

**ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT UNIVERSITY**

**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF NATURAL AND APPLIED SCIENCES**



**PROSPECTS OF NEGATIVE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN SYRIA  
VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE HERITAGE OF ALEPPO'S  
RIVER MASSACRE**

**M.Sc. Thesis by**

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**March 2022**

**ANKARA**

**PROSPECTS OF NEGATIVE HERITAGE  
MANAGEMENT IN SYRIA  
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ALEPPO'S RIVER MASSACRE**

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**by  
Wesam Zarka**

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## M.Sc. THESIS EXAMINATION RESULT FORM

We have read the thesis entitled “**PROSPECTS OF NEGATIVE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN SYRIA AND VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE HERITAGE OF ALEPPO’S RIVER MASSACRE**” completed by **Wesam Zarka** under the supervision of **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Salah Haj Ismail** and we certify that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

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## ETHICAL DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, in this thesis which has been prepared in accordance with the Thesis Writing Manual of Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences,

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- All information, documents and assessments are presented in accordance with scientific ethics and morals,
- All the materials that have been utilized are fully cited and referenced,
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**Date: March 15, 2022**

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**March 15, 2022**

**Wesam Zarka**

# PROSPECTS OF NEGATIVE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN SYRIA

## VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE HERITAGE OF ALEPPO'S RIVER MASSACRE

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to exemplify some of the negative heritage created in Syria over the ten bloody years that followed the beginning of the uprising in 2011, seeking a form of heritage management that can promote justice. Different motives and methods for negative heritage management are exemplified and compared to find out the most appropriate one or ones to be adopted or adapted in the Syrian context. The massacre of Aleppo's River is tackled with extended research on the told and untold stories of the victims. A flexible form of management featuring the victims is proposed and illustrated. Virtual application of the proposals is suggested as a step that can be useful by itself and can also facilitate the future actual application. Virtual or symbolic justice is considered for this case featuring the victimizer through values-centred representation. An evaluation based on the values of the community is attempted and the Islamic perspective of heritage management are discussed. Finally, a general plan is presented for managing the Syrian negative heritage. Also, some expected difficulties for managing the Syrian negative heritage are considered and suggested solutions are presented.

**Keywords:** Syria, Values-centred Preservation, Negative Heritage, Heritage Management, Syrian Uprising, Syrian Conflict, Aleppo's River Massacre, Symbolic Justice, Virtual representation, Flexible representation, QR codes, Bottom-up approach, Community approach, Metaverse.

# SURİYE'DE NEGATİF MİRAS YÖNETİMİNİN BEKLENTİLERİ

## HALEP NEHİR KATLIAMINDAKİ MİRASIN GÖRSEL TEMSİLİ

### ÖZ

Bu araştırma, 2011'deki ayaklanmanın başlamasını takip eden on kanlı yıl boyunca Suriye'de yaratılan negatif mirasın bir kısmını örneklendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Adaleti teşvik edebilecek bir miras yönetimi biçimi aramaktadır. Negatif miras yönetimi için farklı motifler ve yöntemler örneklendirilmiş ve karşılaştırılmıştır. Çalışma, Suriye bağlamında benimsenecek veya uyarlanacak en uygun yöntem veya yöntemleri için bulmak istemektedir. Halep Nehri katliamı, kurbanların anlatılmış ve anlatılmamış hikayeleri üzerine kapsamlı araştırmalarla ele alındı. Mağdurları içeren esnek bir yönetim şekli önerilmiş ve gösterilmiştir. Tekliflerin sanal olarak uygulanması başlı başına faydalı olabilecek bir adım olarak önerilmektedir.ve gelecekteki fiili uygulamayı da kolaylaştırabilir... Değer merkezli temsil yoluyla katili öne çıkaran bu durum için sanal veya sembolik adalet düşünülür. Topluluğun değerlerine dayalı bir değerlendirme yapılmaya çalışılır ve miras yönetiminin İslami bakış açılarına göre bir değerlendirme tartışılmaktadır. Son olarak, Halep'in negatif mirasının yönetimi için genel bir plan sunulmaktadır. Ayrıca, Suriye'nin negatif mirasını yönetmek için beklenen bazı zorluklar da göz önünde bulundurulmuştur ve önerilen çözümler sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Suriye, Değer Odaklı Koruma, Negatif Miras, Miras Yönetimi, Suriye Ayaklanması, Suriye Çatışması, Halep Nehri Katliamı, Sembolik Adalet, Sanal temsil, Esnek temsil, QR kodları, Aşağıdan yukarıya yaklaşım, Topluluk yaklaşımı, Metaverse.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Syria was one of the countries affected by the Arab Spring. The peaceful demonstrations calling for freedom in March 2011 were faced with extreme violence that resulted in an ongoing destructive conflict. Unfortunately, the atrocities caused by this conflict have formed one of the darkest chapters of recent history as hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions have been displaced.



**Figure 1.1** A school in Bennish in the northern countryside of Idlib targeted by a Russian airstrike on Feb 3, 2020. Photographer: Ghaith Assaf. It was one out of 22 educational centers targeted only during the first 2 months of the year [3].

Moreover, the direct intervention of other countries has complicated the conflict. For instance, *Why Are Russians Paying for Bombing Schools in Syria?* is a recent report by HRW that draws the attention of the Russian taxpayers to their government's role

in the Syrian conflict after five years of their direct military intervention that started on September 30, 2015. The report finds out that targeting the hospitals, schools (Figure 1.1) and markets aimed at forcing the civilians to flee as “there were no apparent military objectives” according to the HRW’s investigation [1,2].

The huge and varied negative heritage piling up in Syria manifested clearly through thousands of leaked photos of tortured-to-death detainees (Figure 1.2). The former “Syrian military photographer” known only as Caesar copied thousands of photographs of detainees from a police computer. The detainees were tortured to death by Bashar al-Assad’s regime between 2011 and 2013. [4]



**Figure 1.2** An exhibition at the United Nations in New York of Caesar’s shocking pictures of Syrian victims who were tortured to death. Photograph: Lucas Jackson/Reuters.

*Death by Chemicals* is another report by HRW documenting the “widespread and systematic” use of chemical attacks by the Syrian regime [5]. The most recent attack covered in the report was on April 04, 2017, on Khan Sheikhoun, a town in the countryside of Idlib, which killed at least 90 people including 30 children (Figure 1.3).



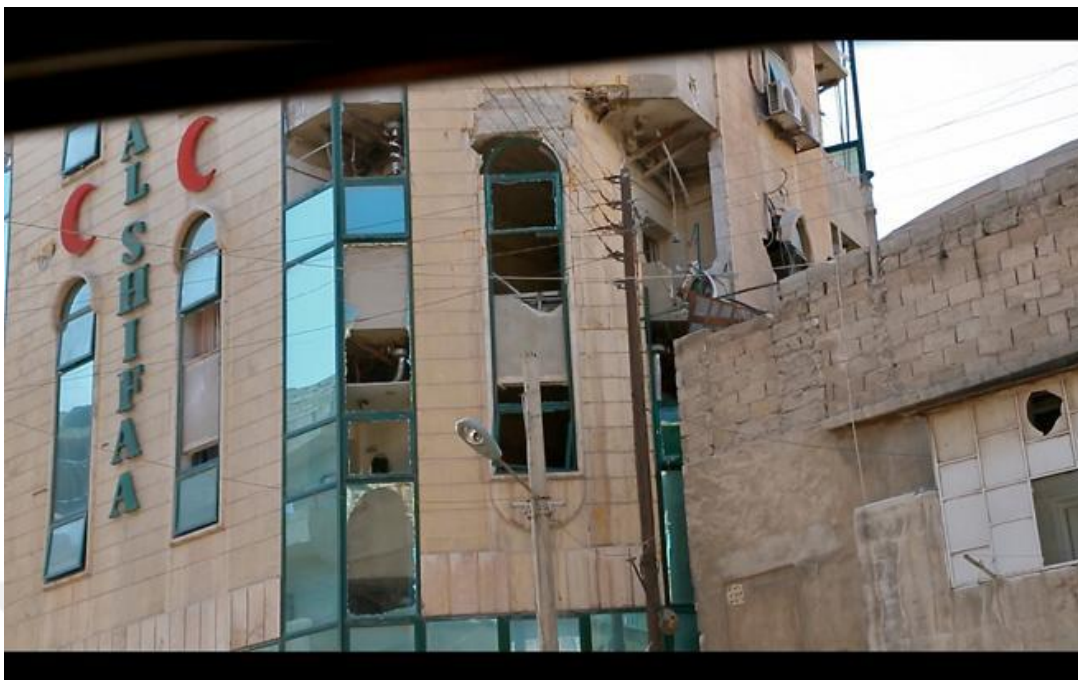
**Figure 1.3** Abdel Hamid al-Yousef, holding his twin babies who were killed in a chemical attack, in Khan Sheikhoun in April 2017. He also lost his wife and 16 other relatives in the attack. (Alaa Alyousef via AP, File)

The worst attack was in Ghouta (Figure 1.4), not far from Damascus, and killed hundreds in August 2013 [5]. The exact number of victims in the Ghouta attack is debatable but according to a US governmental figure, it is 1429 [6]. Later the use of chemical attacks by the Syrian regime was described as widespread and systematic [5]



**Figure 1.4** Victims of a suspected chemical attack on Ghouta, Syria on August 21, 2013. © 2013 AP Photo/Shaaam News Network via HRW.

Deliberate bombing of hospitals and residential areas, and all the massacres and displacement cannot and should not be ignored. However, there are essential questions about the expected outcome of preserving such a painful heritage and how this heritage can be productively managed.



**Figure 1.5** Dar al Shifaa Hospital in Aleppo after one of the many attacks on it. © 2012 Rachel Beth Anderson for Human Rights Watch [7].

Although the building of Dar al Shifaa (Figure 1.5) was known to be a hospital, a Syrian government warplane targeted it on August 12 and 14, 2012, killing four civilians and wounding five [7]. An eyewitness interviewed in this study could count more than 10 attacks on the Dar al Shifaa Hospital before it was finally put out of service in a huge attack that killed many including the eyewitness's sister who worked as a volunteer nurse there [8].

The ten years of the Syrians' suffering have not urged the international community to enforce any solution that can bring justice and peace. Syrian and international independent legal institutes concerned with human rights have prepared hundreds or even thousands of reports and files that document crimes and ask for justice. These legal bodies include Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Syrian Network for Human Rights, and the Syrian Institute for Justice. However, there have been no fruitful efforts to make use of these reports and files in the UN or any related international court to achieve justice in Syria so far.

This study attempts to participate in dealing with this painful reality which will, sooner or later, become part of the past and be described as a negative heritage. Managing the negative heritage being created to boost justice is the ultimate objective of this study. Seeking justice outside the boundaries of courts can, on the one hand, enhance the efforts for achieving justice in courts. Moreover, the kind of justice that can be achieved through managing the negative heritage is not less important than the one sought by prosecutors, lawyers, and judges.

Managing the negative heritage successfully can promote positive values in society for generations to come. It can promote standing with the oppressed and condemning the oppressors. It can help present a more accurate account of the history and eternalize the lessons learned from a tragedy. It can, consequently, achieve a supreme goal of justice by decreasing the potentials of creating future injustices.

### **1.1 The Hypothesis, Objective, Importance, and Limitation of the Study**

**The research hypothesis is that** managing the Syrian negative heritage can help in achieving justice and **the objective** of this research is to propose a general plan to do that. **The importance** of this research comes from the fact that there are no plans or attempts to manage the Syrian negative heritage being created now. The Syrian negative heritage studied is **limited** to the one created during the last ten years since 2011 and is not inclusive of all the negative heritage as it is too huge to be tackled in one study. **The case study selection** in this research is based on the belief that its victims can be considered of the most vulnerable ones.

### **1.2 The Methodology**

**The sampling** in the literature review is selective to cover varied countries with different perspectives for managing negative heritage with more focus on cases with values-centred representation as a desired one for the Syrian case. The massacre of Aleppo's River that was committed in 2013 is taken as a case study. All the available resources on Aleppo's River Massacre are studied and interviews with key stakeholders are conducted in the process of **data collection**. Values-centred, artistic

representation of the case study is suggested, illustrated, and evaluated. Two visual representations are suggested and evaluated: one featuring the victims and using QR codes to add flexibility to the representation, and one featuring the victimizer and seeking symbolic justice. The proposals' evaluation includes discussing negative heritage management from an Islamic perspective to better understand the Syrian community values. The lessons learned from the cases examined in the literature review and from attempting to manage the negative heritage of Aleppo's River Massacre are **generalised** in a suggested general plan to manage the Syrian negative heritage.



# CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature is attempted to clarify two important terms in this study which are “negative heritage” and “managing negative heritage.” It is also meant to present background information about managing the Syrian negative heritage in specific.

