Mahmoud Barakat

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE ANCIENT VILLAGES OF NORTHERN SYRIA IN THE MEMORIES OF DISPLACED LOCALS

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Central European University Private University

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by

Mahmoud Barakat

(Syria)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

Central European University Private University, Vienna, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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External Reader

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External Supervisor

Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **Mahmoud Barakat**, candidate for the MA degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 27 May 2024

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Signature

Abstract

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Syria's rich archaeological heritage has faced serious threats, including looting, damage associated with fighting, and the intentional destruction of antiquities. This destruction is prevalent across the ancient villages in northern Syria, some of which are part of World Heritage sites. The destruction is not limited to the built environment; it extends to a massive, government driven campaign of cutting down of olive trees, fully uprooting and removal them. There are a huge number of displaced local people from this area who were forced to escape and flee to seek refuge near the Turkish border; some have sought sanctuary within and nearby the cultural landscape of northwest Syria.

The research focuses on the cultural landscapes in the southern part of Idlib province in Syria. The features of cultural heritage at these archaeological sites and surrounding olive groves are assessed carefully, identifying their resonance within the memories of displaced locals as well in memoryscapes form out of displacement and comprising the monuments, olive groves, and displaced locals. The study aims at exploring issues of the importance of local heritage for the displacement community as well as to map their memories of home, where special echoes can find new, healing meaning.

The role that such cultural landscapes play in the preservation of collective memory and post-war psychological recovery will be pivotal. There is the possibility that cultural heritage could be used as one tool in helping reduce the trauma of displaced people and, eventually, even in internal post-war recovery in Syria. Moreover, there is a need to incorporate forward-looking heritage futures into research and findings connected to resilient heritage and the ability to aspire during displacement. Finally, there are new, social connections that can be created through provoking and stimulating memories of this special cultural landscape.

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I also express my sincere thanks to all my friends, classmates and others who have helped me directly or indirectly whenever I needed.

A huge thank you must go to those who shared their stories. You are the ones who made this possible. Especial thanks to my childhood friends who shared with me and shaped unforgotten memories of that landscape of the research.

I would like to express my very great appreciation and thanks to Dr. Iván Sárosdy who has always given me huge support and help.

Finally, heartfelt thanks are due to my family, my parents and siblings for providing me with continuous encouragement and sharing their memories. I dedicate this work to them in their displacement. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Thank you.

A fleeting memory of my former hometown. A view from the olive groves in Hazarin, Idlib in 2017, before displacement. Photographed by Mahmoud Barakat

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List of Abbreviations

1. AFP - Agence France-Presse
2. a.s.l - above sea level
3. BC - Before Christ
4. CE - Common Era
5. CLF - The Cultural Landscape Foundation
6. ICOMOS - the International Council on Monuments and Sites
7. IDPs - Internally Displaced People
8. NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
9. PTSD - Post-traumatic stress disorder
10. UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Introduction

My hometown and the place where I grew up, lies near Albara, in a town called Hazarin, one of the 'Ancient Villages of Northern Syria'.[1] I was eight years old at the beginning of the olive harvesting season in October 2000 when I first went with my family to gather olives in a field close to cliffs and some ancient monuments close to the village. That day, I asked my mother about one of the rocks, with a wheel shape, which lay in the middle of the field among other carved rocks and cylindrically shaped basalt stones. She answered that it was an old press stone that the former inhabitants of this land used in their olive oil production. Such occasions and many other later events constructed a sense of curiosity, intense interest, memory, attachment, and speculation in the mind of that eight-year-old child.

Since I was a child, I have been drawn to those ancient objects and structures lying in different places in the monuments that surround my hometown. At the same time, these scattered monuments shaped the landscape through a unique combination of natural and heritage elements. Not only did these monuments shape the landscape but, from that long ago time, my memory and sense of place as well. Those monuments, combined with agricultural activities that took place around them, from olive harvesting and fig gathering as well as grape cultivation, are key parts of what comprises the essence of the region known as the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria. The narratives surrounding them were integrated into the daily cultivation work and field activities through myths and stories transmitted through generations.

However, I only learned that my hometown lies within the World Heritage area known as the 'Ancient Villages of Northern Syria' when I was 25 years old. I was surprised and proud at the

[1] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 'Ancient Villages of Northern Syria', UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed 8 October 2022, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1348/. Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2011.

same time. The same is probably true for the other local people in this area as well as in other living villages lying close by these sites from the ancient past. I reckon that they were not aware of many academic facts about these sites before the war began and even now.

I am also very much interested in this research topic involving elements of landscape, memory, conflict, displacement and cultural heritage because the topic touches me on a personal level, as a displaced person, longing for that area and trying to maintain what is left of both joyful and painful memories of that landscape, people, places, buildings and environment. Often, I recall those valleys, trees, events, activities, smells and senses. These thoughts make me think about connections between memory, trauma and the cultural landscape of my former home. My family, people from my home region and I have gone through a type of displacement, forced, violent and painful, and I am going to talk about some of the effects of that here. If that goes deeply into my emotions, it also runs deep for many other displaced people. I have a responsibility and duty as an academic, able to conduct the research and as one of many locals displaced from that cultural landscape, to carry out this research as a contribution to academia and to reduce the suffering of displaced people from my region and all over the world.

Chapter 1: Overview

1.1. Methodology

1.1.1. Sources

I used a comprehensive assessment of key aspects of the cultural landscape surrounding my hometown to assess the interconnectedness between local people, their memories of this lost cultural landscape and the formation of memories of the cultural landscapes in absentia. I carried out the research in two phases, and the first phase falls into two parts:

1. Fieldwork conducted partially through friends still living in Northern Syria, to collect data—conducting interviews with heritage workers, Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and locals in the diaspora—within northern Syria. I needed their support to conduct interviews *in situ* with locals who have been internally displaced from the southern Idlib region, as in-person interviews would have been impossible for me to undertake on my own. Data collection was largely carried out through various internet media.

2. The second part involved writing more in-depth narratives of my memories and those of my father as a former landowner and olive tree farmer to describe the memory of this landscape through the eyes of two different generations. Left unwritten, such memories will be lost for the coming generations of my dispersed family.

The second phase comprises assessment and analysis after the collected data was processed (comparative analysis, qualitative analyses). I discussed the outcomes based on the interviewees' answers and explanations. I used information from secondary literature and news

articles to cover updates about recent events in the Idlib region. The interviews in this research were carried out in a local dialect of Arabic, the mother tongue of the displaced locals from the south part of the Idlib governorate. Most of the interviews were recorded. I transcribed and translated the interviews and strove to avoid lost content and provide the most accurate meaning in translation.

1.1.2. Methods

One of the research methods utilized in this research included limited fieldwork to collect data.

> Interviews were conducted with local cultural heritage experts and internally displaced, local people from southern Idlib province. This part of the research aimed to more accurately assess the interconnectedness between local place identity and these cultural landscapes, now so radically transformed by war. The interviews were carried out within the local community in three towns: Albara, Kafer Nbl, and Hazarin, in southern Idlib province. The interviewees are internally displaced people within Syria or externally displaced as refugees. The objective was to construct a bottom-up understanding of how different groups of locals with connections to this region relate to and remember the local cultural heritage.[2] The interviews were conducted with 15 adults: 6 women and 9 men, one of whom is a heritage worker. The age of the participants ranges from 24 to 70 years old. The personal interviews delivered mostly qualitative data designed to help me understand the nature of memory and emotions in displacement as these connect to the cultural landscape of their former homeland. To protect the interviewees privacy, I used their first name only as

[2] Gustav Wollentz, 'Making a Home in Mostar: Heritage and the Temporalities of Belonging', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23, no. 10 (26 November 2017): 928–45, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2017.1347891.

they live in a conflict zone and their personal data needs to be protected. The quotes from the interviews provided in this study were selected as the segments relevant to the research topic.

