



The Conservation of Cultures Nearing Extinction

General Assembly 3



From a separated world to global peace: the need
for a new look on institutions.



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Student Officer: Mirthe Breedijk, Ban Habib

Position: Chair, Deputy Chair

Introduction

Lots of cultural heritage around the world is disappearing. Cultural diversity is under pressure through for instance the extinction of languages around the world. Languages are bearers of culture because culture is transmitted to generations through language. When a language goes extinct, other cultural heritage is often lost as well. There are over 7,000 languages spoken worldwide but half of them is spoken by only 0.1 percent of the world's population. That means there are very small groups of people who maintain many languages. In the globalized world where communication around the world has become possible, languages with a lot of speakers are gaining territory and small languages have become less useful.

While a phylogenetic approach makes the continued extinction of cultures and the emergence of new ones explicit, cultural evolutionary changes such as the rise of agriculture, industrialization or more recently colonization can cause periods of mass cultural extinction. At the current rate, 90% of languages will be extinct or dying by the end of this century. Unlike biological extinction, cultural extinction is not necessarily accompanied by genetic extinction or even mortality but is the result of a breakup of a social entity and the discontinuation of culture-specific behaviours.

When examined over millennia, the extinction of cultural features or institutions can be studied in a phylogenetic comparative framework that incorporates archaeological data on ancestral conditions. Over decades or centuries, cultural extinction can be studied in a behavioural ecology framework to examine how the consequences of cultural behaviours and population dynamics cause individual behaviours to deviate from traditional norms. Through research in the former cultures, we can understand more about contemporary cultures and emphasize its importance as chapters of human development.



Definition of Key Terms

Indigenous people

Indigenous people are people of culturally distinct ethnic groups who share direct ancestral ties to the land and natural resources where they live. They are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and their natural environment. Indigenous cultures are the customs, beliefs, and traditions of groups of people who have inhabited a land for many generations. Indigenous cultures are often characterized by a great respect for the environment and the interconnectedness of all living things.

Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity is the variety of human societies or cultures in a specific region, or in the world as a whole. It is the variety of cultures and ethnic backgrounds that exist in society, such as language, religion, customs, and values. It is an important part of our global society, as recognizing that there is a large number of cultures that exist, helps to bring different perspectives, beliefs, and experiences together, which can promote inclusion and lead to new solutions and ideas based on living together. Cultural diversity is beneficial in that it can help to strengthen social cohesion and foster respect and understanding between different cultures.

Genocide

Genocide is the intentional destruction of an ethnical, national, racial or religious group. This includes the killing of a group's members, as well as cultural destruction. This is a major violation of human rights, as clearly stated in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Ethnic groups that went extinct or were under severe threat have been a victim of genocide. Genocide does not exclude intentional harm to these people such as but not limited to torture, rape, or even cultural destruction.

This has happened at numerous occasions throughout history, but a clear example is the Nanjing massacre. Not only were 300.000 - 600.000 people brutally murdered during this incident, many others were physically harmed in other ways. Therefore, the Nanjing massacre is also known as the Nanjing rape. Genocide does not always mean murdering a whole ethnic group.



General Overview

Causes

The conservation of cultures, especially those under threat, is a critical issue facing the world today. It is essential to preserve the diverse cultural heritage of the world to improve our understanding of our past and to create a more equitable future. Cultures at risk of extinction are cultures that, due to a variety of factors, are on the verge of extinction. This is usually a result of external pressures such as globalization, assimilation, or colonization, but it also may be caused by changes in environment, economy, migration patterns, political pressure, and other circumstances. Climate change is also a threat for the conservation of cultures. Rising sea levels, droughts and floods often lead to displacement of peoples and loss of traditional knowledge and practices. Moreover, the loss of nature also affects cultural heritage as cultures can be deeply connected to their environment.

Consequences

The consequences of cultures in danger of extinction are the loss of language, traditional customs and practices as well as a reduction in cultural diversity. This can lead to loss of identity and a sense of disconnection from someone's heritage. In addition, cultural extinction can lead to the erosion of cultural knowledge, a decrease in cultural resilience and the disappearance of unique art forms, stories, and customs. Many artifacts where things are written on them will no longer be translatable. It can also lead to extinction of plants and animals unique to that culture. Finally, the loss of a culture can have a ripple effect on future generations, eliminating a unique worldview of life.