### 2.1 Negative Heritage

Heritage is supposed to provide a sense of security through the shared past it represents, and the unifying known roots it symbolizes. Thus, preserving heritage for future generations is sought [9]. Hall’s expectations of what heritage should stand for cannot easily fit negative heritage that is usually connected to sites representing conflicts, massacres, and disasters [10]. In the context of defining Cultural Heritage, UNESCO uses the term “Heritage in the event of armed conflict.” However, Negative Heritage is the term used in this study as an umbrella term under which many other similar terms have been used. Schueckler uses this term, Negative Heritage, to illustrate values-centred preservation of many cases of racial discrimination in American history and these cases will receive most of the focus in this study [11]. Tunbridge and Ashworth use the terms Dissonant Heritage and “dark spot” of history to refer to what this study calls negative heritage and there is a chapter in their book about the Heritage of Atrocity [12]. Inconvenient Heritage is a term used by Constantinou and Hatay when they talked about the ethnic conflict in Cyprus, which is also featured in this study when tackling the political use of heritage. Constantinou and Hatay also used the term Negative and Unwanted Heritage in this sequence [13]. When Bolin investigates the genocide heritage in Rwanda, also focused on in this study, he uses the term Sites of Difficult, Painful Heritage [14]. Suominen-Kokkonen uses the terms Negative Heritage and Unwanted Heritage to talk about the Orthodox Churches in Finland which were built when Finland was part of the Russian Empire. He tackles controlling or destroying memory brought by political change. He also uses the term Dissonant Heritage to describe the heritage that lacks conformity to the norms of the majority [15]. Moses also talks about Negative Heritage in historic preservation

in the context of stigmatized space and traumatic sites [16]. Mason chooses the term Traumatic Heritage Places to talk about negative memories, histories, or events like the genocide in Rwanda. He believes Traumatic Heritage Places can function as both archives and agents of social change [17]. Uzzell and Ballantyne tackle conflicts by considering Hot Interpretation of heritage as the “purely-rational” interpretation is neither possible nor desirable. They believe that recent hot events are more challenging as it would be more difficult to historically project the big picture and because they have not lost their “emotional sting” yet [18]. Whereas Logan and Reeves talk about places of pain and shame and describe the cruel side of history as Difficult Heritage. They classify this Difficult Heritage into four categories: sites of massacres and genocide, war-related sites, civil and political prisons, and ‘benevolent’ internment camps [19]. Thus, in this study, all the painful feelings and bad memories, caused by the atrocities, for a community or a group of people will be referred to as Negative Heritage.

One may argue that it is better to forget such heritage, avoiding the inconvenience it may create. Schueckler refers to the challenging nature of negative heritages for preservationists concerning the responses the heritage may provoke [11]. Nevertheless, Constantinou thinks that the inconvenient heritage can also be precious although it might not be desired [13]. A site can represent an “entire genocide,” and it may create “non-heritage benefits like advocating for social justice, peacebuilding, and civil rights.” Consequently, “social functions of healing, mourning, or politicizing culture in the present can be obtained” [17]. Mason mentions the curatorial and archival uses as heritage benefits [17], but the focus of this study and the desired outcome of the heritage management process intended here are rather the non-heritage benefits related to social change.

In the context of identity-based conflicts, the identity *enhancing* function of heritage could be taken for granted and it is one of the four functions of heritage suggested by Korostelina. The second suggested function of heritage in this context is the *legitimization* one as it facilitates maintaining the existing power structures and the relationships within the group concerned with the heritage in question. This is usually done by remembering the violent past and, hence, making use of it to keep holding to

power as a protector from the barbaric other, which is referred to in this study as the political use of heritage. The third function is the *normative* one and is mainly concerned with fostering justice through reflecting on the painful past represented in the heritage site. The last function is the *healing* one and could be achieved if the heritage maintains a balance of what should be remembered and what should be forgotten without being biasedly selective. The last two uses are touched upon in this study when tackling values-centred preservation. I think that this focus on positive values and social change is what makes any negative heritage a useful heritage.

Logan and Reeves (2009) believe that heritage management of sites where there is ongoing or recent conflict can become effectively used for managing the conflict and reaching a “sense of shared national identity” [19]. The conflict in Syria first started as a value-based conflict calling for human rights related to justice and freedom, but later turned into an identity-based one when sectarian militias from across the borders supported the Syrian regime and ideological groups formed in response. The conflict now is thought to be managed by international stakeholders seeking political gains. Therefore, the four functions of heritage suggested above by Korostelina would be relevant when considering the prospects of negative heritage that has been and is still being created there including the massive killing, destruction, and forced displacement.

Korostelina is worried that the victimized group may be undeservedly empowered as it might also have been involved in initiating violence [20]. The point of turning atrocities into heritage can also be addressed to avoid the cycle of having the victimized turning into the victimizer when seeking revenge instead of justice. Lowenthal highlights the need to learn how to control heritage so that heritage does not control us [21]. When tackling conflicts and tensions, Anheier and Isar (2009) think that the narration of the past should be done without encouraging future conflicts [22]. Thus, the Syrian negative heritage should be managed sensitively to make sure it becomes a useful one, a negative heritage managed positively.

## 2.2 Negative Heritage Management

Managing any negative heritage is based on answering two basic questions about why and how this negative heritage should be remembered. Examples are studied from three different countries: America, Cyprus, and Rwanda. Three different cases of negative heritage presentation related to different periods of American history are examined. More recent cases are examined from Cyprus and Rwanda. The negative heritage of all these cases is explained briefly and some details are given on how the negative heritage of each was managed. The motives and procedures of managing the negative heritage of these cases are addressed and reflected on to learn lessons that can be applied in the Syrian case or cases.

### 2.2.1 Why Remember

Heritage may get its value basically from people's will to preserve and remember it. Heritage usually makes people proud of what it shows artistically and architecturally or symbolizes ethically. However, pride is not the only motive beyond the will to preserve heritage. When the heritage is a negative one, the reasons may also include redressing historical ethnic power imbalance, forming identity in a conflict context, reconciliation in the conflict-torn community, and achieving justice at least symbolically as intended of this study regarding the Syrian negative heritage. Justice usually needs to go through the court and in the Syrian case it seems it needs a political decision by the international stakeholders. Symbolic justice, however, might be achieved by turning atrocities into a heritage that can facilitate social change.

#### 2.2.1.1 Cases of American Negative Heritage

Schueckler presents three examples of preserving negative heritage sites in America. The three sites are related to three different ethnic groups throughout American history: Native Americans, the Japanese American community, and the African American community [11]. All of them can be considered good examples of how negative heritage can be managed to redress historical ethnic power imbalances.

The first example is the site of the battle of Little Bighorn known also as the Battle of Greasy Grass or Custer's Last Stand. The Little Bighorn Battlefield National

Monument had first honoured the defeated federal troops led by Custer and killed in the battle against the Native Americans in 1876. Under the pressure of the Native Americans' descendants, the monument became later representative of both sides, telling the two narratives of the story.

Lessons can be learnt from the long journey the stakeholders went through to reach a relatively fair representation of this heritage. In 1881, a marble obelisk bearing the names of all the U.S. soldiers killed during the battle replaced a temporary marker of the place. In 1950, a public historical museum was added featuring Custer, the leader of the soldiers who was killed in the battle. The continuous pressure of the Native Americans resulted in having their voice heard in representing their heritage. Threats of using violence and disturbing ceremonies related to this heritage helped in drawing the public attention to the Native Americans' cause. In 1991, congress approved a change in the name of the historic site, calling it the "Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument," and the bill mandated that a memorial be built on site in honour of the native participants in the battle and the cause for which they fought. In 2003, Indian Memorial was finally designed [11].

The second example is Manzanar which was one of ten Japanese internment camps during World War II. In these camps, about 110,000 people of Japanese origin, including American citizens, were forced to live. Their internment lasted for about three years and a half because they were considered a threat to the war efforts after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor [23]. Although the Japanese Americans could turn these camps into small cities, they were deprived of their "civil liberties", and they were badly affected financially. Manzanar had included about 800 buildings which held once about 10,000 internees, but 50 years later only three buildings were left. The Japanese American community insisted on reconstructing the wire fence, barracks, and guard towers to give a real impression of the function the site had as a prison.

The site of Lower Manhattan's African Burial Ground in New York is the third example. It is exemplified by Schueckler as a negative heritage although it was a place where the African American community had relative freedom as they could practice some African traditions during the colonial period. What made this site a negative one is the bad memories it brought to the African American community. That is not only

for being destroyed by European settlers, in the first place, but also for being carelessly dealt with when discovered again while constructing a federal office tower in 1991. A long and complicated process by the African American community resulted in designating the area as a national historical landmark in 1993 and then a national monument in 2006. Acknowledging an injustice which a group of people has suffered from is meant to secure this group from any future injustices.

Although the three sites are presented as successful examples of values-centred preservation, Schueckler believes that they also indicate a failure for both the American nation and the heritage preservation field. He believes it is a failure because the three ethnic communities had to work hard over decades to get their values presented. Thus, he suggests that heritage preservation efforts can be more “inclusive and proactive” if a values-centred preservation framework is adopted in the first place [11].

#### ***2.2.1.2 A Case of Negative Heritage in Cyprus***

Negative heritage can also be utilized to form an identity in the conflict context. An example from Cyprus of destroyed villages, like Alihodes, can be presented in the context of negative heritage that may indicate ethnic cleansing. The village is an example of a brownfield site that was intentionally demolished [24]. Although the village was inhabited by Turkish Cypriots who were all Muslims, it hosted the Ayioi Iliofotoi church and an annual festival for the Christian pilgrims. Now, and after all its inhabitants fled to the north in 1964, there is nothing left but the church. The fear of revenge had pushed people to leave their homes on both sides, and revenge is thought to be the reason why the houses were destroyed in Ayioi Iliofotoi and other villages in the south. The authorities of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) are using this negative heritage of destroyed villages to encourage Turkish Cypriots to abandon the idea of going back to the south “remembering to forget”. Consequently, the empty villages of the Greek Cypriots in the north that were better preserved can be the alternative for the Turkish Cypriots to live in [23]. Thus, reminding Turkish Cypriots of this heritage of hostility can support the need for identity formation, the self and the other, in a country that is still seeking international recognition. Likewise, Syrian authorities can also follow this strategy of reminding the people of the negative

heritage created by the other parties to gain more support in maintaining the new borders and the newly formed authorities.

The use of negative heritage might be quite appealing to governments to make political gains. On the other hand, values-centred preservation may require great efforts by some community groups.

### ***2.2.1.3 Rwanda Genocide***

The successful heritage management of the three American sites of negative heritage can also mark the failure of humanity to protect or preserve the rights of the weak at some point in history or over a long period of it. Rwanda's genocide started in April 1994, victimizing about five hundred thousand people mainly from the Tutsi minority who were brutally killed in churches, hospitals and educational centres. The number of victims is quite arguable as it might be less or more, but the genocide that lasted for 100 days is not [25].

To archive the genocide and reconcile the community eight sites, most of which had been churches where thousands or tens of thousands had been slaughtered, were turned into memorials. Some essential heritage values, including the physical integrity of collections portrayed, were affected to cater for the political functionality of the memorials [17]. International efforts were invested in some of the memorial sites, like in Nyamata, to cater to conservation requirements as well. The Genocide heritage is meant to boost the development of the country and is shaped and utilized accordingly. No fees are required when visiting the eight memorials, but their visitors still participate in the economic development [20].

However, the touristic function of negative heritage, Dark Tourism, can be ethically problematic when it is meant to support the economic situation of a country. For example, the difficulty of interpreting hot issues is illustrated by the Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania, Australia. It's the place where 12000 convicts were held prisoners after they had been transported from Britain between 1831 and 1870s. One big challenge related to managing this heritage site is that visitors of the place are supposed to enjoy their time and spend money, the touristic function, but that could be

considered tasteless when considering the history of the place. A recent massacre of a random shooting in 1996 labelled the site as the place where Australia's worst massacre was committed. The touristic function of the site has become more problematic since then [19].

The Rwandan management of heritage might be evaluated to get the learned lessons and built on them in the Syrian context, especially in the part related to touristic function. Not only because the numbers of victims and displaced people resemble the estimated ones in the Syrian conflict, but also because the motives beyond the management of heritage could be quite relevant.

### **2.2.2 How to Remember**

The suggested values, in this study, according to which the negative heritage should be preserved in the Syrian case may be freedom and justice, but this choice of values is what the community concerned with the negative heritage should ultimately make.

Having decided what values or objectives the negative heritage should represent or achieve, managing the painful heritage successfully relies on how to do that. There is a variety of options that can be adopted to represent traumatic heritage including representative centers, memorial walls, obelisks, photographs, artifact remains, and oaks planted to symbolize the victims. Other options that are less related to specific places may include educational events, publications, candlelight vigils, organizing a pilgrimage to the related sites and similar cultural acts that might represent intangible heritage [11, 14, 17, 26].