The in-depth interviews took place in person and online.[3] The challenge consisted of finding suitable interview partners and holding discussions with local heritage specialists from Syria generally and from the north part of the country in particular because of the ongoing active conflict. The main challenge in conducting such interviews lies in the reluctance of displaced people to take part in the interview process. Most people were not willing to be interviewed due to the feeling of having been used in the past by many other research institutions. They feel like they are being treated like experimental objects for data collection for research purposes while they face a daily struggle just to survive. Many researchers neglect the suffering of those vulnerable, displaced and traumatized people. Most often, the privacy of IDPs is violated, but since there is no proper system of protection in the refugees' camps or in the host areas, these complaints are treated as being of secondary importance and sacrificed in the struggle to survive.

The deeper aim of the qualitative data is to study the emotional connections, meaning and understanding of this particular cultural and natural landscape for its pre-war inhabitants. I have used this method to answer a series of questions related to attachment to space and place, examining cultural landscapes with displaced local people, assessing their emotions, memories and nostalgia as these are connected to their mutually held views of this southern part of Idlib province. The goal is to address the way their old cultural landscape impacts them psychologically through questions focusing on memory, loss and trauma as well as heritage. I

[3] Hariz Halilovich, 'Reclaiming Erased Lives: Archives, Records and Memories in Post-War Bosnia and the Bosnian Diaspora', *Archival Science* 14, no. 3–4 (October 2014): 231–47, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-014-9227-z.

categorized people's attitudes, perceptions, memories and understanding of their heritage after displacement and their perspective on activities-place-cultural landscape attachments. Analysis requires understanding their experiences and memories and to clarify the ways in which their connections with the cultural landscape of southern Idlib province are evidenced in specific tangible and intangible ways. Socio-demographic factors that may influence the kind of answers given include: age, sex, educational level, place of birth, generational grounding in the area, and length of residence there before displacement from the region of the cultural landscape.[4]

The questions were designed carefully, covering selected parts of this cultural landscape, displacement, memory, emotions and attachments. To avoid hurting interviewees' feelings by asking overly provocative questions, I asked help from a psychiatrist, a psychotherapist and an anthropologist in reviewing and checking interviews questions first. The list of the questions that appear in the interviews can be found in the appendix. Some of the interviewees found it difficult to remember or were embarrassed to be approached with certain types of questions, or also asked face to face.

1.2. Problem statement

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Syria's rich archaeological heritage has faced serious threats, including looting and damage associated with fighting and intentional destruction of antiquities.[5] This destruction is prevalent across the Ancient Villages in Northern

[4] Maria Lewicka, 'Place Attachment, Place Identity, and Place Memory: Restoring the Forgotten City Past', *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 28, no. 3 (September 2008): 209–31, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2008.02.001.

[5] Jesse Casana and Elise Jakoby Laugier, 'Satellite Imagery-Based Monitoring of Archaeological Site Damage in the Syrian Civil War', ed. Peter F. Biehl, *PLOS ONE* 12, no. 11 (30 November 2017): e0188589, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0188589.

Syria, some of which are part of World Heritage sites.[6] Since the start of the conflict in Syria, the security situation has not allowed any missions to be undertaken in the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria area. Reports have been published of serious destruction to some places as well as ascertained and potential threats resulting from the armed conflict in Syria that began in March 2011.[7]

The Syrian conflict has been defined by more than 10 years of displacement, making Syria the source of the largest population displacement crisis since World War II. More than 13.5 million Syrians have fled their homes in search of safety.[8] Many of them have been displaced multiple times. Around two million people have been displaced in Idlib province alone.

At the present time, many living villages lying close to the ancient villages of northern Syria have been evacuated when they became the scene of clashes along the military front line that separates the opposition forces from the forces of the Syrian regime. The site has fallen victim to deliberate and severe sabotage, destruction, and recent alterations that may forever alter this distinctive cultural and archaeological scene.[9]

1.3. Research goals and questions

I am going to look at north Syrian cultural landscapes in southern Idlib province (the landscape surrounding the Roman and Byzantine sites of Albara and Sarjila), where I can assess individual features of this cultural landscape including the general surroundings of the area,

[6] Emma Cunliffe, Nibal Muhesen, and Marina Lostal, 'The Destruction of Cultural Property in the Syrian Conflict: Legal Implications and Obligations', *International Journal of Cultural Property* 23, no. 1 (February 2016): 1–31, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739116000011.

[7] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 'UNESCO World Heritage Centre - State of Conservation (SOC 2021) Ancient Villages of Northern Syria (Syrian Arab Republic)', UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed 11 September 2022, https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/4010/.

[8] Mohannad Al Rish, 'Recent Tensions Highlight the Enduring Syrian Refugee Crisis', *COAR* (blog), 13 June 2022, https://coar-global.org/2022/06/13/recent-tensions-highlight-the-enduring-syrian-refugees-crisis/.

[9] simat2017, 'Documentation of the Current State of the Archaeological Sites Registered on the World Heritage List. Park /4/ - Mount Al-Zawiyah (توثيق الحالة الراهنة للمواقع الأثرية المسجلة على لائحة التراث العالمي الواقعة في منطقة جبل الزاوية المتنزه الأثري رقم 4/)', Syrians for Heritage (SIMAT), 29 July 2020, https://syriansforheritage.org/?p=4152.

modern agricultural practices, local living communities and remains of ancient architectural features. I identify the way in which these factors resonate within the memories of displaced locals and within the Syrian diaspora and trace potential new connections that are forming between the narratives surrounding these ancient monuments and displaced locals. I will focus on memories created from images, sounds, smells and touch that are particular to these landscapes and trigger other memories of shared activities and landscape narratives.

The aim of the study is to explore issues connected to memories of landscape in support of the post-war psychological recovery of the community in the Syrian displacement as well as to map their memories of home—whether pleasant or traumatic—where special echoes in old buildings can have new meaning. The role of memory narratives involving such significant cultural landscapes plays a crucial role in the preservation of collective memory and postwar psychological recovery. My research questions are as follows:

- What might be the role of the memoryscape of the Albara and Serjila parks and traditional modern agricultural activities in the psychological rehabilitation of displaced locals?

    1. How do cultural landscape remembrances affect personal rehabilitation in a postwar phase?

    2. How do people remember their interaction with and connections to the agricultural lands (orchards and fields, animals, locals) and the built archaeological and natural landscapes of south Idlib province?

    3. How are these memories of a past life mediated and understood across changing social spheres (displacement and demographic change)?

    4. What are the locals' memories in connection with archaeological monuments and traditional agricultural activities?

5. To what extend is there a difference between the academic understanding of these sites and local beliefs, understanding and memory?

6. How are the traditions and cultivation of surrounding olive tree groves, olive oil processing and use in cooking/medicinal/cosmetic traditions connected to the memories of displaced people from the local population?

How does the memory of the cultural landscape shape the memories before, during and after the conflict?

1.4. Feasibility of the research and its justification

There is a huge number of displaced local people who have sought refuge within the cultural landscape of northwest Syria.[10] The importance and significance of the cultural landscape created by the physically endangered ancient villages of North Syria make the research for this thesis crucial. There is a possibility that cultural heritage could be used as one tool in helping reduce the psychological trauma of people in displacement and, eventually, even in post-war recovery in Syria. Moreover, there is a need to incorporate a forward-looking heritage future into research and findings connected to resilient heritage and the ability to aspire during displacement. Finally, there are social connections that can be created through provoking and stimulating mutual memories of this special cultural landscape.

1.5. Background to the research

The Cultural Landscape Foundation (CLF) states that "Cultural landscapes can range from thousands of acres of rural land to homesteads with small front yards. They can be man-made

[10] Ben Hubbard and Ivor Prickett, 'Fleeing a Modern War, Syrians Seek Refuge in Ancient Ruins', *The New York Times*, 19 April 2021, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/world/middleeast/fleeing-a-modern-war-syrians-seek-refuge-in-ancient-ruins.html.

expressions of visual and spatial relationships that include grand estates, farmlands, public gardens and parks, college campuses, cemeteries, scenic highways, and industrial sites. Cultural landscapes are works of art, texts and narratives of cultures, and expressions of regional identity. They also exist in relationship to their ecological contexts."[11]

The interrelationship between societies and their cultural landscape is dynamic, since both entities are in constant interaction with each other.[12] The interconnections of traditions and values (locality, historic, memories, permanence and continuity of generations, aesthetics, economic resources, cultural and social associative values) are key to the way unique cultural landscapes are shaped.

