

Culture Heritage and Globalisation: Challenges to Sense of Identity and Cultural Sustainability

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Abstract: The world looks very different today and will continue to be so in more years to come. Landscapes, both physical and cultural, have been changed and alongside, technology in all aspects of human life. Undeniably, globalisation has facilitated cultural exchange but at the same time, it also has drawbacks in communities whose cultural life revolved around a sense of solidarity and communal spirit that served as a spring well for identity formation. The spectre of rapidly changing global environment is coupled with societies becoming more multi-cultural. Against this backdrop, culture heritage preservation and identity formation process have become a challenge particularly in the context of culture as traditional basis and anchor for sense of community and identity. The paper examines the issues related to culture preservation and heritage and the implications and challenges to identity formation of both communities and individuals in the context of a globalising world. It looks into the role of heritage institutions as critical agents for cultural sustainability in order to insure resilience of culture for future generations. The paper argues that safeguarding culture heritage, both tangible and intangible, is significant in the light of the reality that sites, objects and ways of life are all coming under threat amidst the unrelenting advance of globalisation.

Keywords: Community and identity formation, culture heritage, globalisation.

Subject classification: Cultural studies

1. Introduction

The world is characterised by heterogeneous and diversified societies in both physical and cultural features. At the same time, it operates in a context of change; hence, the world looks very different today and will continue to be so in more years to come. Landscapes, both physical and cultural, have

been changed and alongside, technology in all aspects of human life. The spectre of rapidly changing global environment is coupled with societies becoming more multi-cultural at the same time diasporic confronted with homogenising global forces.

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in the topic culture heritage particularly as it is focused on by

international cultural organisations like the UNESCO, the most powerful international heritage organisation. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the successor of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), includes the safeguarding of the world's cultural and natural heritage as specifically stipulated in SDG 11.4. Culture has been recognised as equally important as social, economic, and environmental concerns in the discourse on sustainability of society, hence its inclusion in the United Nations' post 2015 sustainability goals [32]. The role of research in defining the domains of cultural heritage is also acknowledged not only for scholarly interest but also as guidance for mapping out conservation efforts [7].

Traditional pottery, as an example of a culture heritage and which has both art and practical value to communities, needs to be contextualised as an identity marker of a culture in order to strengthen its value as part of intangible cultural heritage that needs to be safeguarded. There is a link between identity formation and culture heritage. Both self and communities' identification are a process of 'inheriting' cultural elements which enters the discourses on community wellbeing and social cohesion. The twenty first century, however, is typified by globalisation characterised by media technology that facilitates free flow of goods, services, and information including movement of people across borders. The accelerated exchange raises questions and results in sociocultural complexities. Against this backdrop, culture heritage preservation and identity formation process is a challenge particularly in the context of culture as traditional basis and anchor for sense of community and identity.

In the context of a globalising world, the role of heritage institutions is critical as agents for cultural sustainability in order to insure resilience of culture for future generations. Safeguarding culture heritage, both tangible and intangible, is significant in the light of the reality that sites, objects and ways of life are all coming under threat amidst the unrelenting advance of globalisation. The preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of cultural vitality are keys to enabling cultural sustainability [29].

2. Media and globalisation of culture

Globalisation is a reality and its geographic expansion is marked by an unprecedented level and magnitude in social interactions and cultural exchanges. The phenomenon resulted in vibrant globalisation studies. For nearly two decades, there have been extensive debates and critique on the nature and processes of globalisation (e.g. [22], [8], [31]). There is some consensus that the process does not follow a single, coherent entity or set of forces; the process is a dynamic one even if the different aspects of globalisation are connected. Central to the studies and debates is the primacy of economic forces that shape the nature and process of globalisation.

The scope of literature has encompassed a variety of disciplines and topics although the relationship between globalisation with culture heritage and identity formation is still largely unexplored. Historically, there has been difficulty in defining exactly what 'culture' means. The definition has been changing through time that also varies

according to the discipline from which it is approached but social cohesion is a significant element that culture encompasses [6]. Through the years, the concept, traditionally associated with anthropology, has cut across disciplines and even resulted in its own distinct academic niche popularly referred to as cultural studies.