#### ***2.2.2.1 Politicized Preservation of Heritage***

Governments' political use of heritage is made smoothly through a top-down decision, but it might sometimes be meant for the sole purpose of maintaining power with no regard to human rights [19]. The politicized preservation of heritage might be attempted by using photos of destroyed villages for example to produce or reproduce identity in the context of the self and the other like done by both conflicting sides in

Cyprus [13]. Although the use of media is now attainable to all, at least the social media, the government in a country like Syria may be still more capable of reaching more people. However, for the time being, there are four governments in Syria, that are somehow weak, and they seem to be controlled by international stakeholders. Thus, values-centred preservation of the negative heritage in Syria can be sought by the community concerned with this negative heritage to promote justice which is supposed to be the most desired value of the stakeholders and therefore the main objective of this study.

#### ***2.2.2.2 Values-centred Preservation***

Values-centred preservation of heritage should be based on the agreed-on values of the stakeholders by getting them actively involved in the heritage management process [11]. Therefore, it requires a community-based, bottom-up process of management where the community takes the lead to get its values represented through its heritage. A representative centre in one site may symbolize the other similar sites where the negative heritage was originally created. Manzanar, which is one of the examples Schueckler presented as a values-centred preservation site, represented the other nine camps that formed the painful heritage of the Japanese Americans [11]. The journey to recognize Manzanar as a heritage site went through a pilgrimage organized by a group of students in 1969, but it is thought to have begun even before. The students who wanted to face the injustice towards their Japanese American community succeeded to create a larger interest group called the Manzanar committee in 1970. Lectures, exhibitions and book publishing were among the activities of the committee. They also sought to reach students and educate them about the internment by providing their schools with the needed resources. In 1972 Manzanar was registered as a historic place in California, and in 1976 it was included in the National Register too. It was until 1985 when it was recognized as a National Landmark. The efforts of the committee reached the congress and could later in 1988 be reflected in approving financial redress to compensate the victims.

The creation of the memorial was the next target, and it was officially considered in 1992 when the National Park Service started working on creating a desired representation of the negative heritage. The mission had to be carried out taking into

consideration the satisfaction of the stakeholders, especially the representatives of the Japanese Americans. In addition, there were interpretative exhibits functioning as mock-ups to get people's feedback. The biggest challenge was how to reflect the real function of the place with the few buildings left. The old photos of the site did not show the big picture of the place either as they intentionally did not include the prison-like features. The mission was accomplished by turning the biggest remaining building into an interpretive centre where the visitors can see photographs and artifacts. Also, the difficult decision of reconstructing some prison-like elements of the camp was taken under the pressure of the stakeholders and it was finally implemented in 2004. More details about this long process of giving birth to the Manzanar National Historic Site which were explained by Schueckler can be found on the official site of the Manzanar committee (<https://manzanarcommittee.org/>).

It took about sixty years after the negative heritage was created to be represented and managed in a satisfactory way for the victimized Japanese American community. Likewise, the other two cases which were discussed by Schueckler also took a lot of time and effort to achieve a fair representation of their negative heritage.

The attempts to make the Bighorn Battlefield National Monument more inclusive started in 1940 when it was controlled by the National Park Service or even before. However, it was until 2003 when an Indian memorial was added to the site to make it representative of the Native Americans too. As for the site of Lower Manhattan's African Burial Ground, human remains were discovered in 1991, but the complicated steps and procedures did not result in creating the memorial desired until 2005.

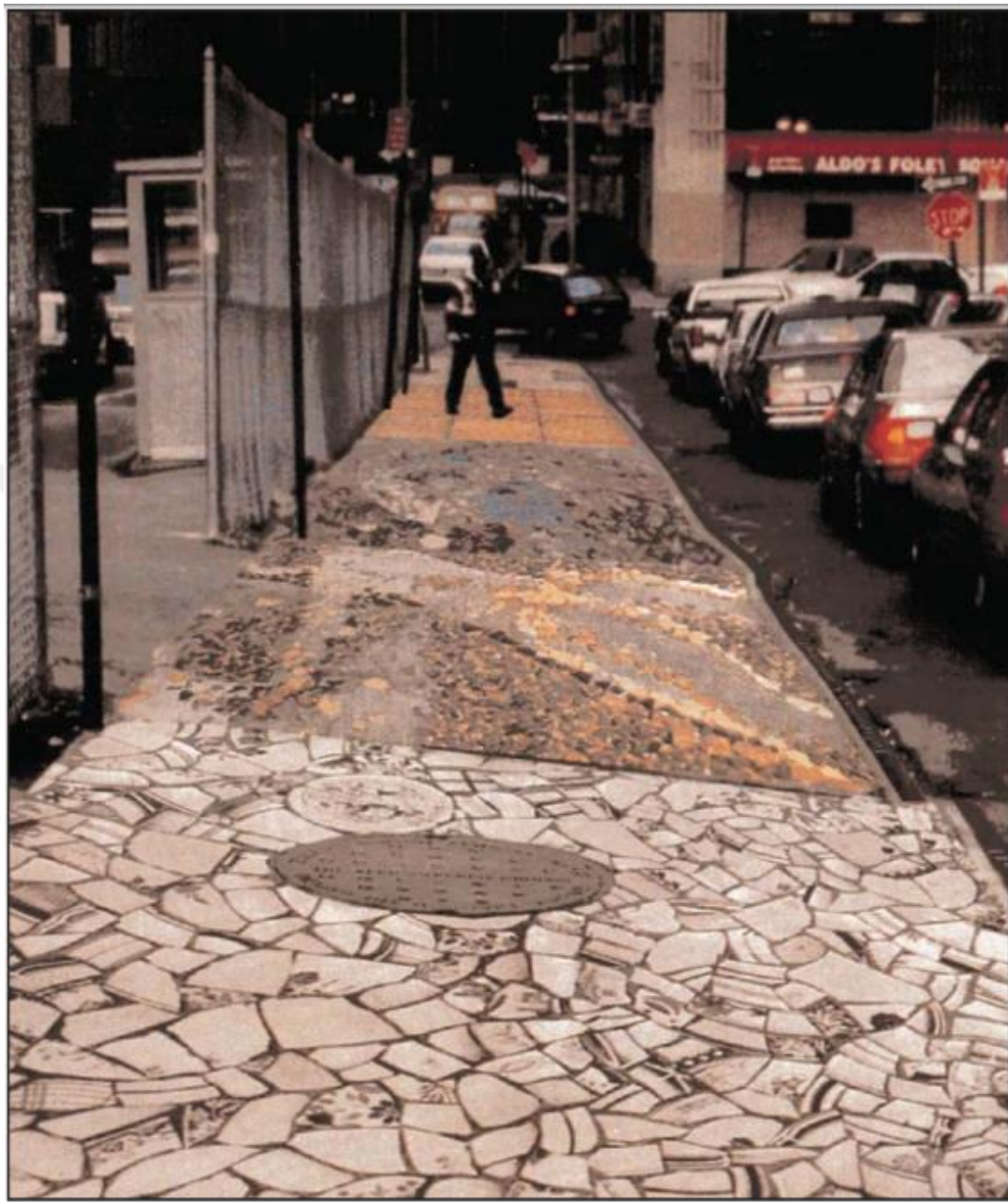
The bottom-up process of the three examples Schueckler brought for preserving the American negative heritage are mainly about the equality value. The three ethnic groups suffered injustices throughout their history and some activists worked hard to be compensated, symbolically at least or financially too as the Japanese American society was, so that they will not suffer from similar future injustices [11]. Likewise, Syrians may use similar techniques to manage their negative heritage based on the values they first stood up for like justice and freedom.

Managing the heritage of the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan included, in addition to creating a monument, replacing the manhole covers within all the borders of the original site with ones that indicate the past of the site. Besides, all the lifts in the site were provided with the signs “an easy-to-overlook fact: ‘You are now suspended above the African Burial Ground.’” The sidewalks were to be gradually replaced by related panels. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 are of two proposals which were presented to the African Burial Ground Coalition Competition to attempt the aspects for managing the site [26]. Likewise, managing the heritage of the chemical attacks can follow a similar memory-provoking technique. The targeted areas can be painted with the yellow colour associated with chemical weapons. Since the tragedy is still so alive in the hearts of the victimized families, the actual application of any provoking management of the sites had better be postponed. However, preserving the data required for a future application can be best attempted as soon as possible.

The technique demonstrated in figures 2.1 and 2.2 can be adapted to represent the negative heritage in the places targeted by chemical attacks.



**Figure 2.1** C. Neville, "Untitled," 1993-94. A proposal submitted to the African Burial Ground Coalition Competition. Source: *Reclaiming Our Past, Honouring Our Ancestors: New York's 18th Century African Burial Ground & Memorial Competition* (1994), 32 via [26]



**Figure 2.2** Karen Bermann and Jeanine Centuori, "The African Burial Ground/Walking Among Africa Graves/Speaking Through the Ground," 1993-94. Proposal presented to the African Burial Ground Coalition Competition. Source: *Reclaiming Our Past, Honoring Our Ancestors*:

### 2.2.3 Managing the Syrian Negative Heritage

By the beginning of 2022 and after 11 years of conflict, Syria is so rich with its negative heritage though it might not be as intense as that of the 100-day genocide in Rwanda. Nevertheless, the variety and extremity of violence applied by the Syrian regime and its allies so far has created and may create more negative sites to be managed in the future. These sites may symbolize the blind barrel bombs, the cold blood massacres, the chemical attacks and the brutal torture and killing of detainees.

What and why to remember is often decided by the victorious by trying to tailor the manifestation of the conflict heritage regardless of how ethical the victory is. One supreme objective for intellectuals should be to correct that defect in history writing. Thus, if the Syrian regime succeeded in regaining control over the land and acceptance by the international community, most probably the victims would be revictimized with the absence of justice. Moreover, dictators and tyrannies of the world would get further motivation to continue their crimes unpunished.

One objective of the management of the genocide heritage in Rwanda is to designate some of the memorials as World Heritage sites to urge the international community to never be so passive towards such crimes neither in Rwanda nor in other places [20]. In the Syrian case, that might also be an objective. Justice, peacebuilding, reconciliation, and development can also be attempted through the management of the negative heritage sites in the post-conflict era whether the uprising of the Syrian people succeeds in the near future or not.

However, this study is looking for possible opportunities to utilize the negative heritage being created now. It is investigating a form of management that can positively engage more people in preventing the creation of more negative heritage and provoke more individuals and governments to stop the ongoing conflict and boost accountability. If accountability and justice are out of reach now, virtual, symbolic ones might be sought.

Considering the prospects of values-centred representation of the negative heritage in Syria, time and efforts expected to be taken can be reduced if lessons are learned from

previous experiences. The variety of techniques used to reach the desired recognition and representation of the negative heritage by the Manzanar Committee can be adopted by the Syrian stakeholders. For example, publications and vigils can keep the memory of the victims present and pave the way for further representation. Organizing the stakeholders' efforts to take practical steps and form support lobbies might be the most valuable lesson to learn from the Manzanar Committee.

In addition to the huge difference between the political system in America and the current Syrian one, another important difference between the American cases and the Syrian one could be the ethnic background of the victims. In the American context, all the cases exemplified are of minorities, whereas most victims in Syria belong to the Arab, Muslim majority. Although the mobilization of efforts is usually more attainable for minorities, reaching an agreed-on representation of the heritage might be less arguable for the majority.

Moreover, the recent Syrian negative heritage might also be less debatable as it is more documented. Countless numbers of photos and videos have depicted and narrated the atrocities committed in Syria and a lot of reports were written. For example, one can try looking for "The Guardian or Channel 4" and "Syria" to find hundreds of informative articles, thorough investigations, and touching reports and documentaries about what happened and who are the stakeholders of torture, killing and displacement. The civil defence volunteers known as the White Helmets are also a good source of documentation besides their basic role in the rescue operations.

# CHAPTER 3

## CASE STUDY: ALEPPO'S RIVER MASSACRE

Aleppo's River Massacre is the main case of this study, and the following information can shed the light on how vulnerable its victims are. The background information about the river and the told and untold stories of the victims are meant to clarify the painful heritage of the massacre.

### 3.1 Aleppo's River – North and South

Most rivers in Syria flow from the north, the main ones from Turkey, and fresh air blows from the west, from the Mediterranean Sea. In Syria, the north and west can be considered more privileged than the south and east although the capital Damascus is relatively in the south. That also goes on the northern and western countryside of Aleppo compared to the eastern and southern one. To what extent fresh air and water have played a role in favouring areas over others in the Syrian case is a hypothesis that might be studied. However, another hypothesis to consider is demographic rather than geographic and both hypotheses might be inseparable anyway.