Anthropogenic forces are a dominant factor in shaping such rural spaces and memories. All wars, in all their phases, have direct and indirect effects on the landscape that can be traced on the scarred surface of the earth and in peoples' memories even long after the fighting has come to an end. The archaeological sites, landmarks and displacement locations evoke memories of personal, former happiness, pain and grief. They provide intimate spaces from the past which memory can inhabit and live. Heritage, local, social and rural identity and cultural landscapes draw on discursive practices that are, themselves, complex and contradictory. The close connection between the intangible and tangible cultural landscapes of dead village sites follows a unique and specific awareness of the cultural landscape by the folk who formerly lived there. The conceptual link between intangible heritage, cultural landscape and identity provides a basis for a deeper understanding of societies and their interrelationships with the cultural

[11] 'About Cultural Landscapes | The Cultural Landscape Foundation', accessed 31 May 2022, https://www.tclf.org/places/about-cultural-landscapes.
[12] Luis Álvarez Munárriz, 'The Category of Cultural Landscape', *AIBR, Revista de Antropologia Iberoamericana* 06, no. 01 (1 January 2011), https://doi.org/10.11156/aibr.060104e.

landscapes surrounding them, ultimately leading to a better understanding of collective memory, war and rehabilitation.[13]

[13] Munjeri Dawson, 'Tangible and Intangible Heritage: From Difference to Convergence - UNESCO ,'للأمم المتحدة 2004, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000135853.

Chapter 2: Historical background of the landscape of the area

World history has always been the history of the relationship between culture and nature. Societies and cultures have met their basic needs for survival and reproduction.[14] The interaction of human and natural forces played an important role in the materialization and transformation of the landscape regions bordering the Mediterranean Sea.[15] As a cultural landscape, this chapter will concentrate on the main agricultural activities of the landscape and their connections with the population in addition to touching upon the Roman and Byzantine World Heritage monuments found there. I am going to briefly explain the historical background as well as the olive cultivation and products tradition in this part of southern Idlib province. At the end of this chapter I provide a narration of both my personal memories and the memories my parents' with regard to our own former lives among the olive groves.

1.6. A short prehistory of the area

Since this research does not focus on prehistory, this part is not directly relevant in local modern perceptions of the landscape I will keep this discussion very short. Settlements from different prehistoric and historic eras all left their mark, however, on the diverse landscapes of northern Syria beginning in the seventh millennium BC.[16] These ancient histories are less visible since they largely take the form of tells or scatters of artifacts on the ground surface – features which are not directly recognizable as sites compared to monumental stone structures dating back

[14] Sing C. Chew and Daniel Sarabia, 'Nature–Culture Relations: Early Globalization, Climate Changes, and System Crisis', *Sustainability* 8, no. 1 (January 2016): 29, https://doi.org/10.3390/su8010078. P:1

[15] Asli Oflaz, Walter Dörfler, and Mara Weinelt, 'An Overview of Olive Trees in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Mid- to Late Holocene: Selective Exploitation or Established Arboriculture?', 2019, 131–65. P:131

[16] Winfried Orthmann, ed., *Archéologie et histoire de la Syrie. 1: La Syrie de l'époque néolithique à l' âge du fer / éd. par Winfried Orthmann*, Schriften zur vorderasiatischen Archäologie, Bd. 1,1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013).

from the first until the seventh century. These ruins dominate in the landscape since they come from still standing, recognizable structures.

What builds memory for locals is what they have seen and lived next to. Prehistoric components are present in the area but rarely recognized as such by locals. However, locals consider the significance of the sites and they often visited them as part of their daily lives. Thus, I will limit the historic background of the thesis to the ruins from protohistoric and historic periods with ruined monuments that produce a variety of clear 'memoryscapes.' I am aware that this is also a function of the 'what people can see and touch' syndrome which represents a kind of biased perspective on the deep history of humankind in this region.

1.7. General background

A large number of archaeological sites lie in northwestern Syria between the cities of Aleppo and Idlib, (*figure 1*). The area, with its many impressive, late antique ruins constructed from massive, dressed limestone blocks, is popularly known as the "Dead Cities" or "Ancient Villages of Northern Syria".[17] The cultural landscapes of the Dead Cities area, including structures and village remains, reflect the transition from the Roman Empire to Byzantine Christianity.[18] The Ancient Villages of Northern Syria and their relict landscapes provide an eminent example of sustainable rural settlement from the first to the seventh centuries CE, an economy based on the careful use of soil, water and limestone resources, and the mastery of production of valuable agricultural crops such as the olive.[19] At the same time, in the recent

[17] Witold Witakowski, 'Why Are the So-Called Dead Cities of Northern Syria Dead?', in *The Urban Mind, Cultural and Environmental Dynamics*, vol. 15 (Uppsala, Sweden: African and Comparative Archaeology Department of Archaeology and Ancient History Uppsala University, 2010). P:295.
[18] Wail Houssin, "Historical and Cultural Landscape of the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria," *European Science Review* 5, no. 5–6, 2015 (May 6, 2015): P: 3–6.
[19] 'Cultural Properties - Ancient Villages of Northern Syria (Syrian Arab Republic) | InforMEA', accessed 9 May 2022, https://www.informea.org/en/decision/cultural-properties-ancient-villages-northern-syria-syrian-arab-republic.

past, this land also contained a vibrant landscape once filled with living villages and a population largely engaged with agriculture.

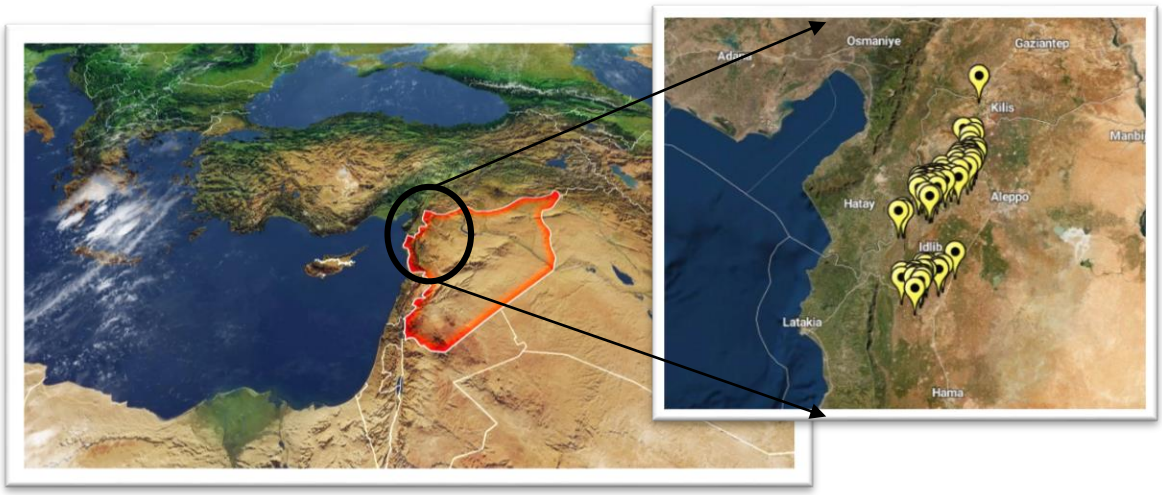

Figure 1: Map of the Dead Cities.[20] https://www.heritagedaily.com/2020/12/the-dead-cities/136473

The Dead Cities comprise over 700 mostly deserted towns that can be found in the hills (Jebel) of Sem'an, al-Halqa, Barisha, al-A'la, al-Wastani, and Zawiyé ranging in height from 400 to over 900 meters a.s.l.[21] Because the limestone from which they were constructed is so durable, about sixty of them have withstood the test of time and the damaging impacts of more modern human activities.[22] They also provide us with historical insights about the rise and fall of farming communities during the classical era. There is no doubt that the Syrian crisis' effects on ancient villages will teach us more about how war affects cultural heritage.[23]