The culture industry is one of the significant concepts that highlight the analytical link of globalisation with the nature of cultural life that emerged in the postmodern world. Developed by Frankfurt School theorists, Horkheimer and Adorno, the culture industry thesis argues that with the heightening of globalisation, commodification of cultural life replaces traditions, where a culture once was lived [14]. In short, globalisation processes also result in culture globalisation that parallels economic globalisation. The development and expansion of new communication systems profoundly warped the sense of culture, and even territorial, boundaries. In the global world, maintenance of borders between cultural norms is no longer feasible. The blurring of boundaries, as postmodernists term it, made possible the emergence of a 'global village' that is largely premised on an international market, mass media and the primacy of consumption in all its forms including commodification of nearly every aspect of culture.

The concept of commoditisation as located in the contemporary postmodern world is a powerful analytical angle to examine the sociocultural sphere in the globalisation process which was otherwise a discrete analytical domain that the field of anthropology developed. Appadurai, a leading theorist on globalisation, provides the earliest

analytical work on how people find value in things from human transactions and exchanges that reveal economic logic. His seminal work on "The Social Life of Things" (1986) traced the commodity pathways of objects that are sacred or ritual in their origin [1]. In succeeding publications, he expands his work to a provocative analysis of globalisation focusing on its cultural contents and consequences [3], [4].

Globalisation promotes conspicuous consumption which tends to dissolve cultural attachments. More than anything, a characteristic distinction of the global world today is media technology that further dissociates people resulting in isolation. Mellor argues that culture across societies worldwide is now determined by media, diffusing specious practises and values including time and space compression [20]. With the development of media technology and increasing mobility, the postmodern world has been turned into an image society focused on the production and consumption of 'images'. Much of the images mediated by technology are interpreted beyond or even outside of the traditionally acknowledged cultural images [21]. Images, hyper-reality, multiple identities and self-effacement, themes that are usually associated with postmodernism, characterise the global world raising questions about the construction of identities [17].

Media in various forms promote cultural homogenisation; however, in the same way, they can be used constructively in preserving and promoting local identity and for drawing attention and interest to the aspirations of local communities. Within the present globalised context of communities and its consequences, cultural identity

remains a quest for both individuals and communities and is at the essence of contemporary imagination. Media, culture and identity in the era of globalisation are intricately intertwined.

3. Cultural sustainability and identity challenges of globalisation

The growing pace of globalisation has highlighted culture issues and some critics argue that cultural globalisation will overpower national identities. Ironically, globalisation also facilitated cultural exchange which promotes inter-culture awareness. At the same time, it also has drawbacks in communities whose cultural life revolved around a sense of solidarity and communal spirit with a defined territorial homeland that served as a spring well for identity formation. The conflicting trends in globalisation and identity pose a challenge to stable localities in both culture and place.

Identity construction originates from the values of family, community, nation and physical geography. However, the contemporary postmodern world is already deterritorialised, and as argued earlier, has been transformed into a 'global village'. Castells more aptly describes the global world as a 'network society' with a prevalent culture developed by a comprehensive but diverse communication system [9]. Given such context, the supposed natural connection between identity, culture and place is challenged. Contemporary identity formation process is conditioned by computer-mediated communication resulting in online, oftentimes, multiple identities and virtual communities. Migration dynamics, culture flows and

blurring of boundaries are social realities that impinge upon the cultural self including collective identities. As people continue to live in a particular space, there are also new forms of community and virtual neighbourhoods that shape one's identity. As Appadurai argues, the virtual ones can "mobilise ideas, moneys, and social linkages that often directly flow back into lived neighbourhoods" [3, p.195].

The complimentary processes of globalisation and information era are unavoidably changing the personal and social identity representation, particularly of the young generation. Some scholars even argue that in many developing countries this has resulted in identity crisis [5], if not hybridised identities [35]. Doubtless, identity construction in the era of globalisation has become much more challenging.

Identity, community and identification are no longer tied up with physical space or territories but should be looked at as cultural processes that are linked and mediated by media and information. Identity and belonging are ongoing processes of constitution and reconstitution within the context of fluidity of the boundaries of self and society [19]. In a way, such processes make for a diffused sense of identity, particularly for younger generation whose ordinary, daily lives are caught up in wider processes of globalising and hybridising. However, even in a rapidly changing, postmodern world, belonging and connection remain very important but need to be looked at as being filtered and condensed through place. Savage et al. refer to this process as elective belonging and increasingly involves connections via media [25].