Importance of preservation

There are many cultures at risk of extinction, including many indigenous cultures in Africa, South America, and Asia. For example, people in South Africa who spoke the N|ng language have lost their communities due to displacement and have been forced to learn other languages. At this moment, the language is almost extinct. There are only 5 people left who speak this language who are all women. Cultures, like those associated with the N|ng, are vulnerable because they are frequently based on small communities with few resources to survive. Therefore, it is important to conserve and protect cultures that are at risk of extinction.

Conservation of cultures preserves the unique stories, traditions and values of cultures and communities around the world. Preserving languages and cultures helps with continuing understanding of their knowledge. It will also ensure that identity will remain the same and knowledge will not be lost to future generations. Furthermore, cultural conservation helps to protect the rights and autonomy of minority groups and it helps to foster respect and helps to understand different backgrounds. By preserving the cultural heritage of a community, people can learn more about its history and gain insight into the beliefs of its people. This can help to build a more inclusive and equitable society.



Challenges

Despite the importance of preserving cultures that are nearing extinction, there are several challenges involved. First, insufficient resources are available to fund and implement cultural preservation projects. Many of these projects are precious and require considerable time and effort. Moreover, there is often a lack of political support for such initiatives, making it difficult to secure the necessary funding.

Second, there is a lack of education and awareness around the issue of cultural preservation. Many people are not familiar with the importance of cultural heritage and do not understand the ways in which it can benefit society. This lack of knowledge can cause a lot of heritage to be lost, as with not understanding how much value a legacy has.



Major Parties Involved

UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was established in 1945 as the United Nations specialized agency for education, culture, science and communication. UNESCO's mandate is to promote understanding among peoples and the free exchange of ideas through cooperation among nations in order to contribute to global peace and security. UNESCO's main function is to pool knowledge, promote knowledge transfer, make expertise available and develop standard-setting instruments for the four areas of expertise in which UNESCO operates. The organization has 195 member states and 10 associate members and has been under the leadership of Bulgarian Director General Ms. Irina Bokova since 2009. About 2,000 people work at UNESCO from about 170 countries, of which about 870 are employed at one of the 65 field offices and institutes UNESCO has worldwide.

Yanomami

Living for centuries deep in the Amazon rainforest, the Yanomami are a relatively isolated indigenous tribe. For centuries they have struggled to survive in the pristine forests between Brazil and Venezuela. Today, the approximately 29,000 Yanomami say they are in danger of losing their land, culture, and traditional way of life.

"Our land is being invaded again. Our rivers are being polluted with mercury again," said Davi Kopenawa, a Yanomami leader who has dedicated his life to protecting the rights and lands of the Yanomami in the Amazon. Joenia Wapichana, the only indigenous woman elected to Brazil's congress, said the devastation caused by the Garimpeiros and powerful economic interests bent on exploiting the rainforest threaten both biodiversity and the survival of indigenous life.

Illegal mining is devastating the environment of the Amazon, which has great spiritual value for indigenous people and is the source of their traditional livelihoods, from food to medicine. Trees and habitats are destroyed, and the mercury used to separate gold from grit leaks into rivers, poisoning the water and entering the local food chain. Mercury poisoning can damage organs and cause developmental problems in children.

The Yanomami serve as a great example of the countless indigenous tribes threatened by exploitation, discrimination and loss of land. The list of tribes on the brink of extinction around the world is long, to just name a few: the Akuntsu in Brazil, the Jarawa on the Andaman Islands in India, the Livonians in Latvia, the Nunak in Columbia, the El Molo in Kenya, the S'aoch in Cambodia, the Batak in Phillipines. There are optimistic stories of indigenous people that after facing extinction finally have a growing population again, such as the Asháninka in Peru, the Circassians in the Caucasus, the Nex Perce in the USA, the Enxet in Paraguay and the Surui in the Amazone as well.



The International Council of Monuments and Sites

The International Council of Monuments and Sites is a non-governmental international organization dedicated to the conservation of monuments and sites. ICOMOS was founded in 1965 and is again divided into national committees. It is a network of experts in fields such as history, archaeology, anthropology and urban planning. There are more than 7,000 members in more than 110 countries. It is headquartered in Paris.

ICOMOS is committed to the conservation and protection of cultural heritage. It is the only worldwide non-governmental organization of this type dedicated to promoting the application of theory, methodology and scientific techniques to the conservation of architectural and archaeological heritage.

Its creation in 1965 is the logical result of the initial discussions between architects, historians and international experts that began in the early 20th century and culminated in the adoption of the Venice Charter in 1964. In light of numerous studies, conferences, symposiums and discussions led by its national committees and international scientific committees, ICOMOS gradually built up the philosophical and doctrinal framework of heritage at the international level.