These groups of buildings, abandoned in the period between the eighth to the tenth centuries, are distinguished by well-preserved landscapes, architectural remains of dwellings, pagan temples, churches, cisterns, baths, etc. In addition, the monuments contain features showcasing

[20] HeritageDaily, 'Serjilla – The Dead City', *HeritageDaily - Archaeology News* (blog), 13 May 2020, https://www.heritagedaily.com/2020/05/serjilla-the-dead-city/129068.
[21] Maamoun Abdulkarim, 'The Damage at the World Heritage Sites in the Third Archaeological Park in Jebel Sem'an of Northern Syria from the Roman and Byzantine Period' 1 (1 July 2022): 31–36.
[22] Maamoun Abdulkarim, *World Heritage at Risk The Ancient Village of Northern Syria Before &during Crisis of 2011-2021*, 2023, 2011–21.
[23] Abdulkarim, 2011–21.

the hydraulic techniques, the protective walls and the Roman cultivation plans that reflect the populations' mastery of agricultural production. [24] The buildings have been used during the Syrian conflict as shelters for IDPs, besides the fact that some reused the stones of the ruins for building and different purposes. Also, some of these structures were affected by the brutal 2023 earthquake which affected the area badly.

These sites have attracted the attention of a number of researchers. These scholars admired the remains of what appeared to be a thriving rural community, including the architecture and socio-economic structures that supported it. The well-preserved ruins of churches and other buildings show that they date from the last centuries of antiquity. When the area was abandoned and for what reasons were questions that preoccupied scholars for several years. Whereas early scholars saw the abandonment of the dead cities as a result of the Arab invasion of Syria, contemporary research recognizes that the dead cities were still inhabited in the eighth century CE, or even later.[25]

1.8. Serjilla and Al-Bara Roman and Byzantine sites

Serjilla and Al-Bara are two of a group of five ancient settlements within the archaeological parks of the Dead Cities that lie an hour southwest of the city of Aleppo in northern Syria, (*figure 2*). Here, in my childhood, beautiful and eerie ruins emerged amid sprawling olive groves. They are a fascinating remnant of the Byzantine farming establishments and emporia that flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries CE.[26]

[24] Centre, 'Ancient Villages of Northern Syria'.
[25] Thomas Riis, *The Dead Cities of Northern Syria and Their Demise*, 1 ed (Kiel: Steve-Holger Ludwig, 2015).
[26] Eric Westervelt, 'Al Bara and Serjilla: A Taste of Syria's "Dead Cities"', *NPR*, 22 October 2008, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=95939710.

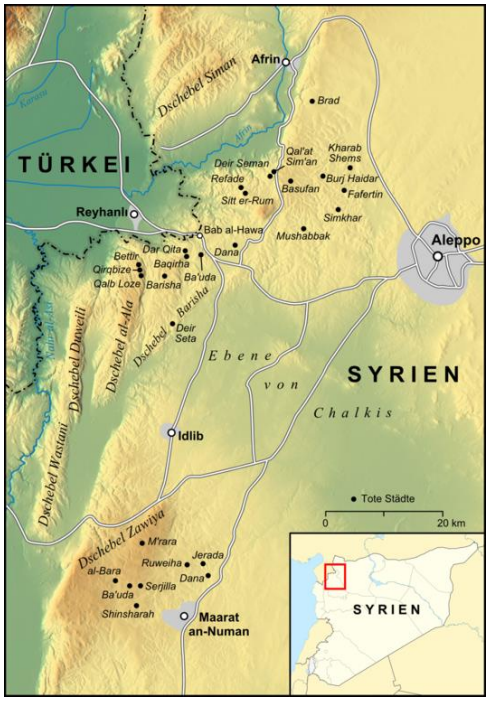

Figure 2: The location of Dead Cities in the northwestern parts of Syria.[27]

Al Bara is about 6 kilometers from the present-day town of Kafr Nabl, (*figure 3*). Huge parts of the old agricultural subdivisions (field systems) and many small valleys cultivated during the roman and byzantine periods are visible on the limestone plateau near the old villages.[28]

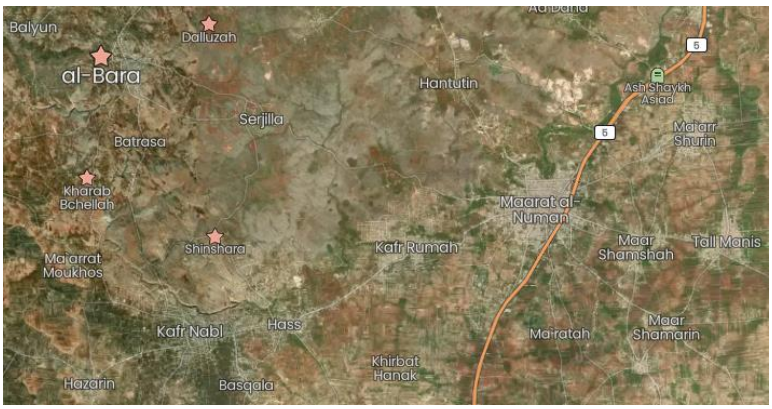

Figure 3: Map of Al Bara and Sarjila location, https://mapcarta.com/W593178779/Map

[27] 'The Dead Cities of Syria', accessed 25 May 2024, https://www.amusingplanet.com/2016/08/the-dead-cities-of-syria.html.
[28] simat2017, 'Documentation of the Current State of the Archaeological Sites Registered on the World Heritage List. Park /4/ - Mount Al-Zawiyah (توثيق الحالة الراهنة للمواقع الأثرية المسجلة على لائحة التراث العالمي الواقعة في منطقة جبل الزاوية المتنزه الأثري رقم /4/)'.

Off the Aleppo-Latakia road near Orm al-Joz, there is another area full of these ancient farming establishments. One of the most interesting is Serjilla, located in a small valley famous for its baths and villas. Serjila covers an area of about circa 80,000 hectares and is located on the eastern slope of Jebel Ariha in Jabal Reha, which is a mountainous region in the modern governorate of Idlib. The settlement is one of the oldest Byzantine sites in the region, founded around CE 473. Research at the site has offered archaeologists a glimpse into Byzantine agricultural practices for producing grape and olives.[29]

Figure 4: The olive presses in a fifth century CE villa at Serjilla. Credit: Diana Darke, July 2020.[30]

Descending a gentle slope, one passes tombs connected to the archaeological sites with buildings constructed from dressed stone blocks, lacking their roofs and lying half open to the sky. Near the bottom of the valley sits a bathhouse, equipped with a steam bath and a cold bath. Next to it stood a graceful building with a double veranda that might have been a meeting place of elites. Several villages, almost intact, stand on the opposite side of the valley. The stone lintels bear decorations (crosses, flowers, olive branches) that achieve elegance in their simplicity and exude a human warmth in this bare and rocky place. It is likely that Serjilla was

[29] HeritageDaily, 'Serjilla – The Dead City'.
[30] 'The "Forgotten Cities" of Idlib at Risk in Syria's War', *Dianadarke* (blog), 26 February 2020, https://dianadarke.com/2020/02/26/the-forgotten-cities-of-idlib-at-risk-in-syrias-war/.

once a lively town, populated by olive growers and stone masons, landowners and merchants, (*figure 4*).[31]

Figure 5: The vast archaeological settlement of Al-Bara, located on a slightly sloping valley in the middle of Jabal Al-Zawiya - a view from the southeast from the Majalia side (2009), Mazhar Ranna (CC-BY-NC-ND)[32]

There is no clear road going through the Al-Bara site and the land is densely covered with trees and scrub, (*figure 5*). The land is still fertile here, and some small lands among the stones are still used to cultivate olives, grapes and apricots. The ruins of Al-Bara cover an area of 6 square kilometers and include many large villas, three monasteries, and dozens of Byzantine churches (*figure 6*). Five churches are still visible among the ruins today. The most striking structures are a pair of pyramidal tombs, 200 meters apart. These huge tombs, decorated with carved acanthus leaves, testify to the city's past richness. The largest pyramid still contains five sealed and decorated tombs,[33] (*figure 7*).