Despite the fluidity and difficulty of localising among current generation, one postmodernist scholar argues that the postmodern world also brought forth nostalgia [30]. Globalisation may have challenged the notions of nation-state, community, home, culture and belonging but it also brought awareness on cultural diversity and pluralism. Stable localities are rendered open to the expanding reach of global forces but such openness can also serve as opportunity for transformation and a space for negotiation. Globalisation may tend towards uniformity but as Khaniki argues, it can also simultaneously strengthen cultural uniqueness [18]. A similar position was held earlier by Robertson when he defined globalisation as “a form of institutionalisation of the two-fold process involving the universalisation of particularism and the particularisation of the universal” [24, p.102].

In a world that offers a plurality of options and when the options become too unbearable and stressful, people instinctively turn to places of memory to come to terms with the past in order to chart the future [34]. Localisation becomes a strategy to regain cultural identity. Cultural identity is as fundamental as the question of “Who am I?” and provide answers to the questions of “Where are we going?” and “What do we have?” [10]. Thus, cultural identity will remain a powerful marker of individuals and communities in confronting the logic of market economy. To search deep into the cultural memory of a group or community is a suitable way to regain or establish one’s bearing. As Howes argues, cultural identity will not easily fall prey to globalisation. As earlier pointed out, this is evident in the

emergence of international and local policies that affirm the significance of safeguarding cultural heritage in the face of development, as earlier indicated [15]. Cultural heritage has an important identity-promoting role and therefore there is a need for state policies to be more attentive to how such heritage can be effectively charted in the policy landscape.

4. Identity formation, cultural heritage and preservation

It has always been said that culture is the soul of a nation. UNESCO, as the leading proponent of culture heritage, forwarded the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage underscoring that “culture heritage is an important component of the cultural identity of communities, groups and individuals, and or social cohesion” [36]. Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is not only significant as identity marker but is also linked to the sustenance of economic life of a given society or community. Heritage is both a historical and cultural expression; it is also a manifestation of territorial and intellectual ownership of a country.

4.1. Cultural landscape and ecology

Amidst the de-territorialisation of identity and community, management of cultural heritage poses a challenge. Cultural sustainability rests upon the protection of cultural assets. The durability and productivity of cultural assets that are dependent on physical and environmental requisites like pottery are difficult to sustain unless the latter are

subjected to regulatory mechanisms like ecological zoning. As Holden argues, cultural activities should be looked at as closely linked to the ecosystem and cultural producers, advocates and policy makers should therefore take a strong stance as environment advocates too [31].

Environmental advocacy is not simply the domain of ecologists. Mapping local cultural ecologies would necessarily involve a combination of descriptions of local activity, history, demographics and other physical features. Such comprehensive perspective will lead to the identification of strengths and weaknesses in the determination of what can be considered as worth investing into [33], [16]. Thus, when cultural ecologies are mapped it is elevated into a larger picture of the cultural landscape of the community. As Penna argues, preserving the cultural landscape is significant since it is the context of a people's identity and sense of belonging [23].

Identity is therefore premised on the cultural landscape which, in turn is conditioned by the physical environment and the resources that local people make use of. However, locally available resources need to be used in a sound way and when the environment is depleted or threatened, identity formation is compromised. As such, heritage appreciation becomes challenging which implies that certain cultural practices will be lost or as one impact of globalisation, new meanings will be attributed to local assets. Heritage is not a renewable resource and this is where heritage conservation becomes a significant effort as a means to revisiting social values ingrained in their societies for centuries.

Heritage conservation, however, is not simply a mechanism to demonstrate ownership and territorial appropriation. Conservation is not also manifested in having material culture or artefacts displayed and exhibited in museums or libraries. The challenge of safeguarding culture heritage and legacy lies in its value as traditional knowledge that helps build resilience to meet the challenges of change towards a more sustainable future.

4.2. Cultural memory

Much more significantly, culture heritage is essential in insuring cultural memory particularly as a resource for the younger generation in the process of their construction of meaning, re-inventing themselves and strengthening their identities. The past has a link to the present; identity construction is constituted by one's heritage which serves as cultural codes of ways of thinking and talking about communities and people of space and time.

In the age of information and globalisation, cultural identity does not only come as a historical collection of thoughts, beliefs, traditions, languages, and behaviours as manifestations of intangible heritage or as collections of pottery, buildings, traditional costumes and other tangible culture expressions. Fostering cultural memory in an era of contested spaces where ideas and images are constantly circulating rendering plural identities in both personal and community levels is not an easy process for heritage institutions like museums and libraries. The process needs to be looked at as a cultural heritage-making, where culture memory is played out not merely as a

reflection of a historical identity but is imbued with a dynamic role in creating and transforming social and cultural identities. Embong suggests that the new media is the best hope for drawing attention and interest to the aspirations of local communities and further argues that “cultural identity is at the essence of contemporary imagination just as much as globalisation and its consequences” [12, p.20].