Queiq River arises from the southern Gaziantep plateau in Turkey and goes through Aleppo from north to south. It roughly divides the city into east and west although it passes outside the borders of the old city. Assessing the river's role in favouring some parts of the city should take into consideration the fact that during the last few decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century the river was turned into a malodorous stream after it dried up in the late 1960s. Like Seoul's Cheonggyecheon River, part of Aleppo's River was first covered to lessen the bad smell and later after about 50 years, it was uncovered again as water from the Euphrates River had been diverted to revive the dead river. However, unlike Cheonggyecheon, the restoration process focused only on one part of the city, mainly near the city centre.



My father grew up in Aleppo near Baghdad railway station and their building which overlooked the river was considered part of Al Azizieh neighbourhood (Figure 3.1). He would remember how the river would flood in the winter (Figure 3.2), but my childhood memories of my grandparents' flat were rather dry. In the 1980s and 1990s, we would not call the long yellow strip that separated the two streets in front of my grandparents' building a river. Instead, we called it Al-Shalalat which means the waterfalls. It was an area of 10 to 20 meters wide with stone benches around fountains that I can hardly remember seeing them working. In addition to the yellow stony area of the fountains and benches, there were some green spaces too. As children, we preferred to play there instead of the small park across the street surrounded by a mosque and 2 churches that was always full of old people. Many people in Baghdad Station and Al-Azizieh neighbourhoods were Christians, some of them were originally Armenians who came as refugees to Aleppo during World War I. I guess this area had the best view of the river before it was covered, after it was covered and when it was uncovered again. Two more neighbourhoods to the north also had a good view. They are Al Sheikh Taha and Al Villat (the Villas), but in fact they were mostly modern five-storey buildings, not villas as the name suggests. Al Sheikh Taha on the opposite bank where I spent two years of my childhood was older and less beautiful than Al Villat and more diverse. Poorer Christians and people from different religions and ethnicities live there.



**Figure 3.2** The flooding of Queiq River in 1952 [27].

Two big neighbourhoods grew in the northern part of the city. Al Sheik Maqsoud and Al-Hellok had a majority of Kurdish and Turkmen people who mainly came from the countryside of Aleppo and most probably could find cheaper housing options near the railway and the undesirable dead river by then. However, they did not have direct access to the river as the railway high bed separated Sheikh Maqsoud from the western bank of the river and some fields separated Hellok from the eastern bank of the river. Random housing was not uncommon there like in many expansions in the east and south of Aleppo.

In the opposite direction, to the south of Baghdad Station, the river goes through the big Public Park and under the main square of the city to reach Bab Al Faraj, Al-Jamilaiah, and gets closer to Old Aleppo. Almost no efforts were made there to take care of the riverbanks. Al-Masharqah could be one of the oldest extensions of old Aleppo and it was separated from it by the river [28]. This neighbourhood which is inhabited by the major component of the city, Sunni Arab Muslims, had already been added to the massacre record of the Assad family and that was on 11 August 1983 [29]. About 33 years later, in the same neighbourhood, more than a hundred civilians are thought to be arrested at the checkpoints of the Syrian regime or the sectarian thugs allied with it. They were executed in cold blood and thrown in the river to go back to the south where most of them came from in the first place. The Human Rights Watch's report states that the majority had crossed the checkpoints separating the liberated areas (East Aleppo) from the Syrian regime's areas (West Aleppo) to go to their workplaces or to buy goods for their shops in the liberated areas [30]. Their attempts to make a living in the north were brutally put to an end. They were sent back to the south as a stream of bodies through the river (Figure 3.3).



**Figure 3.3** Aleppo's River Massacre: People gather on the banks to view the corpses Photo: Thomas Rassloff/EPA. The study suggests this place as a memory agent where the negative heritage of the massacre can be managed to achieve symbolic justice.

## 3.2 Documentation and Data Collection

All the available information about the massacre's victims is studied and creamed off in the process of data collection. Investigational reports, journalistic reports, and documentaries about the massacre are addressed to collect the victims' told stories. Many interviews are conducted with activists and eyewitnesses to attain some of the untold stories. This step of data collection also includes investigating the artistic representation of the massacre and is meant to make a better understanding of the negative heritage as a prerequisite to attempt managing it.

### 3.2.1 The Victims' Told Stories

Some stories and details about the victims of Aleppo's River Massacre were recorded in many investigational and journalistic reports. Some other details were also recorded in the documentaries made about the massacre. This study will try to collect what has already been recorded and look for other stories that have not been recorded yet to

form a database that can facilitate the attempts to manage this negative heritage. Naturally, we will start with what has already been recorded.

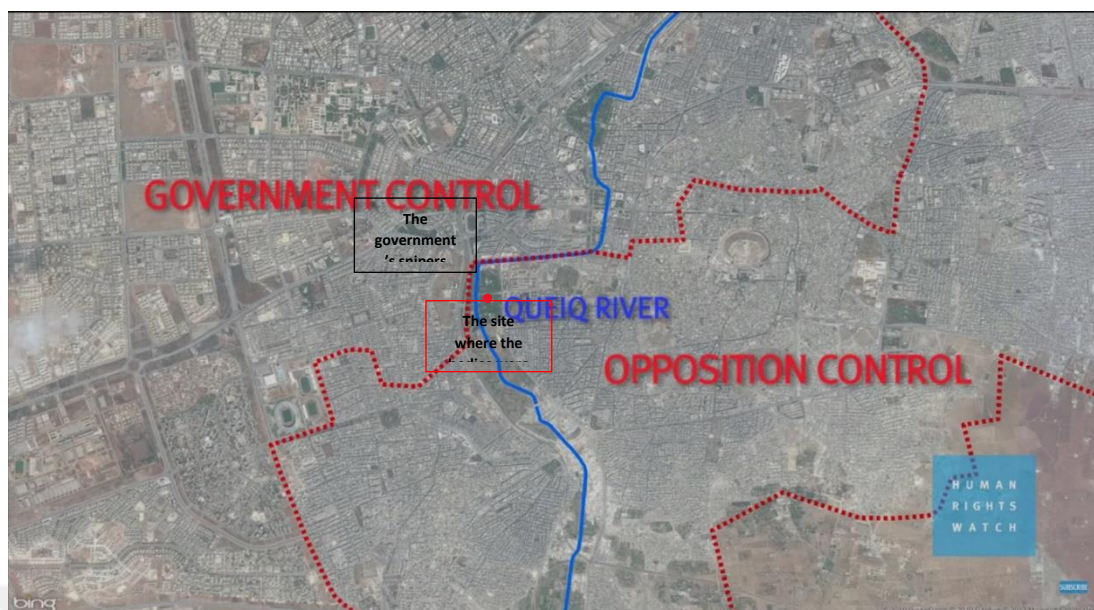
### ***3.2.1.1 Investigational Reports***

(SYRIA: A STREAM OF BODIES IN ALEPPO'S RIVER) is a report by the Human Rights Watch documenting Aleppo's River Massacre. (THE MASSACRE OF QWEIQ RIVER .... THE MARTYR RIVER) is another important report published in Al-Ayyam Syria. The HRW report can be considered the most serious investigational report about the massacre. Also, the report published in Al-Ayyam Syria is important as it might be the only published one that includes a list of the identified victims with their available information.

Searching the Human Rights Watch website shows that Syria has been featured in their reports 3420 times so far. It seems only China (4249 times) and Russia (3951 times) are more featured in the reports about human rights violations and war crimes so far. By nature, HRW can be considered an important stakeholder when negative heritage is addressed.

To investigate Aleppo's River massacre, the **HRW** team including the emergencies researcher Ole Solvang and Anna Neistat visited the site where most of the bodies were discovered (Figure 3.4). They met 18 of the victims' families and some activists who were involved in dealing with the bodies found.

According to the report they prepared, most victims' hands were tied behind their backs and their faces could hardly be identified as the shooting targeted the heads at close range. Signs of electric shocks and burns by cigarettes could be noticed. Almost all the victims' families HRW could reach assured that the victims were last seen in West Aleppo after they went there to work or buy goods as they had not been involved in any anti-regime activities [30].



**Figure 3.4** The place where most bodies were found.

The report gave details about three young men victims who were among the victims. One of them, named Mohammed in the report, was a shop owner at his 26. He went to West Aleppo to accompany his mother-in-law although he had already received threats from the government checkpoint. He disappeared after he left his mother-in-law at a bus station and could be found 4 days later among the bodies. Another victim, named Ahmed in the report, was a merchant aged 27. He went with his nephew to buy some goods. They separated and Ahmad disappeared to be found three weeks later in the river. Another young man, 30, named Mahmoud in the report, went to buy some supplies for his business but he did not come back the same day to be found by his father the next day among the bodies. His father said that his son was very friendly and never harmed anyone. “He didn’t even smoke. Why did he deserve to die like this?” he asked. It seems the only reason why they were killed was being in the wrong place.

Although the HRW report could confirm only 147 victims, those who had been photographed, the report described the number claimed by the activists, which reached 230 victims, reasonable too. The systematic documentation of the victims started after several bodies had been buried without being photographed. Another reason for the possibility of a bigger number of victims was mentioned by Yousef Houran, the lawyer

who prepared a detailed report about the massacre. He explained that at least 40 bodies were found in the southern countryside of Aleppo carried with the current of the river. Mr. Houran's report is one of the untold stories that will be addressed later in this study.

Another unique report was published in **Al Ayyam Syria** or Syrian Days. It was meant to be inclusive including a list of the 44 identified victims and a lot of links to photos and videos showing the victims, the process of retrieving them from the river, and burying them [31]. Unfortunately, many of the links provided lead to unavailable videos by now. Although this report is trying to include all the details, it limits its scope to the first wave of victims that arrived on January 29, 2013. Only the bodies that were thought to belong to the first wave but were not reachable until one, two or three days later were counted. Thus, the total number of the victims they counted was about 100 or, with less certainty, 109 victims. Two of the identified victims were thought to be mentally retarded and five had been known to be detained in the intelligence branches' centers in Aleppo according to the report. There is also forensic information and the water level of the river before the bodies arrived and after.

The importance of this report is that it could be the only published one with a list of names including the information available by then. 16 of the identified victims had only their names and the city they come from in the list without any further information. All were from Aleppo and only one was from Duma. The remaining 28 identified victims had some related information next to their names like the neighbourhood where they lived which were all in East Aleppo. Some had information about their ages, when and where they disappeared.

In the daily reports of the Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union, there are more identified victims but unfortunately their reports were neither systematic nor consistent. In their report for March 10, 2013, seven more identified victims with other 14 unidentified ones are listed [32].

### *3.2.1.2 Journalistic Reports*

Some pieces were also published by the international press including the Guardian (SYRIA: THE STORY BEHIND ONE OF THE MOST SHOCKING IMAGES OF THE WAR), the CNN (ALEPPO'S RIVER OF DEATH), the Time (BEHIND THE PICTURE: ALEPPO'S RIVER OF DEATH), and the New Yorker (THE RIVER MARTYRS).

Unlike the HRW report, **the Guardian** mentioned the real names of the victims and their relatives who were interviewed [33]. Some names were hidden at the request of the witnesses who worried about the safety of their relatives still living in the areas controlled by the regime. The stories of many victims including ones who worked and lived in the regime areas are mentioned.

Mohammed Hamandush, 18, was going to the dentist in West Aleppo when he was arrested. His father managed to know where he was held and was told he would be sent to join the army. Instead, he was sent as a body in the river. His face was wrapped with a nylon bag that was fixed with tape. His family did not know if the bullet he received killed him or he had been suffocated first.

Mohammed Waez was a merchant who was stopped at a regime checkpoint and his family had information that he was held in a military prison. They were told that he would be released in 10 days but at the end of the 10 days, they found his body among the ones in the river. He had been shot in the head and had his hands and legs tied. By checking the lists of the victims who could be identified, you can find that two victims had the same name, Mohammed Waez, but the fathers' names were different: Muhammad and Abdullatif. Both are described as adults but without mentioning their ages.

Two brothers, Yassin, 20, and Omar, 14, worked as tailors in West Aleppo to provide for their families. Both had been missing for 5 days before they were found with the other bodies. The information about these two brothers could not be confirmed when compared to other resources that provided the names and ages of the victims.

Martin Chulov who prepared this investigation for the Guardian went back to Aleppo while the bodies were still coming with the current. On February 10, he was in the centre near the river where the families would come to check if their relatives were among the victims. A young man called Mahmoud al-Drubi came with his brother to look for their father who had been missing for 22 days. Their father worked at the national bank and lived in West Aleppo. He was supposed to be heading to work but his family never heard anything about him until they discovered he was among the bodies found in the river. His son was sure that the regime killed him according to Martin.