[31] Anthony Toth, 'The Dead Cities of Northern Syria', *CNEWA* (blog), accessed 17 September 2022, https://cnewa.org/magazine/the-dead-cities-of-northern-syria-30509/.

[32] 'Al-Bara in Jabal Al-Zawiya - the largest archaeological settlement in the "ancient villages of northern Syria" (البارة في جبل الزاوية – أكبر المستوطنات الأثرية في "القرى القديمة في شمال سوريا")', https://syrian-heritage.org/ar/, accessed 26 May 2024, https://syrian-heritage.org/ar/البارة-في-جبل-الزاوية-أكبر-المستوطن/.

[33] James Gordon from Los Angeles USA California, *Al-Bara Is the Most Extensive of the Dead Cities of Northern Syria and One of the Last to Be Abandoned. It Held out as a Bastion of Eastern Christianity until the Arrival of*

Figure 6: Deir Sabat monastery, Al-Bara, April 2009, © Gerhard Huber [34]

Figure 7: Pyramid tomb in AL-Bara, April 2009 © Gerhard Huber, [35]

Al-Bara is the largest of the dead cities in northern Syria and one of the last to be abandoned.

It resisted as a bastion of Eastern Christianity until the arrival of the Crusaders in the eleventh

the Crusaders in the 11th Century., 12 November 2009, 12 November 2009, Bara, one of the Dead Cities, NW Syria, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bara,_one_of_the_Dead_Cities,_NW_Syria_-_1.jpg.

[34] Austria-Forum | https://austria-forum.org, 'Al-Bara', Global-Geography, accessed 26 May 2024, https://global-geography.org/af/Geography/Asia/Syria/Pictures/Other_Side/350_Deir_Sabat_Kloster_Al_Bara.

[35] https://austria-forum.org.

century CE. From humble beginnings in the fourth century CE, Al-Bara became one of the most important centers of wine and olive oil production in the region, (*figure 8*).

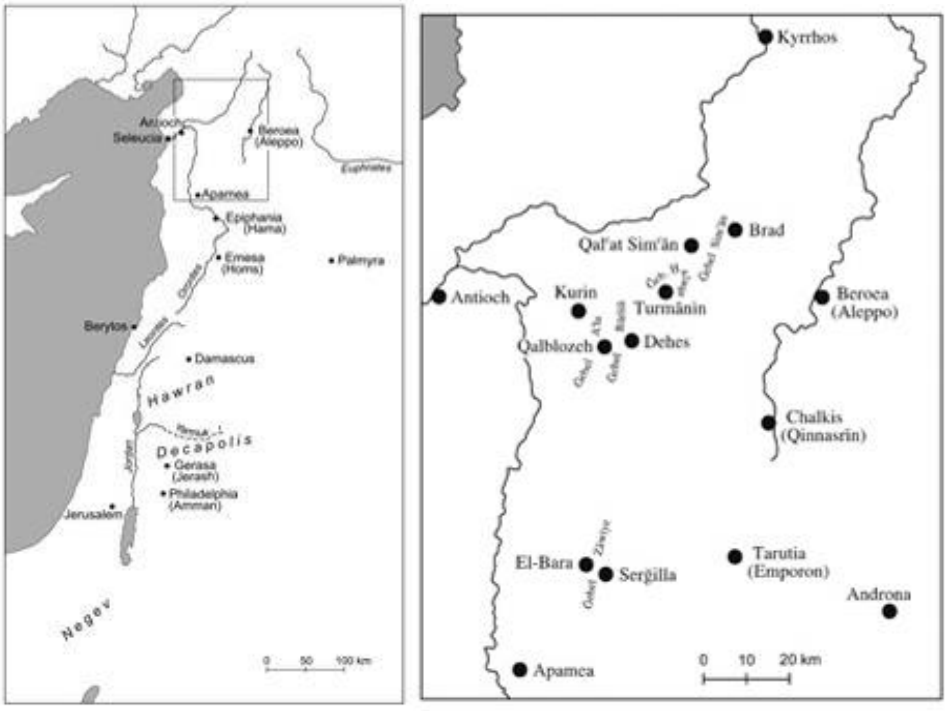

Figure 8: The Levant in Late Antiquity. The area of the Dead Cities. Map by Alicja Grenberger.[36]

Al-Bara prospered and developed, surrounded by rich and fertile lands. It was also located along the north-south trade route between Antioch and Apamea, even after trade routes changed in the seventh century CE and most other settlements were abandoned. Al-Bara resisted the Muslim conquest and predominantly remained a Byzantine Christian settlement, with its own bishop who was a vassal of the Archbishop of Antioch. Eastern Christianity finally ended in Al-Bara with the conquest of the Latin Christian Crusaders at the end of the eleventh century. In 1125, the Crusaders were expelled from the area and Al-Bara came under Muslim control. It was finally abandoned at the end of the twelfth century, probably due to an earthquake. [37]

[36] Witakowski, 'Why Are the So-Called Dead Cities of Northern Syria Dead?'
[37] USA, *Al-Bara Is the Most Extensive of the Dead Cities of Northern Syria and One of the Last to Be Abandoned. It Held out as a Bastion of Eastern Christianity until the Arrival of the Crusaders in the 11th Century.*

1.9. Landscape activities (olive trees and oil production)

The region of the Dead Cities appears to have been prosperous in roman and medieval times, as indicated by the presence of several, still somewhat extant, building complexes scattered over the landscape. The ancient economy was characterized by extensive agricultural production. Hundreds of olive presses have been found within dead city sites, suggesting the presence of commercial olive oil production.[38] One unique aspect of the region is the cultivated landscape of the old peasant farms, which consists of square and rectangular fields separated by stone walls.[39] Traditionally, the art of building stone walls has been passed down from generation to generation. Historically, this method was used to develop land manually piece by piece, starting from locations where conditions were ideal. Not surprisingly, in modern times, this area was a vibrant landscape, filled with living villages and a population engaged largely in agriculture, especially olive oil production and olive tree cultivation.

The abandoned ancient villages were very prosperous some 1,500 years ago, with hundreds of inhabited settlements, villas and villages. Their inhabitants practiced cultivated wheat, vineyards and olive trees, and grew other types of trees such as figs, engaged in trade and sold their products in all regions of the Mediterranean. Large parts of present-day, traditional agricultural subdivisions are found within archaeological settlements. Exploited for agriculture, the landscape became rich and productive.[40]

Olive trees and oil production in the eastern Mediterranean can even be traced back in the archives of the early and middle bronze age city of Ebla (2600-2240 BC), located in northwest

[38] Georges Tate, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du Nord* (Presses de l'Ifpo, 1992), https://doi.org/10.4000/books.ifpo.4334.
[39] Abdulkarim, *World Heritage at Risk The Ancient Village of Northern Syria Before &during Crisis of 2011-2021*, 2011–21.
[40] 'The villages of the limestone massif in northern Syria- a long history', video, https://alalamsyria.ir | العالم سورية (23 ,العالم سورية July 2020), https://alalamsyria.ir/news/12749.

Syria.[41] Olive oil production in Syria, thus, dates back to well before the Roman period.[42] Olive oil and the wine industry on villa estates made their former inhabitants rich in the early years of Byzantium. Enormous stone oil and wine presses stand next to splendid villas, as if their owners had just recently moved away.[43] The Ancient Villages of Northern Syria and their relict landscapes provide an excellent example of sustainable rural settlement from the first to the -seventh centuries CE, based on the careful management of soil, water and limestone as well as the mastery of production of valuable agricultural crops,[44] such as olives, figs and grapes. It is an entirely different matter, that I will concentrate on monuments from the Roman to the present located in the research area because their ruins comprise memory for the displaced.