Heritage conservation, however, is not simply a mechanism to demonstrate ownership and territorial appropriation. Conservation is not also manifested in having material culture or artefacts displayed and exhibited in museums or libraries. The challenge of safeguarding culture heritage and legacy lies in its value as traditional knowledge that helps build resilience to meet the challenges of change towards a more sustainable future. Much more significantly, it is essential in insuring cultural memory particularly as a resource for the younger generation in the process of their construction of meaning, re-inventing themselves and strengthening of their identities. The past has a link to the present; identity construction is constituted by one’s heritage which serves as cultural codes of ways of thinking and talking about communities and people of space and time.

Since heritage premises memory, such cultural heritage requires a sense of patrimony. Given that social and cultural change is an inevitable reality and amidst the culture flows that characterise contemporary communities, developing sense of patrimony is a formidable challenge. Silverman and Ruggles [28, p.12] argue that “for tangible and intangible cultural heritage to have meaning and potency, the heritage must be

active, dynamic, used and performed rather than existing inert and static.” The preservation of heritage rests on sustaining its practice which translates into cultural knowledge. Much of what is considered intangible cultural heritage is manifested in embodied practice. Thus, heritage institutions including education agencies and advocates are faced with how to effectively package cultural preservation and incorporate programmes related to traditional culture expressions such as folklores, crafts and others.

Museums and libraries are not just houses for cultural heritage collection. Creators of heritage institutions’ programmes are best positioned to take advantage of the advanced information technology in re-packaging the showcasing and safeguarding of cultural heritage that will facilitate the development and strengthening of the sense of patrimony. Many museums now have interactive designs; information technology can be harnessed for creative ways to make cultural heritage more accessible and attractive to the public. Additionally, education curricula at all levels can be further infused with re-vitalised ways of learning and appreciation of cultural heritage such as the inclusion of traditional craftwork, theatre, folklores, and other practices that can be enacted in more meaningful approaches that cater to current, technology-oriented generation.

Babran, as a scholarly voice from the South, argues that adaptation in the changing world is a natural societal process but alongside, societies also continuously update their cultures and identities including capabilities in the modern world

[3]. Communication technology can be utilised for both the enhancement of their cultures and strengthening cultural heritage. The culture industry is flourishing in the age of globalisation and it can be harnessed for social and cultural development. There are many important facets of globalisation like media, technological advancement, internet and other forms that are playing a vital role in cultural transformation [26].

To illustrate how cultural memory is a powerful trigger of identity, I present two personal case incidences of how local resources are effectively used in invoking cultural memory through the use of social media, in particular Facebook. I have intimate, local knowledge on these two local resources; the case presentation therefore is a phenomenological experience.

In the summer of 2019, I posted a series of blogs on the local cottage industry of my ancestral homeland in the Philippines which is bag weaving out of a local plant fiber known as *pandan* (*spp Pandanus*). It was a four-part series of write up that include its cultural and economic values, the phases in the weaving process involved in the production of the pandan bags, the threats on both its cultural identity mark and economic value and prospects for its re-vitalisation.

Pandan tree is particularly ubiquitous in the landscape and as soon as one enters the village, the lines of pandan of varying heights serve as a distinct mark in the agriculture landscape of the area. The plant is striking amidst the coconut grooves which are usually a visual interest to visitors to the village. Traditionally, pandan is utilised for weaving bags that are used for a variety of purposes.

Weaving is a ‘lowly’ cottage industry because the bag does not merit high or (fair) pricing in the market. Its use has been confined to simply being a service bag, with varying sizes, to carry bulk loads of items just like the grocery plastic bags of today. However, it significantly supported and supplemented the subsistence, agriculture-based households of the community. Pandan, as a resource that is easily accessible for many subsistence families for weaving, serves as an instant means to derive some income. More importantly, pandan is regarded as culture icon of the village. It serves as a culture identity marker which is the premise for establishing an annual Pandan festival in April that coincides with the foundation day of the village.

Summer of this year, 2020, I used Facebook again to post a write up on *alingaro* (*spp. Eleagnus philippensis*), a climbing shrub that wildly grows along riverbanks, farm tracks and walk paths coiled among trees and other wild growths of diversity. This plant yields tiny pink, sour-sweet berries. I wrote on how they were never cut or cleared in my growing up years and the berries served as ‘toy’ fruit in my childhood era. The berries were picked while on an innocent children’s spree, frolicking in the farm setting of our homeland, never really having them as part of a regular consumption. It was a fruit of childhood fun.