Another victim that worked and lived in West Aleppo was a young man who was arrested in from of his father in a mobile shop where he worked. The father could find him the next day among the bodies. His father was too afraid to take him and bury him in West Aleppo. His father's fear is one of the untold stories this study encountered. The Guardian does not mention the name of this victim, but it is not difficult to get his name from the lists of the identified victims. According to these lists, it was Ahmad Kattan, and he was arrested by some thugs supporting the regime.

The Guardian has done many serious investigations about the ongoing Syrian painful heritage, and it can be considered one of the most reliable sources of information at least concerning Syria and this is based on personal observation. However, the stories mentioned in this specific investigation cannot be taken for granted. Some missing details may affect the credibility and that is why, when considering managing this chapter of the Syrian negative heritage, the stories here should be re-examined. It is also worth mentioning that the article is not accessible on the Guardian website anymore which can lead to an untold story about the documentation challenges.

Donatella Rovera who was Amnesty International's senior crisis response adviser wrote for **the CNN** from Aleppo [34]. She narrated the stories of five victims including a father with his son, and an uncle with his nephew.

She starts with one of the victims she saw on March 3. When his body arrived in the river, they could read with difficulty three words that were written on his face in a blue marker. "Al-Assad" was written on his forehead, "Syria" was written on one cheek,

and “that’s it” was on the other cheek as they figured out. That was a slogan used by the regime supporters. The man was Ahmad Ali Salah Hamwi as he could be identified two days later by his relatives. His son Hassan who was only 12 years old could also be identified among the bodies that arrived the next day. They both were identified after they were buried as unknown victims, but their relatives saw their photos in the office which was established for this purpose and run by volunteers.

Another victim was Mohammad Shaaban Mustafa, 47. He worked in Baghdad railway station in West Aleppo and would go through the checkpoints to reach his workplace as he lived in Bustan Al-Qasr where many of the victims lived. On February 13, he left his home and disappeared to be found the next day in the river shot in the head.

On January 27, Majid Nunu, 38 went with his nephew Abd al-Majid Reem Batsh, 15, to register the birth of his new baby in West Aleppo. Both disappeared and their bodies were found with the first wave of bodies that arrived two days later. The boy was shot in the heart with signs of torture on his face and his uncle was shot in the head. A detail that may add to the tragedy of this family is that the child’s parents were both working in Libya and he was living with his grandparents. I remember a conversation with a mother in East Aleppo in 2015 when the sky was raining barrel bombs. I was trying to convince the mother to send her 10-year-child to school. I would argue it was dangerous everywhere in East Aleppo and most schools had been moved underground by then so there was no point depriving her son of education. She told me that she had already lost two children and he was the only one left. “When they died, they were not with me. At least if this one dies, I would like to be next to him so that we might die together.” She explained.

Donatella Rovera had confirmation from the victims’ families that they had no concerns about politics, a term used to mean revolutionary activities.

**The New Yorker** published a long letter from Aleppo by Luke Mogelson [35]. He used a literary style to document the massacre providing a lot of background information not only about some victims but also about their families and the volunteers who worked on getting the victims out of the river, documenting, and burying them. One important name in this sequence is Hisham, the head of the Office

of the River Martyrs. Another important name is Youssef Horan, a lawyer who was investigating the massacre hoping that the report he was writing would be used to prosecute suspects for war crimes. Until this study was written, more than 9 years after the massacre was committed, Mr. Horan's report has not been required yet. More about that would go in the part about the untold stories in this study.

Back to the told stories, Luke met the father of two victims: Iqbal, 26, and Wael, 11. Wael had not been successful at school and had failed the first grade twice so his father tried another form of informal education at a mosque, and it did not work either. The father figured out that it might be because his son was hyperactive, so he made him join a karate club and convinced a friend to accept him as an apprentice in a laboratory for making artificial teeth. Wael started to prove successful.

Wael and Iqbal were living with their mother in West Aleppo as their parents were divorced. They wanted to visit their father in East Aleppo, so they left their mother's house on January 26 and disappeared. The father asked the police and they told him that his children were held in a military-intelligence unit, and they would be "shipped" to him. The next day he found them both in the river. Both were shot in the head; Iqbal's bullet went out through his ear and Wael's bullet went out through his eye. Their hands were tied behind their backs and Iqbal had a metal wire around his neck.

Hisham described to Luke one of the most shocking cases he saw among the river victims. It was a man whose throat was taken out. When he was found his head was twisted around. It was for an old man who worked as a caretaker at a school in West Aleppo. He went there with his son to get his salary. His son was still missing.

The number of the river victims as Luke was told was 234 victims including 94 buried in the Kabakibi or Cobblers' Garden which was designated for the unidentified victims (Figure 3.5). More has been said about the numbers of victims and why it varied in the HRW's report.



**Figure 3.5** Hisham, the man in black, while preparing to bury a body in the Cobblers' Garden where most of the unidentified victims were buried. Source: The New Yorker

Hisham, who was 28 years old then, would not tell his wife and five children about his work in the office of river martyrs because he wanted to avoid any questions about it. A nightmare Hisham frequently had was about burying a little boy shot in the head. The boy who was at the age of Hisham's eldest son would fold his hands around Hisham's neck resisting being kept in the grave.

Luke would frequently see two old men who would wait for more bodies to come to help get them out of the river. One of them told him how the bodies sometimes come so torn off from the water so it would be difficult to pull them out in one piece. Two bodies were buried next to the riverbed because it was not possible to move them anywhere. The first one was buried too close to the river and when the current became strong it pulled the body out of the ground again and drafted it away. Later in this study, a man who used to help get the bodies out would be the source of many untold stories too.

It seems the Cobblers' Garden was no longer a suitable place to bury the unidentified victims so another graveyard that was designated for the regime soldiers was used too. A man called Abu Hamdi came to look for his brother-in-law who had been missing for 15 days. He went to West Aleppo to buy milk for his children and never came back.

His family checked the photos of the victims and suspected one of the photos to be his, but they could not be sure. Because he has an old scar on his left forearm caused by an operation, they wanted to check the body to confirm. Abu Hamdi was accompanied by a lawyer, Yasin Hilal, who could convince the men taking care of the graveyard to cooperate as they required permission to open the grave. None was sure which grave they should open. They first opened a grave that had three bodies inside, but none had the required scar. They opened another grave, and the two bodies inside did not have the scar either. They could not find him.

Yasin Hilal, the lawyer accompanying Abu Hamdi, worked in the Integrated Judicial Council of Aleppo and was a colleague of Youssef Horan. He attended the burial of many victims in this graveyard and could remember some details about them. He stopped in front of one of the graves and started narrating the details of what he described as the strangest things he had ever seen. It was a man's body badly damaged by the water, but his wife embraced him and would not stop kissing his face which received a bullet that ruined the entire head.

The last story mentioned by Luke about the victims of the river was of a man that was brought to be buried on a wheelbarrow as his body was too worn to be carried. The skull was open leaving the head empty. His back had received so many stabs too. Most probably that victim was unidentified, and no more details were mentioned about him.

Luke's letter is full of details about the snipers' victims, and the blind-shelling victims, it also has many stories narrated by people who came back to life, who had been arrested and made it to freedom again. All the pieces already mentioned here including the one by CNN and the Guardian had background information about the conflict but the one published in the New Yorker was the richest.

### ***3.2.1.3 Documentaries***

Two documentaries were produced by two Syrian channels supporting the uprising: Syria TV (MARTYRS' RIVER) and Aleppo Today (THE RIVER MASSACRE: CLUES AND LIES). Another shorter documentary, (QUEIQ RIVER MASSACRE:

THE BURIED TRUTH), was made by a Lebanese channel supporting the regime called Al Mayadeen.

**Syria TV** interviewed in its documentary about the massacre many people who were directly involved in dealing with the victims [36]. The interviewees included a forensic expert, lawyers who participated in an investigation about the massacre, activists who documented the victims and buried them. The documentary tries to trace the investigation done and, in this context, narrates what is supposed to be the testimony of one of the criminals who participated in killing the victims. His name is Bashar Badleh and he was arrested and investigated giving many details that cannot be verified. I interviewed Mr. Youssef Huran who investigated the suspect for a couple of months and added some of what he told me to the untold stories this study is seeking to reveal.

The documentary does not include many stories about the victims. One of the few stories it tells is of a 70-year-old man who went to get his pension from West Aleppo and disappeared to be found with the other bodies in the river. It also tells a story of a man who was looking for his brother that had been missing for a month. He started crying and shouting hysterically when he found his brother among the bodies.

**Al Mayadeen's** short documentary or investigation tries to refute the information presented in the HRW's report by interviewing some of the victims' relatives [37]. One of the stories is about the victim who came first in the published lists of the identified victims. Mohammad Muneer Rihawi had been missing for 15 days before his body was retrieved from the river and Al Mayadeen interviewed Mustafa Rihawi who was introduced as a cousin of the victim. Mustafa claims that on the day of the massacre the people of Bustan Al-Qasr woke up after hearing gunshots, a detail that was not mentioned by anyone else. Another detail of the same nature mentioned by Mustafa is that there was a curfew in that area at that time. Then he narrates how his cousin was arrested in Bustan Al-Qasr by an armed group there before he was found dead in the river. According to Mustafa, they learned later about it from someone else who was arrested with Mohammad. Mustafa's testimony and many other testimonies in the documentary are conflicted and include many details about the numbers of victims and the current of the river that are overtly wrong.

One interesting testimony is of a father who lost his child in the massacre. His son is Mohammad Kattan and he described how he accompanied him to the crossing point at the end of Bustan Al-Qasr and never saw him again until he found his body in the river. He showed hesitation in specifying where exactly he left him. He first mentions Bustan Al-Qasr traffic lights and then he immediately says it was at the schools where he left him. The difference between the two locations he mentioned might be significant as the first leaves no doubt that his son reached West Aleppo. Forcing the victims' families to speak to present fake testimonies is not uncommon but it seems Mohammad's father tried to avoid it.

**Aleppo Today's** documentary mainly tries to counter the regime's story. In that context, the nephew of a folk singer who was among the victims is interviewed [38]. Abdulrahman Restom known as Abo Hassan Heritani was missing for a long time before he was found in the river on June 2, 2013, shot in the head. One report mentioned that he was arrested in West Aleppo where he was living but the date of the arrest went back to the end of 2012 or the beginning of 2013. His nephew mentioned that some family members saw his car later with an officer in the regime's army. The regime media would show a part of his songs praising Bashar Al-Assad, but his nephew would argue that his uncle had sung it before the uprising. However, the discovery of his body was about four months after the first wave of bodies had arrived [39].

All the reports and documentaries tackled here and many others I read and watched include a lot of background information about the massacre including how the victims were killed and how they reached the part of the river where they were found, but I was trying to focus on the personal details related to the victims. Hopefully, these pieces of information can form a database to facilitate any future projects to manage the painful heritage of this massacre.

All the above-mentioned sources of information about the massacre made their separate investigations either on the ground like the HRW, the Guardian, and the CNN or interviewed the eyewitnesses later who witnessed the massacre and were involved in dealing with the victims and their families. The Time published the testimony of Alessio Romenzi, an Italian photojournalist who was in Aleppo at the time of the

massacre. Likewise, the New Yorker has published a long letter by Luke Mogelson, an American journalist who narrated a lot of details about the people he met in Aleppo during the massacre.

The Syrian regime promoted from day one that the terrorists, namely Al Nusra Front, were the criminals who killed the victims. Later, when the regime backed by the Russian warplanes took control over East Aleppo, the Lebanese Channel Al Mayadeen that is known to be close to the Hezbollah militia prepared its short documentary.

There might be some other sources that this study could not reach. However, what has already been documented and summarised here can form a solid basis to try to understand and manage this negative heritage at hand, as sought by this study. Furthermore, key stakeholders were also reached and interviewed seeking the untold stories of the victims and the unattained justice so far. The personal stories of the victims are the main concern of this study and that is why the humanitarian part is considered rather than the legal one.

### **3.2.2 The Untold Stories of Aleppo's River Massacre**

Although there have been several attempts to reveal the stories of the victims of Aleppo's River Massacre, many stories are still untold. Little has been revealed even about the victims who were identified. Managing the heritage of this terrifying massacre would be faced by a heritage of fear, a heritage of lack of trust, and a heritage of unattainable justice.

To trace some of the untold stories, I communicated with some activists who were directly involved in retrieving the bodies out of the river and documenting them. One important source of the untold stories I could reach is Mr. Youssef Horan, the lawyer from the Syrian Institute for Justice who led the investigation about the massacre. Trying to reach the victims' families helped me understand why many stories are still untold as many families are unwilling to speak about their victimized family members and enrage the Syrian regime.