1.9.1. Olive culture

The olive tree is a signature plant species in the history of Mediterranean agriculture. Its origins are linked to the emergence of some of the oldest archaeological cultures.[45] According to a comparison of the geographical patterns of plastid diversity in wild and domesticated olives, the northern Levant was the site of its first domestication, followed by widespread dispersals throughout the Mediterranean Basin concurrent with the growth of societies and intercultural interactions in this part of the world.[46] Its versatility and global presence in traditional farming

[41] Nathaniel Brown, 'By the Rivers of Babylon: The Near Eastern Background and Influence on the Power Structures Ancient Israel and Judah - Free Download PDF' (University of California, Santa Cruz Department of History, 2011), https://silo.tips/download/by-the-rivers-of-babylon-the-near-eastern-background-and-influence-on-the-power.

[42] Iosif Emmanouil Kapellakis, Konstantinos P. Tsagarakis, and John C. Crowther, 'Olive Oil History, Production and by-Product Management', *Reviews in Environmental Science and Bio/Technology* 7, no. 1 (January 2008): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11157-007-9120-9.

[43] Kevin Rushby, 'Syria's Mysterious Dead Cities', *The Guardian*, 9 January 2010, sec. Travel, https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2010/jan/09/syria-dead-cities-byzantine-archaeology.

[44] 'Cultural Properties - Ancient Villages of Northern Syria (Syrian Arab Republic) | InforMEA'.

[45] Catherine Breton, Jean-Frédéric Terral, Christian Pinatel, Frédéric Médail, François Bonhomme, André Bervillé, The origins of the domestication of the olive tree, Comptes Rendus Biologies, Volume 332, Issue 12, 2009, Pages 1059-1064; Besnard G, Khadari B, Navascués M, Fernández-Mazuecos M, El Bakkali A, Arrigo N, Baali-Cherif D, Brunini-Bronzini de Caraffa V, Santoni S, Vargas P et al. 2013. The complex history of the olive tree: from Late Quaternary diversification of Mediterranean lineages to primary domestication in the northern Levant. Proceedings. Biological sciences/The Royal Society 280: 20122833.

[46] G. Besnard et al., 'The Complex History of the Olive Tree: From Late Quaternary Diversification of Mediterranean Lineages to Primary Domestication in the Northern Levant', *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 280, no. 1756 (7 April 2013): 20122833, https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2012.2833.

systems have made it an economic pillar and cornerstone of Mediterranean agriculture to this day.[47] As one of the oldest cultivated fruit trees, the olive tree is of biological, evolutionary, geographical, archaeological and social importance.[48] The olive tree has great importance in the cultures of the Near East as a symbol of peace, wisdom, luck, and prosperity.[49] The dove returned to Noah's ark with a fresh olive leaf in its mouth as a sign of hope.

The olive tree is one of the oldest domestic tree species, deeply rooted in Syria's geography, history and traditions. Due to the Syria's Mediterranean climate and mountainous soil, this millennia-old domestic tree has become an authentic component of the green map stretching along the slopes of Syria's coastal mountains.[50] Olives are one of the main crops in the country today.[51] Olive trees occupy first place among other fruit trees in Syria, accounting for 65% of the total area planted with fruit trees, formerly covering an area of 544 thousand hectares and about 80 million trees.[52] Northwest Syria, close to one of the main centers of its domestication,[53] has been a center of olive cultivation since prehistoric times.[54] Nowadays, olive trees grow in many parts of Syria, but the most productive cultivation took place in the northwestern parts of the country, in the mountainous lands between the regions of Aleppo and

[47] Guillaume Besnard, Jean-Frédéric Terral, and Amandine Cornille, 'On the Origins and Domestication of the Olive: A Review and Perspectives', *Annals of Botany* 121, no. 3 (March 2018): 385–403, https://doi.org/10.1093/aob/mcx145.
[48] Oflaz, Dörfler, and Weinelt, 'An Overview of Olive Trees in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Mid- to Late Holocene'.
[49] Alaa Zarifa, 'A Centuries-Old Tradition: Syria's Olive Harvest from Farm to Table', Raseef 22, 23 November 2022, https://raseef22.net/article/1090701-a-centuriesold-tradition-syrias-olive-harvest-from-farm-to-table.
[50] Zarifa.
[51] Paolo DeAndreis, 'Bumper Crop Expected in Syria Amid Ongoing Civil War', Olive Oil Times, 18 November 2022, https://www.oliveoiltimes.com/production/bumper-crop-in-syria-amid-ongoing-civil-war/114542.
[52] Mustafa Bayram and Yasemin Gök, 'The Effects of the War on the Syrian Agricultural Food Industry Potential', *Turkish Journal of Agriculture - Food Science and Technology* 8 (30 July 2020): 1448–62, https://doi.org/10.24925/turjaf.v8i7.1448-1462.3278.
[53] Catherine Breton, Jean-Frédéric Terral, Christian Pinatel, Frédéric Médail, François Bonhomme, André Bervillé, The origins of the domestication of the olive tree, *Comptes Rendus Biologies*, Volume 332, Issue 12, 2009, Pages 1059.
[54] Yoshinori YASUDA, '<FEATURE ARTICLES: Changes in the Environment and Civilizations in Turkey and Syria>The Rise and Fall of Olive Cultivation in Northwestern Syria : Palaeoecological Study of Tell Mastuma' (International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 1 January 1997), https://doi.org/10.15055/00000344.

Idlib and along the mountain zone along the Mediterranean Sea extending from the Turkish border to Damascus.[55]

Olive cultivation was the most important factor in the development of the Mediterranean state-level society. Olive has immense cultural and historical significance and Syria is a country with an olive-growing tradition.[56] The country ranked seventh in the world in olive oil production in 2018 although before the outbreak of the war, it ranked fourth.[57] With the recent Syrian conflict, Syria's food and agricultural industries have been severely hit.[58]

Rain-fed agriculture is practiced in the mountainous land areas that extend from northwestern Syria to the Mediterranean coast. The cultivation of olives is most successful in this region, in addition to the cultivation of wheat and cherries although their share in the total agricultural production is relatively small.[59] Olive cultivation in Syria (72.20%) is, thus, centered around the northwest (Aleppo-Idlib) and the coastal area.[60] Syrian olives are characterized by the phenomenon of floating, or the exchange of loads, with the crop being abundant one year and light the following year.

As one of the most important crops in Syria, the olive sector provided the nation with 25% of its income, both directly or indirectly, through cultivation, processing the olive harvest into olive oil, storage, transportation, export, etc. Olive cultivation is considered one of the most important industries for creating employment.[61] Moreover, olive oil is an essential part of

[55] DeAndreis, 'Bumper Crop Expected in Syria Amid Ongoing Civil War'.
[56] 'Siria, País Con Tradición Olivarera y Cultivo En Secano', 3 April 2022, https://www.olimerca.com//noticiadet/siria-pais-con-tradicion-olivarera-y-cultivo-en-secano/90e77ba17fcbfb74bd1f957aabc56dbc.
[57] Zarifa, 'A Centuries-Old Tradition'.
[58] Bayram and Gök, 'The Effects of the War on the Syrian Agricultural Food Industry Potential'.
[59] 'Syria: Olive Cultivation on Hilly Land in the Northwestern Part of the Country and along its Mediterranean Coast | International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative', accessed 8 January 2023, https://satoyama-initiative.org/case_studies/syria-olive-cultivation-on-hilly-land-in-the-northwestern-part-of-the-country-and-along-its-mediterranean-coast/.
[60] Bayram and Gök, 'The Effects of the War on the Syrian Agricultural Food Industry Potential'.
[61] 'Syria'.

Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisine. It lies at the heart of many recipes and is one of the most important ingredients.[62] Olive oil is also used in folk medicine and cosmetics.

