-typhoon Yolanda IV, 5, 6, 15, 35
Syria 1, 2, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24
Syrian War 19

T

Tacloban 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14
Tagmo 5, 6
Tanauan 11, 14
Tapos Ika-Kwarenta 5
Tarika 29
Tartus 22
Tunisia 1, 2, 27
Turkish 19
Typhon Goni 7

U

Ugarit 22
Umayyad mosque 22
UNESCO 21, 23, 24, 25

W

War 19, 21
Waray 6, 16

Towards Mobilising Intangible Heritage for Recovery and Resilience

*Case 1: the making of new rituals for healing and recovery in
super-typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan post-disaster ground zero*

*Case 2: the syrian intangible heritage: post-war attempts for pres-
ervation, continuity, and recovery*

Case 3: Tunisian case study after the Arab Spring

ISBN: 978-1-8383625-1-5