The main concern of this study is the told and untold stories of the victims. However, when attempting to manage the heritage of the massacre, some untold stories about the

investigation and documentation might also be relevant. How far the victims were honoured through the burial process or later through art is one of the untold stories too. The destiny of the legal report that took about one year to prepare is one of the untold stories that may clarify how unattainable justice can keep more and more stories untold. The destiny of the hair samples that were taken from the victims to use in any future DNA tests is also one of the untold stories.

### ***3.2.2.1 The Old Parents' Treble Tragedy***

One of the residents of Bustan Al-Qasr, the neighbourhood where the victims were found, would frequently volunteer to get the corpses out of the river. He told me about an old man and his wife who would come every morning and wait for their three sons to come among the victims. They lost communication with their children after they went to West Aleppo to work in construction as they did every day. When the three brothers did not come back and the bodies started coming with the current, they believed their children would be among them. They were too old to stand and wait like the others, so they would bring their chairs and wait to check whenever a new wave of bodies came carrying their children. Finally, one by one, they came.

The eyewitness who told me the story could not provide the names of the victims or at least the family name. I tried to figure out who they were from the list of victims, but it turned out that no accurate lists are available. Updating and correcting the lists available is an essential procedure when attempting to manage the negative heritage of the river.

The same eyewitness had a relative among the victims. Walid Abdulsalam Hemaimi, 57, was identified and described as someone who had been detained for 12 days by the Air Forces Intelligence, as mentioned next to his name in the identified victims' list included in the report published in Al-Ayyam Syria [31], before he was found in the river among the first wave of bodies arrived on January 29, 2013. The victim was a relative of the eyewitness's wife and according to him, he was a schoolteacher who went to West Aleppo to get his salary.

### *3.2.2.2 The Glorifications of Victims and Artistic Representation*

The victims of the river are thought to be the people who tried to distance themselves from the uprising that had broken out almost 20 months before the massacre was committed. This presupposition is based on the belief that those who crossed to the regime areas back and forth are the ones who were not involved in any revolutionary activities including the peaceful ones. Although this was confirmed by many of the victims' families, the presupposition that people who used to go to West Aleppo distanced themselves from the uprising cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, many of the victims who were not identified are thought to be arrested from different cities and killed under torture. However, a lot of the photos, videos and eyewitnesses' testimonies indicate that most of the victims were killed directly after being detained as they were still wearing their belts and their shoelaces were not taken off. These two details have been considered as indications that the victims were not put in prisons in the first place. The importance of this argument is reflected in the way people may think about the victims apart from just being victims.

Although the name of the river was changed by activists in Aleppo into the Martyr River, the burial of the victims and the lack of representation of the victims can indicate the lack of glory usually designated for martyrs.

Sadness, confusion, and shock are clear in the videos showing the burial of the river victims [40,41]. Surprisingly, only one of the victims identified in the available lists had a unique burial. There is a video showing people, most probably friends, neighbours, and relatives, gathering in front of his building and chanting for him as a martyr. Intending to glorify martyrs, chanting and firing guns into the air are common in Syria.

I could contact one of his cousins to get more information about him. His cousin was surprised that the martyr was identified among the victims of the river. He explained that his cousin was a Free Syrian Army fighter and was killed on the front line in the ongoing fighting with the regime soldiers at that time. He believed that his cousin was identified among the river victims by mistake. The videos of the burial show that the date was the same one when the first wave of victims arrived, and the place was also

Bustan Al-Qasr where people gathered and chanted. The activist who was filming clearly said while recording the video that the martyr was one of the river victims. There is a possibility that the victim's relative I talked to might be confused himself, but the less glorification shown in burying the other victims might be a strong indication that his information is more accurate than what the activist says in the video [42]. It seems many people grew hesitant to correct any wrong information as the media of the Syrian regime would exploit any mistake and try to overgeneralize it. Consequently, trying to correct the mistakes would put the people who try to do that under big pressure as they would be blamed for helping the regime's media. Nevertheless, now there are activists who believe in the importance of correcting the mistakes once they are made; and they gathered forces and formed a fact-checking platform called Verify or Taakad that is concerned with correcting the mistakes spread on social media focusing mainly on Syria ([verify-sy.com](http://verify-sy.com)). Likewise, when managing the negative heritage being created in Syria, a mechanism for checking the facts is essential. In addition to the reports of Human Rights Watch, some other serious studies can also be very helpful in this context. One example is a study about the massacre of Rasm al-Nafl village, in the eastern countryside of Aleppo. It was also in 2013 when more than two hundred civilians mainly women, children and old people were killed in cold blood by the Syrian regime and the supporting militias [43]. Another example is a study about demographic engineering and displacement that were used systematically by the Syrian regime as the study argues [44].

Many artists have devoted their art to support the Syrian Uprising. Some of them do that on daily basis like Aziz Asmar who came back to Syria from Lebanon where he used to work to participate in the uprising. Aziz lives in a town in the countryside of Idlib and he decorates the walls of the buildings destroyed by shelling with paintings and graffiti that carry revolutionary and humanitarian messages. Occasionally, he addresses international issues related to freedom and justice (Figure 3.6).



**Figure 3.6** Aziz Asmar's mural for George Floyd. Source NowThis Politics [45].

Sometimes he responds to the events in Syria immediately and sometimes he comes back to important events on their anniversaries (Figure 3.7).



**Figure 3.7** A painting by Aziz Asmar on the 9th anniversary of Deir Bealba Massacre. A massacre committed in Homs in 2012. Source Aziz's FB page [46].

Before the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Aleppo's River Massacre, I contacted Mr. Asmar to check whether he had already attempted to address the massacre or if he had plans to do that on the anniversary of the massacre that was coming a few days later. It seems he had not and his plans to tackle the memory of the massacre were interrupted by a rainy day.

Another Artist who also supports the Syrian Uprising on a daily basis is Marc Nelson, an American artist. He was attracted to the Syrian cause in 2016 after he started learning about it from the media. He saw horrible images and could not get them out of his head as he has told me in a voice message. He needed to put them on paper and since then, he has produced hundreds of sketches about the Syrian victims [47]. On the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Aleppo's River Massacre, he added two sketches representing two of its victims (Figures 3.8 & 3,9).



**Figure 3.8** Sketch by Marc Nelson from an eyewitness's photo. A young Syrian boy, his broken body found floating in the Queiq River. Aleppo, 29 January 2013 [48].



**Figure 3.9** Sketch by Marc Nelson based on eyewitness photo on the 8th anniversary of the Queiq River Massacre [49].

Rami Abdulhaq is Syrian artist who regularly participates in exhibitions illustrating characters that were actively involved in the peaceful activities of the uprising. For example, the White Helmets volunteers and some highly appreciated leaders in the battles against the Syrian regime are among the characters he illustrated. Mr. Abdulhaq wants to keep the memory of such heroes alive among the Syrians. When I interviewed him, he was planning another exhibition about the detainees in the regime prisons.

In his exhibition on the victims of the White Helmets volunteers, he presented 30 pictures of the volunteers who lost their lives trying to rescue other victims (Figure 3.10). Under each picture, the helmet of the featured victim is placed along with more

information about him including, in many of them, photos of the victims' children he left behind [50].



**Figure 3.10** Rami Abdulhaq's exhibition on the victims of the White Helmets volunteers [51].

In the interview conducted with Mr. Abdulhaq, he says that victims of massacres, like the Aleppo's River one, also represent the Syrian Uprising but the reason why he does not feature them in his works is the absence of known personal details about them. He explains that the absence of these details reduces their influence on the community as a whole compared to the inspiring heroes he usually features [52].

Every artist may have his or her own reasons for the choices they make when featuring a person or an event. However, apart from Marc Nelson's sketches (Figures 3.8 & 3.9), I could not find any artistic works representing Aleppo's River massacre and its victims. The reason why I contacted these three artists and investigated their motives is that I believe they are the most active artists concerned with the Syrian Uprising. The presupposition that the victims of the river have not received enough attention from the artists concerned with the Syrian Uprising based on how these victims are

valued might not be accurate. However, we still can easily notice that these victims are artistically underrepresented.

### ***3.2.2.3 The Report and DNA***

The HRW report about the river massacre mentions that another more detailed report was being prepared by Al-Shams Centre for Human Rights and Forensic Investigation based in Aleppo [30]. On the first anniversary of the massacre, a conference was held in Istanbul to announce the results of the investigation. By then the name of Al-Shams Centre was changed into the Syrian Institute for justice. The conference was organised in cooperation with No Peace Without Justice Organization under the title “If the River Speaks” which was the title of the report too. At that time, general findings were announced including accusing the Syrian regime represented by the Air Forces Intelligence, Military intelligence and the militias supporting the regime of committing the massacre. The number of the victims according to the report was 220 including 5 women who were raped and tortured. According to what was announced the report included more than 50 testimonies about where and when the victims were missed or arrested in addition to the reasons of arrest and who exactly arrested some of the victims. The motive beyond the massacre was terrorising the residents of Aleppo with some cases of revengeful, sectarian reasons as mentioned in the report.

Choosing to write about this report under the untold stories in this study is because too little was revealed about it. Seeking more information about the report, Mr. Youssef Horan who led the investigations was interviewed. Mr. Horan believes that the detailed content of the report should be kept secret for legal reasons and should only be fully displayed in a specialized court. At the same time, he expresses his disappointment that there are no signs that such a court would be available in the near future. His disappointment is also based on the fact that he failed to find any international party that could guarantee to organize such a court in the future so that he would have managed to hand on the suspect who was arrested by the Free Syrian Army as a participant in the massacre. Mr. Horan is convinced that the suspect really participated in the massacre as he gave details about the victims and brutal methods of killing that he would not have known otherwise. For example, the suspect gave details about the women who were raped and killed. According to Mr. Horan, the women found were

drafted by the river to a village in the southern countryside of Aleppo where they were buried once they were found without any documentation.

Another source of disappointment is the destiny of the hair samples that were taken from the victims. They were preserved in Aleppo for a future DNA test. Unfortunately, after being preserved for almost four years they were not used. When eastern Aleppo was besieged and taken over by the regime in December 2016, the hair samples were left behind [53].

The activist who cut the hair samples from the victims bitterly revealed how he tried to take big samples in case more than one party required to make the expected DNA tests. He never expected they would not be used and would be left in Aleppo instead of taking them to a safer place [54].

Feeling disappointed is contagious. Moreover, it is so challenging to chase the stories of the victims whose families still feel threatened and seek safety in silence. Examining their distorted bodies, trying to figure out who is who and imagine how they had been murdered, is a too heavy psychological burden. Addressing negative heritage is not a pleasant journey but seeking justice and working to prevent future atrocities are worth trying.

# CHAPTER 4

## MANAGING THE HERITAGE OF ALEPPO'S RIVER MASSACRE

The previous chapter of this study is meant to provide the needed information to attempt managing one of the so many cases of the Syrian negative heritage. Two proposals are suggested in this chapter as bases to remember and visually represent the heritage of Aleppo's River Massacre. The first proposal is based on some of the stories narrated in the previous chapter and meant to exemplify how the victims can be remembered to urge achieving their missed justice. The other proposal is about achieving symbolic justice through the artistic representation of the victimizer.

### 4.1 Proposal for Flexible Representation of the Heritage of Aleppo's River Massacre

The management of the negative heritage can go through flexible visual representation that can be easily adapted if there is a need for that. Flexibility can work as a tool to achieve justice by leaving the door open for updating the database of the negative heritage. An already existing example indicating a sense of flexibility through the feature of being able to expand is a memorial in Berlin for the members of parliament (Reichstag) who opposed Hitler and lost their lives in return [55]. The memorial had a space for adding more slabs to represent more victims who might be identified in the future (Figure 4.1).



**Figure 4.1** Memorial of the members of parliament in front of the Reichstag [55].

With a more recent heritage like the Syrian one, flexibility is essential. The heritage of Aleppo's River massacre is an example of how difficult it is to get a comprehensive database despite all the available information and reports. The heritage of fear Syrians are suffering from can hinder building an accurate database and, consequently, postpone initiating the management of the negative heritage until the database is complete. That might result in achieving little if any. A flexible representation of the heritage can facilitate getting more information about the targeted heritage and integrating the obtained information in that representation. Managing what is already known can be the cornerstone for more comprehensive management in the future. Visualising the heritage and leaving the door open for the stakeholders, especially the victims' families, to add to it later can flexibly extend the database of the heritage and re-represent it after the validity of information added is checked. A committee of the most interested stakeholders can be formed for this purpose.