1.9.2. Olive cultivation practices

Olive cultivation was one of the most important traditional agricultural activities in the region of the dead cities, giving olive grove landscapes a great cultural and emotional value.[63] Olive cultivation plays a crucial role in Syrian agriculture, is considered traditionally as having special health and sensory properties. Local people use olive oil for curing stomach or joints aches as well as the more obvious cooking traditions. Thus, olives and olive oil has a role in many aspects of daily life in this rural society. Its cultivation and production provided income to more than 200,000 Syrian families in its heyday before the ravages of the present conflict.[64]

The Syrian olive industry is divided into two sub-sectors: table olives and olive oil. After harvesting, raw olives are sorted and graded before processing. The large, sorted olives are mainly destined olive oil production, which producers sell to traders and wholesalers after processing. The smaller table olives, after being cured by the producers, are sent directly to traders.[65]

[62] 'The Importance of Olive Trees | Syria Relief', accessed 11 January 2023, https://syriarelief.org.uk/news/2022/05/the-importance-of-olive-trees/.
[63] 'Syria'.
[64] El Ibrahem A., Abdine M., and Dragotta A., 'The Olive Oil Sector in Syria', in *Syrian National Strategic Plan for Olive Oil Quality : Final Report*, ed. Di Terlizzi B., Dragotta A., and Jamal M., vol. 73, Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens (Bari : CIHEAM, 2007), 17, http://om.ciheam.org/om/pdf/a73/00800334.pdf.
[65] Bayram and Gök, 'The Effects of the War on the Syrian Agricultural Food Industry Potential'.

Figure 9: Women and children picking olives in the village of Kafr Arouk in the Idlib countryside, 12 October 2021, (Enab Baladi / Iyad Abdul Jawad).

The olive harvest season is an ancient tradition in Syria. Where olives are grown there are always ceremonial rituals carried out during the harvest. Preparation for these ancient rituals is made at the end of summer and the ripening of these fruits, by cultivating the earth, pruning the tree branches, clearing the dead tree trunks, and removing weeds. At the beginning of October, after the first rains, everyone prepares for the harvest by preparing nets and sheets of cloth that are placed under the trees to collect the olives that fall from the trees,[66] (*figure 9*).

The environmental importance of olive cultivation lies in preventing soil erosion through the use of traditional techniques such as stone walls and water-efficient techniques on land with limited uses beyond olive cultivation. In addition, olive cultivation is effective in slowing down the desertification processes. [67]

Olives are generally harvested from October to the end of December, and the harvest season sometimes extends into January. The olives are usually picked by hand, and in many cases, the harvesting work is done by each farmer's family members. Moreover, traditional techniques are used in the olive groves to conserve the soil and limited water resource including the aforementioned use of stone walls. All such techniques are effective in reducing the volume

[66] Zarifa, 'A Centuries-Old Tradition'.
[67] 'Syria'.

and flow rate of surface water to prevent soil erosion. Their construction is also effective in increasing the soil's moisture-holding capacity.[68] Stonewalling technology has traditionally been passed down from generation to generation. The boundaries of the lands were designated by the stonewalls. The dirt roads made by the Romans in the area fell along the paths and that helped in the land division. In ancient times, the land was developed manually, little by little, using this technique. To minimize the labor required to build and maintain the stone walls as well as maximize their conservation and protective effects, farmers took note of the finest details of the natural geographical features like the way water flowed after rainfall and other conditions.[69]

The relationship between humans and nature changes drastically in areas of armed conflict.[70] Before the revolution, Syria's natural heritage was managed in a simplistic and short-sighted way. As a result of the war, Syria's natural heritage was damaged, and in some cases, lost forever. The satellite imagery shows a huge change in the landscape in the last few years. Most of the olive trees have been cut down by the regime as revenge against the locals who supported the opposition. Since the area is very well-known for its agriculture (olive and fig trees), the regime wants to erase that local identity as well as benefiting from exploiting the olive wood.

The Assad government has always neglected Syria's environment and natural heritage in favor of measures that had short-term benefits to a few elites but lead to an increase in the rate of desertification and the destruction of agricultural land. The civil war created a new set of problems: lack of protection of reserves, increased smuggling due to lack of law and order and government policies aimed at winning over the population, and destruction of land as a military

[68] 'Syria'.
[69] 'Syria'.
[70] Samira Mobaied and Jean-Paul Rudant, 'New Method for Environmental Monitoring in Armed Conflict Zones: A Case Study of Syria', *Environmental Monitoring and Assessment* 191, no. 11 (10 October 2019): 643, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10661-019-7805-5.

tactic. The combination of the Syrian regime's corrupt and short-sighted policies and indiscriminate shelling of opposition territory has and currently is decimating vast swaths of agriculturally viable territory. The lack of good governance led to lawlessness as all sides sought to profit by exploiting natural resources such as timber. The desperate need for fuel and food has led Syrians to prioritize logging and farming over conservation.[71] In Syria, timber smuggling has become a powerful market - hundreds of thousands of olive and other domestic trees have been cut down across the country, including in agricultural areas located in disputed lands and in the vicinity of besieged populations.[72] The country's ongoing civil war, which began in 2011, has taken a heavy toll on olive cultivation. [73] In northern Syria, especially in the Idlib region, the ancient villages marked the epicenters of great devastation.[74]

1.10. Narrative of memories

Local oral history is as important as other kind of history and narratives. In this part, I am going to discuss about two parts of memories and narratives. The first narrative comes from my siblings' and my memory as that of a one generation. The second narrative comprises my parents' memories as representative of a previous generation. It is important to distinguish the two periods as memory, narratives and perception differ between generations.

[71] Amr al-Faham, 'Factors Driving the Destruction of Syria's Natural Heritage', *Atlantic Council* (blog), 19 January 2016, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/factors-driving-the-destruction-of-syria-s-natural-heritage/.
[72] al-Faham.
[73] DeAndreis, 'Bumper Crop Expected in Syria Amid Ongoing Civil War'.
[74] 'Cultural Heritage at Risk: Syria (Article) | Khan Academy', accessed 11 January 2023, https://www.khanacademy.org/_render.

1.10.1. Generation 1980/90s: Personal memories and observations from a north Syrian childhood

1.10.1.1. Local history of olive trees

Idlib province is a major agricultural center in Syria, called *The Green Idlib*, while the Idlib area is also historically significant, containing many "dead cities" from classical times as well as tells from even earlier periods. The nature of its agricultural production is diverse with olives, figs, grapes, pistachio, cherry and sour cherry and other fruits all being grown. Olives, figs and grapes have particularly deep roots in the history of the region. From my observation and hearing the stories and oral history from my family and others in my community in the south of this region, I learned that there are even some individual olive trees that are (were) inherited over several generations. These trees connect multiple-generations within families and serve as material props to construct memories and maintain kinship ties.

The agricultural lands fell under three ownership categories; they will be listed in the next section dealing with my parents' memories. Some farmers, in former times, were considered rich if they possessed a few olive trees, so they could meet their subsistence needs for olives and olive oil in addition to growing figs and wheat. The local term in Arabic for a group of olive trees in one row is *Selsal* (سلسال) which means a chain. The name itself is a metaphor for the connection between the intertwined links in a chain and the way trees, planted in a row by a single owner, are interconnected within a group.

My parents inherited a few olive trees from their parents; the rest of their olive trees were bought by them later and planted by them as well. There were 7 trees that were unique. Those trees were inherited from my grandfather who had inherited them from his father. Thus, each of these trees must have been over 100 years. There were many trees, but my father's share was only these 7 special trees. He took great care of them, more so than for his other trees, as

they were considered part of the family legacy, a legacy which rooted the family firmly to this place. There were other 250-300-year-old trees owned by my parents.

From my own experience, I was also closely connected with those trees as I felt their history was shown in the details of their trunks, branches, leaves and fruits. I still remember how many of the branches looked and their changing shapes over time. Nearby the trees, lies part of the heritage area; a cave with niches cut into its walls and a skylight opening, it is the very same cave that many women and children from the town hid at night during the bombardments, before the final displacement in 2019. Many stories were told about the olive grove and the relics lying in and around it. My parents lived nearby for several years in the 1970s. I constructed memories based on what they told me about them that time; a nice, unwitnessed and connected life.

Because there are strong, emotional connections between the farmers and their trees, some of the trees are named depending on their description or variety. Thus, trees are treated as individual entities and landmarks. For example: if the tree is the largest in the groove, then it is named the 'big tree', or if it has a specific trunk shape, then it is named according to that special shape, or if it produces a different type of olive fruit.

In this context, olive trees are treated as members of the extended family, especially since care for them goes on all the year round, from weeding, trimming and painting with lime materials against pests to harvest. All members of the family, including the children took part in this daily and seasonal care.