Uyghurs

The Uyghurs are a Turkic-speaking minority in China. They are suppressed and discriminated against by the Chinese government, which considers Uyghurs to be apostates. More than a million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities have been detained by China in "re-education camps" in Xinjiang. Several countries, including the U.S., U.K., Canada and the Netherlands, have accused China of committing genocide.

The Chinese government is assimilating the Muslim minority through brainwashing techniques and physical punishments. Fear and psychological intervention prevents Uyghurs from expressing their culture. This may prevent their heritage from being passed onto future generations out of fear.



Timeline of Events

9 December 1948	United Nation Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide
10 December 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was established
31 May 1964	The ICOMOS was founded during the Venice Charter.
February 1989	ICG was founded
1 July 2002	ICC was founded
13 September 2007	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples founded
5 July 2009	Riots broke out in the capital of Xinjiang between the Uyghurs and Chinese government
24 March 2017	the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2347



Previous attempts to solve the issue

Museums

There are several museums with the goal of preserving traditional culture and art. For example, at the Royal Museum of Antiquities in the Netherlands, there is an exhibition honoring Nineveh, the capital of northern Iraq during the glory days of the Assyrians. Visitors saw more than 250 objects from domestic and foreign museums, such as the British Museum and the Louvre, including reliefs, statues, clay tablets and scroll seals. UNESCO, the UN cultural organization, has granted Nineveh patronage, endorsing the international significance of the exhibition. Other museums that recently received this honour are the Grand Palais in Paris and the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. Museums all around the world, most notably the British Museum in London, of stealing artefacts and threatening cultural conservation by having stolen the stories of indigenous groups. Critics argue that European colonialism and its effect on the destruction of cultures are persisted through the display of culturally significant artefacts in museums in the western world, often inaccessible to indigenous people.

To illustrate, the 'Benin Bronzes' are a group of sculptures which include elaborately decorated cast plaques, commemorative heads, animal and human figures, items of royal regalia and personal ornaments, created from at least the 16th century onwards in the West African Kingdom of Benin and currently completely present in the collection of the British Museum. As of 2021, the objects have been requested by the Ministry of Information and Culture in Nigeria as well as representatives of the Benin Royal Palace.

Apologies

Many countries have apologized for their previous behaviour towards cultures nearing extinction. The USA and Germany both recognized the genocide their countries have committed in the past. The Netherlands has formally apologized for their contribution to slavery and the Vietnam war. This has helped countries recover from previous losses and find closure, but more importantly often as the start of a conversation of mistakes in the past and the loss of cultural heritage. These discussions often lead to controversy, as for instance the Australian Prime Minister stated how the current generation of Australians is not responsible for the damage enacted upon Aboriginals. Leaders of Nations often fear consequential reparations after apologies.



Possible solutions

Raising Awareness.

By establishing various programs, such as educational programs, awareness is raised about the importance of preserving cultural heritage. This may include public awareness campaigns, cultural heritage festivals and school programs to teach about the history and importance of cultural heritage. You can also set up community-based cultural preservation initiatives. This involves providing legal, financial, and technical support to communities to help them protect their cultural heritage from development projects, deforestation and other threats. Finally, it emphasizes the damage of tourism through human safaris, which till this day can be endangering to indigenous people all around the world. Through awareness, responsible travelling can be promoted and we can change the coverage of stories of indigenous people all around the world through language that is inclusive and respectful. Through the assistance of the UN for instance, Circassians now have their own autonomous region in which their language is recognized and they have political representation.

Encouraging preservation

Another possible solution would be for governments to set up incentives for people to help preserve their culture. This could include providing grants or other economic assistance to individuals and groups who are actively engaged in preserving their culture. This could include assistance for research projects or for cultural events or festivals. By providing incentives, governments can help to encourage people to become involved in preserving their culture and help to prevent it from disappearing. One of the major steps in preservation is giving land ownership to the indigenous people entitled to that land.

Cultural heritage sites

Cultural heritage sites can help conserve cultures nearing extinction by helping to keep cultural traditions alive and providing a place for people to learn about and share their culture with others. It can also help protect important cultural artifacts, practices, and traditions. Heritage sites can also provide economic opportunities to help people maintain their culture in the face of economic hardship, as well as protect and preserve sites associated with their culture. Through educational programs, cultural heritage sites can also help preserve and promote traditional knowledge and skills that are important for the survival of a culture. Finally, cultural heritage sites can also help promote intercultural dialogue, which can help build understanding and appreciation for the cultures that are at risk of disappearing. An essential element is the returning of culturally significant artefacts from Western museums to the descendants of those who owned them.



Useful Documents

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