A suggested representation of the victims based on their told and untold stories is presented especially for this study. The representation is done by Aisha Al.Omar, an architect specialized in reconstruction and rehabilitation after wars and disasters

(Figures 4.2 & 4.3). Every victim is represented by a grave tombstone with the basic information of the victim and a plaque including a QR code that can reveal the story of the victim when scanned by mobile phones. As a starting point, only the victims whose stories have been revealed will be represented. Their stories will be uploaded on a website especially allocated to manage the heritage of the massacre. The number of the tombstones lining the riverbanks can increase with the discovery of new stories. More flexibility is also achieved by the possibility to edit the stories if more accurate information is available and the decision of what to add or remove will be taken by a committee of the most interested stakeholders as suggested above. As a start, the same location where the victims were found can be allocated on one of the metaverses, 3D virtual worlds, to manage the representation virtually. Relatives of victims and human rights activists can establish interest groups to collect and verify the needed data and then represent it virtually. Many websites like [nextearth.io](http://nextearth.io) or [secondlife.com](http://secondlife.com) might be used to host the intended representation. In today's world of pandemics and travel restrictions, virtual reality can be more spread and accessible, especially for places like Syria.



**Figure 4.2** Sketch by Aisha Al.Omar. Memorial for the victims of Aleppo's River Massacre. General view.



**Figure 4.3** Sketch by Aisha Al.Omar. Memorial for the victims of Aleppo's River Massacre. Representation for one of the victims.

A representation centre can be considered in the case of Aleppo's River massacre in the same site. It can include physical versions of all the stories reached in addition to the least shocking photos that can illustrate the massacre committed including relevant works of art like the ones done by Marc Nelson (Figures 3.8 & 3.9). Visitors may have the ability to write on a visitors' notebook their comments and express their feelings. A virtual centre may be created and updated to include the stories of the victims and the changes in the visitors' book. Likewise, a visitors' e-book can also be considered. Thus, managing the heritage of Aleppo's River massacre can be more sustainable.

In the Syrian case, the virtual representation may precede the physical one and can promote it. Both, however, are meant to promote justice which is still missing in Syria.

#### **4.1.1 Evaluation of the Flexible Management Proposal**

The idea of using QR codes is already applied with real graves and some concerns about the long-term validity of this technique are discussed. The materials from which the gravestones are usually made, like granite or marble, are meant to make them last as long as possible. Therefore, integrating the QR code technology with them raised the concern that this technology may be outdated and replaced by a more advanced one. Another concern is the commercial origin of this technology and how it may create an undesirable impression when applied for a humanitarian cause. However, they have the additional merit of providing a virtual public space that is accessible easily from distance. They can provide an interactive digital space to add and preserve information [56].

#### **4.2 Symbolic Justice Proposal for Managing the Massacre Heritage**

A form of symbolic justice can be achieved by a sculpture of Bashar al-Assad lying on one bank of the river with his hands tied behind his back and half of his head is blown out. The stakeholders can decide who else should be similarly represented to be so remembered by future generations. As for the victims, another representation option could be a memorial wall or an obelisk with their names on it. The unidentified victims can also be represented by oaks planted by the river. All these suggested

representations can be developed by interest groups and worked on in one of the 3D virtual worlds, metaverses, becoming more and more popular.

The symbolic justice as an aim of managing the heritage of Aleppo's River Massacre may help in attempting a more accurate version of history. And I call this kind of justice symbolic here because it deals with the image of the victimizer rather than the victimizer in person. Many criminal dictators are today controversial, as some still consider them heroes. That is because the negative heritage they created has not been well managed. Symbolic justice in this sequence can at least expose the right image of the negative heritage makers to the coming generations. A Syrian Artist, Abdalla Al Omari, tried to achieve his own version of Symbolic justice as a refugee by painting the world leaders as refugees too (Figure 4.4). Al Omari's work can be considered an example of symbolic justice achieved by virtual representation. The representation suggested in this study might look more shocking, seeking consolation feelings for the victims' families on the one hand, and provoking ones for the dictators on the other hand.



**Figure 4.4** Abdalla Al Omari's The Vulnerability Series depicting the many presidents as refugees [57].

Future management of this cold-blooded killing can make use of the Rwandan Genocide heritage management. However, restrictions might be imposed by the Islamic religion on how to deal with human remains. Displaying bones, the way it is done in Nyamata, needs to be questioned first.

#### **4.2.1 Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Symbolic Justice Proposal**

Featuring the victims is quite common in negative heritage management and its effectiveness can be predicted. However, featuring the victimizer is more challenging in this proposal. Visualizing the idea of the proposal can be very helpful in attaining a more accurate evaluation of the suggested management proposal for the heritage of Aleppo's River Massacre. A sketch of Bashar al-Assad's statue lying killed on the banks of the river with his hands tied behind his back and half of his head blown out can be a good tool to pilot the expected effect on both his supporters and his victims' families alike.

The idea of the proposal was shared on social media to get feedback and an artist, Dina Al Hamdan, showed an interest in visualizing the idea. However, she showed concern that portraying the victimizer in the same way his victims were found might create an undesired sense of sympathy with him. This concern adds an additional challenge to be taken into consideration.

Another important stakeholder to consider here is the religious community that might be reluctant to heritage preservation based on creating sculptures of human beings. The dynamics of arts and values-centred preservation from an Islamic perspective could form a heated discussion in this context. This religious community might not be able to hinder the form of management agreed on by the heritage specialists, the victimized community, and other stakeholders including human rights activists, artists, and others. However, it might affect the popularity and consequently the effectiveness of the heritage management.

#### **4.2.2 Negative Heritage from an Islamic Perspective**

There are many examples that can be classified as negative heritage in Islam. These examples include cases related to Idols, places of punished people, Pharaoh and Satan.

A different management approach is exemplified for each case. Demolition, avoidance, perseverance, and active, symbolic interaction are the four management approaches exemplified here.

Idols are considered a negative heritage in Islam and there is a strong obligation to destroy them if they are worshipped instead of Allah. For example, that what happened in Macca when it was controlled by Muslims. Here demolition is meant to remove things that may tempt or confuse the people [58].

As for the places of punished people such as the dwellings of Madyan and Thamood, avoiding visiting these places is recommended. However, if one is to go through them it should be done quickly with the intention to learn a lesson and weeping lest one suffers what they suffered because they had wronged themselves [59].

Perseverance is or was the approach for managing the negative heritage of Pharaoh as a tyrant who, with his soldiers, chased the Prophet Moses (PBUH) and the Children of Israel who believed with him to bring them back and punish them. The Quran narrates how they came to the sea and could not go any further, but Allah honoured His Prophet Moses and the believers who were with him by making the sea dry for them so that they could walk across it. Pharaoh, in his arrogance and foolishness, followed Moses and the people who were with him, but he and those who were with him drowned in the same sea that Moses and the believers with him had crossed. The Quran says that Pharaoh died but his body was preserved "This day shall We save thee in the body, that thou mayest be a sign to those who come after thee! but verily, many among mankind are heedless of Our Signs!" (Quran, 10:92) as translated on Quranopedia.com. This preservation is thought to be a temporary one, but the archaeologists and historians might also prove that the body of Pharaoh is still preserved today [60].

Another case of negative heritage in Islam is the site where the devil tried to seduce Adam (PBUH) to disobey Allah. The devil or "Shaytaan" would appear in Mina near Macca and try to convince Adam to reject Allah's will, but Ibrahim would throw seven stones at him and the devil would fade into the earth. That would be repeated three times at three close areas in Mina. The three places would be known later as the

Jamaraat or the stone pillars representing the devil. Stoning the Jamaraat the same way Adam did is one of the basic rites of the Islamic pilgrimage, Hajj [61]. This symbolic interaction with the site is meant to train Muslims to resist the temptations of the devil. So that the negative heritage of the site is managed to ensure its values-centred preservation.

The above-mentioned sites of negative heritage in Islam have been demolished, avoided or preserved based on Islamic values. These values include the refusal of polytheism, remembering the people who wronged themselves and learning the lessons from their sufferings, and highlighting the consequences of arrogance and pride. Studying the last example about stoning the Jamaraat might be very useful when considering managing more recent negative heritage from an Islamic prescriptive.

A basic procedure for managing negative heritage is creating memorials to honour the memory of victims and highlight the criminality of the victimizer like the memorials featuring Rwanda Genocide, the murdered Jews of Europe and the African Burial Ground in [11, 14, 62]. Architectural and artistic proposals are usually prepared to represent the victims and the traumatic history. To achieve that fairly and thoughtfully, evaluating the effectiveness of the representation precedes the creating of the memorials and continues after they are created. In the Syrian case, one important factor in evaluating the effectiveness of any future memorials that attempt values-centred preservation of the negative heritage being created now is how far the values are coherent with the Islamic principle and accepted by the Muslim community.

Trying to reach a better understanding of the dynamics of managing negative heritage from an Islamic perspective, the proposal for managing the painful heritage of Aleppo's River massacre is considered. This proposal can be challenging as it features the victimizer by portraying Bashar Al-Assad in the place of the victims who were found in the river with their heads blown out and their hands tied behind their backs. The value of justice is a pillar in Islam and Al Adl which means justice is one of Allah's names. Also, punishment is an important means for securing the life of possible future victims and of future possible victimizers alike. It is supposed that they would fear punishment and refrain from committing crimes. "There is life for you in retaliation, O people of understanding, so that you may refrain." (Quran, 2:179)

However, how to achieve justice, though a symbolic one, might be a controversial issue. The procedure of making a statue for Bashar Al-Assad, as suggested in the proposal should take into consideration the Islamic view towards drawing and sculpting humans. According to the popular Islamic website Islam Question & Answer, sculpting which shows images of animate beings, both humans and animals is “haram” so not permissible. The fatwa under the title “Sculpting with clay – what is and is not permissible” is based on the cursing of the image-makers as attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): “The most severely punished of the people on the Day of Resurrection will be the image-makers.” The reason of prohibition according to the fatwa is that it is an imitation of the creation of Allah, and because it is a means that leads to polytheism [63].

Another fatwa states that images that do not have complete features, which do not have a nose or eyes, are not included under the heading of “haram” images, and the ones who make them are not included in this warning, because they cannot truly be said to be images, and these images do not imply imitating the creation of Allah [64]. Another fatwa includes an indication of permitting of figures that are not usually treated with respect (unlike statues and idols) [65].

One of the fatwas on the ruling on drawing in Islam states that despite the forbiddance of drawing animate beings, an exception is made in cases of necessity, such as drawing pictures of criminals so that they will be known and caught and other cases of necessity. If the ruler decides that producing images of criminals is necessary, because of the seriousness of their crimes and to protect the Muslims from their evil when they are known, or for other reasons, there is nothing wrong with that [66]. The fatwa is justified by a verse from the Quran in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “...He has explained to you in detail what is forbidden to you, except under compulsion of necessity ...” (Quran, 6:119).

However, a direct question about the proposal suggested that includes a statue of the victimizer was sent to the website. “This is not permitted as making images of animated objects is not allowed,” a direct answer was also received (Figure 4.5).

The screenshot shows the website 'Islam Question & Answer' with a search bar and navigation menu. The main content area displays a question titled 'Values-centred art' with ID 372673, dated 29-05-2021. The question text is: 'A Stream of Bodies in Aleppo's River is a report by Human Rights Watch that investigates the cold-blooded killing of at least 147 civilians between January 29 and March 14 in 2013. All the bodies reached the opposition-controlled part of Aleppo at that time through the river that went through the government-controlled areas first. Most victims' hands were tied behind their backs and their faces could hardly be identified as the shooting targeted the heads at close range. A study for managing the negative heritage being created now in Syria is also concerned about how Islamic any suggested procedure would be. One of the suggestions is seeking a form of symbolic justice that can be achieved by a sculpture of Bashar al-Assad lying on one bank of Aleppo's river with his hands tied behind his back and half of his head is blown out. So that he will be so remembered by future generations. Is drawing and sculpting for this purpose and in this form Halal?'. Below the question, a green box contains the answer: 'This is not permitted as images of animate objects is not allowed.' signed by 'Supervisor' on 31-05-2021 18:21. A left sidebar shows user navigation options like 'My questions', 'Send a question', 'My comments', 'Personal details', and 'Account settings'.

**Figure 4.5** The question on visual representation sent to Islam Q & A Website and the answer received.

Thus, the attempts to manage the Syrian negative heritage can be demotivated because of the absence of community leaders who can make a difference in the traditional school of thought.

# CHAPTER 5

## FINDINGS

Based on the lessons learned from the cases examined in the second chapter of this study and from addressing managing the heritage of Aleppo's River Massacre, a general plan is presented in this chapter. Also, this final part of the study mentions the limitations of this study and the expected difficulties and some recommendations for managing the Syrian negative heritage.

### **5.1 A General Plan for Remembering and Representation of the Syrian Negative Heritage**

The cases examined in the second chapter and especially the three cases from the American negative heritage can be considered good examples for a bottom-up approach of heritage management where the community takes the initiative to manage the heritage and try to get its desired values represented. Likewise, in Syria, the community can also take the lead in managing its negative heritage.