I pointed out in the FB post that *alingaro* as part of the *rite de passage* among the current generation of youth in our community is already lost. In the childhood of my era and that of my predecessor, it was part of our growing up that shaped our cultural memory and landscape. I witnessed

the eventual diminution of alingaro, just as I witnessed the changed socioculture and ecology of my childhood town through the decades since then. This transformation in both cultural and ecological landscape is largely due to the contemporary context of increased pressure from the nature of present economic activities and consequently the reduction of all kinds of diversity resources, particularly the conversion of agricultural lands into residential settlements and cash cropping.

I posted both FB write-ups publicly and on the FB group of my home community. To both my personal and professional surprise, both posts generated a great deal of feedbacks and long threads of conversation from across age groups in our community. The younger ones were inquisitive on both the pandan and alingaro as being cultural plant icons of our community. Among the older generation, the posts triggered cultural memory. There was general sense of nostalgia and lament over the loss of these icons in the consciousness of the young generation. However, what was remarkable was the enthusiasm to have such knowledge passed on to the younger generation, including possible advocacy and revitalisation programs for intergenerational transmission of such identity markers of the community. Pandan is still abundantly grown in the general farming area but alingaro is already nearing extinction. Because I have kept alingaro in my own farm area, I also posted that I can distribute seeds for free to those who are interested to have them planted. The offer resulted in a lot of expressed interest, some of whom were motivated by a desire to have their

children and young people get familiar with this traditional berry.

This particular, personal case example represents the intersection of intangible and tangible cultural heritage demonstrating a local cultural landscape tied to its ecology. While the contemporary context has changed in both economy and physical landscape, the impact that my FB posts generated provides insightful direction on safeguarding and cultural internalisation of new values that can promote the reconnection between past and present through cultural heritage education. Scharmer and Kaufer point out that disruptions with territory, history and own identity can result in a people's disconnection with their essence [27]. However, where it is possible, it can be regained through apprehending the opportunities within the global world. In the case example, heritage policies can be formulated which can be "capable of absorbing ideas and supporting the aspirations from a variety of groups... the inclusion of the perceptions of people who shaped the place" [11, p.39].

5. Conclusion

Cultural heritage is susceptible to the corrosive impact of globalisation. Yet, cultural heritage will continue to exist among people in communities, even in the age of virtual social interactions and relationships. Unequal global conditions are continuously transforming tradition-based societies but the quest for one's identity, who we are, what we want and what we respect will remain even as there are contending issues as regards identity

formation process in a globalising world. Reproducing a distant past is indeed a difficult challenge.

With the advent of market-driven globalisation dominating the world since the last several decades, newer cultural inventions related to consumption and lifestyles have spread across the globe. These icons are an expression of a new kind of cultural identity which is not tied to tradition-bound cultures of the countries concerned, but a new identity to symbolise some kind of cultural hybridisation as its means of engaging or negotiating with globalisation. The global world has also opened up possibilities of sharing some

common experience of history of living together, of sharing certain symbols, yet also allows space to be differentiated from others with an identity.

Despite altered landscapes, cultural patrimony and resilience of culture that serve as fabric of communities and nations can be sustained if culture bearers, institutions and professional bodies can orchestrate to pursue a culture heritage agenda. Such agenda should be a shared vision of valuing cultural heritage not simply to understand the past but as an expression of continuity of culture for the future that is vital to a people's sense of identity.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Photo 1: A Set of Pottery in the Philippines



Source: Ms Ricamela Palis.

Photos 2 and 3: Two Pictures of Urban Scenes in Dalat, Vietnam



Source: Author.

Photo 4: Street Vendor of Vietnamese Traditional Cake in Dalat, Vietnam



Source: Author.

Photo 5: Traditional Cake Baking in Traditional Pottery Wares, Dalat, Vietnam



Source: Author.

Photo 6: A Crafts' Gallery in Dalat, Vietnam



Source: Author.

Photo 7: A Panorama of Dalat, Vietnam



Source: Author.

Photo 8: Fruit Berries of Alingaro (*spp. Eleagnus philippensis*) in the Philippines



Source: Author.

Photo 9: Pandan (*spp Pandanus*) Plant Fiber in A Farm in the Philippines



Source: Author.

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