#### **5.1.1 Initiating and Planning**

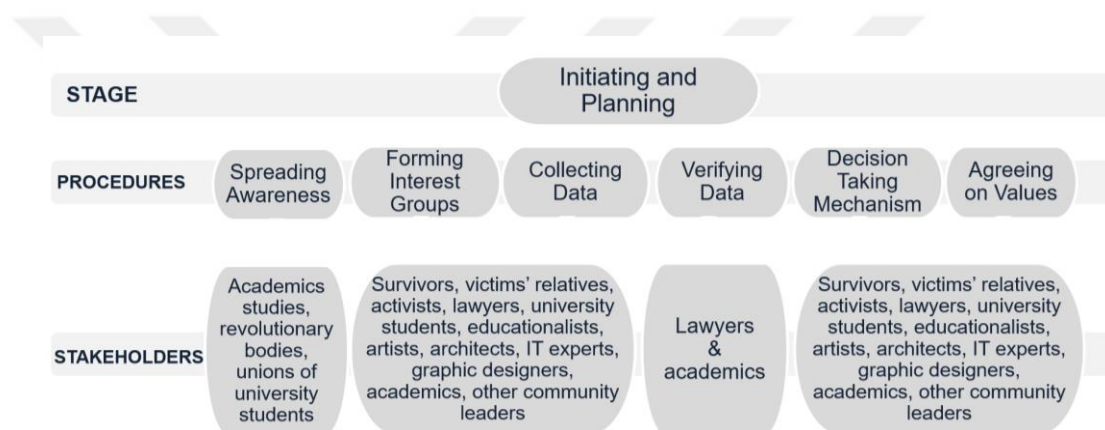
Spreading awareness about the importance of managing the Syrian negative heritage is a milestone in the management process. Revolutionary bodies and unions of university students can be basic stakeholders in this stage. Academic studies can provide the required data for this stage. Successful management experiences can be narrated and their role in the recovery of the community and making it a resilient one can be highlighted.

Forming interest groups for each negative heritage case can be the cornerstone for the management process. Survivors, victims' relatives, activists, lawyers, university students, educationalists, artists, architects, IT experts, graphic designers, academics, and other community leaders can form these groups. All these stakeholders can be actively involved at one or more stages of the management process.

Data collection can be a task that all the members of the interest groups participate in. However, the most specialized members, especially lawyers and academics, can form a committee for verifying the available information.

A decision-taking mechanism can be agreed on at this stage. An elected hierarchy inside each interest group can be the most appropriate option for taking decisions.

Agreeing on the basic reason of remembering the negative heritage should be another milestone for starting to achieve any steps in the heritage management process. Thus, the values advocated can lead the management process by setting the key performance indicators. Figure 5.1 summarises the initiating and planning stage.



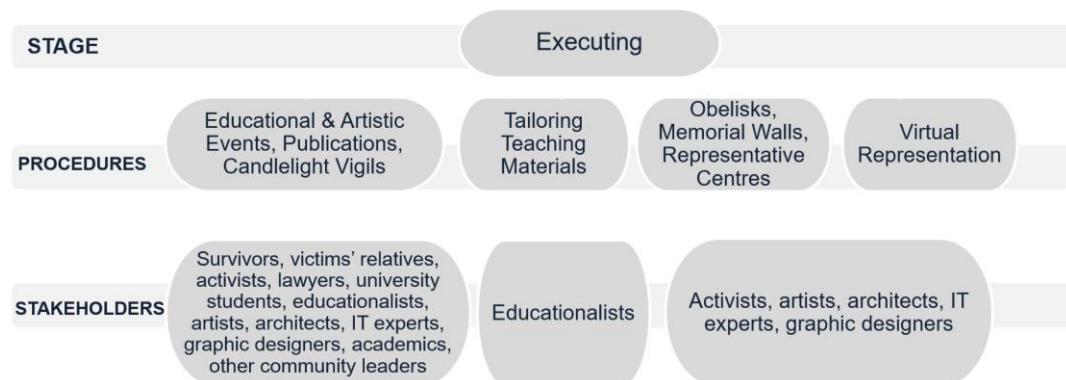
**Figure 5.1** Summary of the initiating and planning stage

### 5.1.2 Executing

The representation options which the interest groups can adopt at first can include educational or artistic events, publications, and candlelight vigils. Educationalists can tailor some teaching materials that reflect the negative heritage and highlight the desired values of remembering the related heritage.

More tangible options can also be considered like obelisks, memorial walls, and representative centers where photographs, paintings and artifact remains might be implemented. The virtual representation for these options can accompany or precede their physical representation. It can also be considered as an alternative solution.

Creative and flexible options can be suggested and applied as long as they achieve the desired values agreed on. Figure 5.2 summarises the executing stage.



**Figure 5.2** Summary of the executing stage

### 5.1.3 Evaluating and Developing

Getting Feedback from the targeted audience, through a simple paper or electronic form, can form the basic tool to evaluate the success of the managing project. This success can be measured in a combination of a quantitative and qualitative method by multiplying the positive effect created and expressed in the feedback by the number of audiences reached. The positive effect can start from sympathy with the victims and increase by condemning the victimizer. At the top of the scale for making a positive effect comes doing something to contribute to achieving justice or preventing creating future tragedies. A committee of the stakeholders can be assigned for this evaluating task.

Coordination between the different interest groups can result in better recognition of their existence and more success. The audience each interest group can reach could be increased if the other interest groups participate in promoting one another's activities. Moreover, their efforts to show the big picture can result in a better understanding of the nature of the Syrian negative heritage as a whole. A Union for managing the Syrian negative heritage can also be formed only after the interest groups are crystallized. Trying to follow a top-bottom approach by seeking to form the union before the interest groups are well established can be counterproductive and attract the kind of

people who are obsessed with leading empty, fruitless projects. The bigger the title is the more attractive it becomes to such people who by nature are very good at reaching the top of such foundations and achieving nothing else. Figure 5.3 summarises the evaluating and developing stage.



**Figure 5.3** Summary of the evaluating and developing stage

The **short-term** application of the proposed plan starts with spreading awareness about the importance of tackling the Syrian atrocities and working to turn them into humanitarian heritage to seek justice. However, the first practical step comes with forming the first interest group that can help in visualizing the idea for whomever interested in working in this field. Forming other interest groups may be achieved in the **mid-term** phase of the plan along with collecting and verifying data which should start in the short-term phase but may continue into the mid- and **long-term** phases as expected due to the recentness of the Syrian conflict. Reaching a mechanism to make decisions and agreeing on values should mark the end of the short-term phase and the beginning of the mid-term one.

The procedures suggested in the executing stage are supposed to take place in the mid-term phase. However, some of these procedures might also be piloted in the short-term phase while working on spreading awareness of the importance of managing the Syrian negative heritage. For example, publications already tackle the Syrian atrocities can be categorized and used to draw attention to their importance and stimulate further

efforts in this field. Similarly, the related works of art already available can be collected and projected in physical or virtual exhibitions.

The evaluating and developing stage is to be addressed in the long-term phase and can result in a formal body when Syrians reach an agreed-on government that can best meet their needs and desired vision of what the future Syria should be like.

## **5.2 Expected Difficulties for Managing the Syrian Negative Heritage**

The Syrian negative heritage is already too huge and is still being created. The examples of negative heritage mentioned in this study like massacres, targeting schools and hospitals, chemical attacks, torturing to death, and displacement are not inclusive of all the Syrian negative heritage. For example, the Syrian blind barrel bombs [67], the more destructive but as blind parachute ones, the Russian earthquake-like bunker-buster bombs, the fatal cluster munitions and vacuum bombs targeting residential buildings are all not attempted in the above management proposals. Personally, as an eyewitness during the siege of Aleppo in 2016, I attribute most of my white hair to these countless attacks [68].

All the examples mentioned about the Syrian negative heritage including the main case study about Aleppo's River massacre require greater investigating efforts to prepare the ground for managing the Syrian negative heritage.

The suggested proposals might not be applicable in the near future as Russia and the Syrian regime are now controlling Aleppo, Ghouta, Khan Sheikhoun and most of the areas where schools and hospitals were targeted. Moreover, many Syrians who made it to safety and live in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime are still worried about the safety of their relatives who still live under the control of the regime and might be punished as a kind of revenge. Thus, the heritage of fear created by the Syrian regime is still terrifying a lot of the victims and their families, limiting their participation in any effort to promote and achieve justice. One of the people I interviewed explained that he is trying to keep a low profile although he is living in Europe now. He fears that the regime can reach him there and either assassinate him, or kidnap and take him back to Syria.

Another difficulty is related to the overwhelming sense of disappointment many Syrians have built over the last painful years. Many have lost hope that a positive change may occur and, consequently, they have grown indifferent and less cooperative. Nothing can be done, or, more accurately, none is allowed to change what the international community has imposed on Syrians as they believe. Many also believe that belonging to the majority in their country has made their suffering and death less worth of the attention many countries usually pay when the victims belong to the minority.

This negative psychological heritage makes many Syrians moody and reluctant to cooperate especially if you are trying to remind them of what they have been trying hard to forget. Moreover, there is a hunger for appreciation for those who have been involved in revolutionary activities. Many believe that they were betrayed at some level or at least their efforts to make a positive change have been underrated. Therefore, no consistent positive behaviour on their part is expected in the heritage management efforts.

Another current difficulty with more complications in the future is a technical one. A lot of the links that are supposed to lead to videos or photos documenting the victims are not valid anymore most probably because of their violent content. Besides, many articles about Syria that have been published in some international newspapers are also unreachable anymore for unknown reasons. With the passage of time, even the recorded evidence of the crimes is disappearing.

In addition to the realities on the ground, the heritage of fear, the psychological, and the technical difficulties, there is a lack of any previous management of the Syrian negative heritage. Therefore, convincing the society in general and the stakeholders in specific of how managing the Syrian negative heritage can boost justice is quite challenging. Moreover, the artistic features in heritage management might not be received warmly by the traditional school of thought.

### 5.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

The recently created Syrian negative heritage was tackled in this study. Different techniques and methods were suggested to present and manage this heritage to turn it into a useful one to achieve a minimum level of symbolic justice for the victims.

The political use of heritage, as discussed when tackling the negative heritage of conflict in Cyprus, may help in forming a unified identity for the Syrians. However, it may also be used by the Syrian authorities, the four governments on the ground now, to keep holding to power regardless of any democratic practices. Thus, hatred instead of seeking justice might be the value promoted behind the attempts of turning the atrocities committed into heritage.

The expected touristic function of the Syrian negative heritage may follow the Rwandan genocide memorials example of not requiring fees for visiting the memorials. This way the Syrian negative heritage can indirectly participate in the economic development of the country without risking being indifferent to the sufferings of the victims as exemplified in the Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania, Australia.

Community-based, values-centred preservation of the Syrian negative heritage can be attempted and approached through a bottom-up management process. Techniques to increase awareness and gain support can be inspired from the negative heritage management of the battle of Little Bighorn site, Manzanar and Lower Manhattan's African Burial Ground site. These techniques include representative centres, lectures, publications, vigils, and exhibitions worked on by interest groups and committees.

To overcome the physical limitations, virtual management of the Syrian negative heritage might be the best available option for now and can achieve some of the desired objectives including a sense of justice. Moreover, it can pave the way for future management on the ground. The suggested proposals in this study and many others featuring other aspects of the Syrian negative heritage can be virtually visualized and an interactive map of Syria including the negative heritage sites can be created by

using a 3D virtual world, metaverse. Thus, promoting the virtual management of the painful heritage in Syria can help achieve virtual Symbolic justice as a step in the journey of preserving the negative Syrian heritage and turning it into a useful heritage. Unfortunately, the Syrian calendar is full of negative heritage memories. Almost every city, town or village has got its mutual sad story or stories that can be well documented and managed to preserve the painful heritage related. Also, attempting values-centred preservation of the Syrian negative heritage through community, culture and beliefs perspectives can be the focus of a future study.

Taking into consideration the limitations and difficulties expected, it is highly recommended to:

- create management plans for the Syrian negative heritage or adapt the one created in this study;
- form interest groups that can be very productive in the bottom-up or community approach of management;
- establish a flexible and transparent methodology that can handle the technical and psychological difficulties for building the related databases needed;
- seek the virtual representation of the negative heritage that can make use of the already available artistic representations and work on creating more of them;
- stimulate a more flexible approach that can accept and encourage the artistic features usually included in heritage management;
- engage teachers and educationists in the management efforts through creating and using related teaching materials that can help in remembering the negative heritage and promote the desired values like seeking justice; and
- encourage academics to do more research on managing the Syrian negative heritage.

- coordinate with Syrian and foreign heritage management experts to provide advice and supervision through the management process.



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