1.10.1.2. Olive trees connections all year round

- **Planting the trees**

Olive trees in the countryside of Idlib are rooted not only in the earth but in the families' heritage too. Families pass down the olive tree heritage asset as part of the continuation of the families themselves. Olive trees are connected with the local community in two ways, the tree which you plant, raise and take care of like a child and the other trees you inherited, take care of, continue in the family line and pass down to the next generation. Tree-human connections are both similar and different in both cases. Normally, planting the olive trees took place in spring. The 'know-how' regarding the proper way to plant and care for their olive trees is something many farmers learned from their own parents as a kind of ancestral knowledge.

- **Grafting and trimming**

Trimming the trees is carried out once every two or three years. It takes place either after the harvest or in the spring. After trimming the trees, the cut branches are collected and brought home to be used for heating and cooking or they are burned in the field.

Grafting branches from one tree to another is not done frequently, probably because the work process is long and sensitive. Farmers select specific olive types to try and enhance their cultivation of their olive groves.

- **Harvesting**

Since olives are the main income source for many of the farmers in Idlib region, picking the olive crop is considered a sort of a main activity for the year. Many farmers prepared materials and tools used for the harvest season in advance. With the start of the olive harvest, normally harvested from the end of October until the end of December, local farmers went to the olive groves as the sun rose; almost no one was left at home. Children are also brought to the harvest work, so as not to be left alone at home, and therefore, from an early age, they are exposed to what they need to learn. Some ladies who are still breastfeeding their infants take their babies

with them. They make a swinging hammock, from ropes and clothes, in one of the olive trees, usually a tree which is not far off from where they are working, and which has already been harvested. In this way, the mothers can help with the family work as their infants sleep. Breakfast, lunch and snack breaks were also prepared the night before and eaten throughout the workday. Normally, those food supplies were kept under one of the largest trees in the field, to shade most of the workers while they are eating, especially on hot days. Most school age children are given time off from school to help their families, or if not excused from classes, they join the work after school which was also my experience.

The harvested olives are collected from under the trees on large pieces of cloth made of different materials. Then the olives are put in baskets to ease putting them into the sacks, or often immediately into the sacks. Most of farmers used baskets called *Keffah* (قفة) or *Nakal* (نقال), handmade baskets. The baskets are made of straw, woven to produce different shapes depending on what they were to be used for.

Some farmers carry out olive sorting during the day as they cultivate the olive trees while others believe it is best to do this work at night before going to sleep. Olive sorting includes removing branches, twigs, leaves and small stones from the baskets of harvested olives. Later on, the olives are placed on the floor in or near the house up to a maximum height of 50 cm and not in sacks until it is time to transport them to the press. Keeping the olive in sacks for any extended time is not a good idea. Sitting in a sack compresses the olive fruit and causes them to heat up. The resulting liquid that leaks out of them at this point is dark and results in a reduction of the quality of the olive oil.

I remember that my elders always suggested that I should use my hands in harvesting the olives, not the comb tool as it has a more human touch and reduces injury to the branches, thus, protecting the harvest in future years. During the harvesting work, productivity was measured

in two ways, either by the number of finished trees or the number of sacks of which there were two types; plastic sacks with a capacity of around 50 kg and hemp sacks which could hold around 100 kg. Men, in most of the cases, are responsible for carrying the sacks. The heavy sacks are carried by two men in a traditional way called *Murabaa* (مرابعة), where one holds the other man's wrist and lays the sack over it, holding the two lower corners of the sack with the other hands.

- **Social connections during the harvest**

On the way to the groves, farmers greet each other and wish each other a fruitful day with a good harvest. Farmers and workers talk almost the whole day, so that the time seems to fly by with talking and working. Discussions vary from gossiping to stories from local history. Those families who finish earlier, support other community members and relatives in cultivating the olive trees. This collective labor strengthened social connections and created social cohesion within the local community. Interestingly, the olive harvest also partly influences school education. For example, art teachers give their young pupils homework to produce drawings about the harvest season.

- **Pressing**

After collecting the olives and preparing them in hemp sacks, they are transported to the presses. Some farmers carry out this hauling in several phases while others accumulate all the harvest and take all the sacks together. My family, before displacement, used to take the harvest in several lots. In some years, my father separated the harvest based on the land location to compare taste and productivity of olives from different trees. Most of the farmers were excited to count the amount of the olive oil that would be produced based on the quantity of the sacks. With the increase in production, and new materials, farmers started to use either metal or plastic containers.

Before the advent of modern presses, farmers used to press the olives using manual, traditional presses. An animal, either a donkey or a mule, was used to drive the heavy stone grinding stones. There was a press in each village or town. Presses were owned by one or two farmers. The crushing stone used in the presses are of basalt material and of ancient origin, some of them dating back to the Byzantine time, taken from the ruins and reused by the farmers. The base stone of the press is of limestone. The press stones are similar to many of other presses in the region, similar to the one I found in my father's grove when I was a child. The cost of the oil pressing was paid from the olive oil itself after production, with a certain percentage agreed upon before pressing. Also, the owner of the press took the remnants of the pressed olives and used them for heating and burning. Before the 1950s, olive oil was not sold. People exchanged goods and products, and they used olive oil as one of the goods. It provided sort of social self-sufficiency.

1.10.1.3. Local traditional uses for olive oil

- **Local cuisine**

Olives and olive oil are basic ingredients in most of the local recipes from my region. There is seasonal food where freshly pressed olive oil is used. From a conversation with my mother, I got some information about specific dish called *Dakka* (دقة). Its main ingredients are olive oil, onion, tomatoes, red peppers and mint. The peppers are smashed using a traditional pestle and a stone mortar, made of local basalt. Olive oil is used for preserving a wide variety of food such as *Makdus* (مكدوس) and pickled black olives *Atoun* (عطون).

- **Medicine and light**

Locally, olive oil is strongly recommended and used for different illnesses and their treatments. My grandfather used to treat people traditionally with olive oil if they had stomach problems.

He applied the olive oil like an ointment on the abdomen and, would then place a cup over the belly button. Olive oil was also used to condition hair and ease bone and joint pain. Before the coming of electricity to the area, locals used olive oil for generating light at night using an olive oil lamps, locally called *Seraj* (سراج). My extended family kept an olive oil lamp until recent times as a part of the family heritage.

1.10.2. Generation 1950s memory (My parents' memories and observations)

1.10.2.1. Olive planting and harvesting in former times

Regarding olive planting, my father's generation relied on a method in which a piece of the tree's roots was taken and replanted. We called it *Qurmah* (قرمة). The chosen tree was of good quality, and in our region, the quality tree of the family is called *Maarawi* (معراوي) or *Hourani* (حوراني) .The root was then buried in the soil during the planting season and organized along geometric lines to make it easier for farmers to plough the groves. Then, the buds in this piece of the stem would sprout, forming a small new tree. A small planting needs to care for for approximately ten years until it becomes a small tree. The most common method of plowing, *Fadhan* (فدان,) employed donkeys or mules to pull the plows in the past. While automated farming has long been employed for large, readily accessible sections of land, *Fadhan* was still used for cultivation on steep hills and on uneven ground even in recent years.

When the olive harvest comes, the farmers begin to prepare for this season, as they start to prepare the food as well. The wives used to bake quantities of bread in the oven so that they would not be busy with the bread during the harvest. Carpenters also used to prepare the ladders *Salata* (سلالة) to use during the harvest.

The olive harvesters in the past used primitive methods according to my parents. Some of the workers in the harvest, both males and females, would climb to the trees using ladders and pick the olives fruits and throw them to the ground. The other workers, most of whom were elderly, would pick up these olive fruits from the ground and collect them. During the harvest, a friendly, cooperative, and lovely atmosphere filled the area. The harvest was transported by horses, mules, or donkeys. After the harvest was finished, the workers took the larger olives to the press. People helped each other cooperatively until all of them finished the harvest together, with no one left alone.

- **Pressing olives**

For nearly 100 years, pressing olives in our region took place in primitive presses, where families used to drag their olives to a large mill with help of animals. They would take these crushed olives and put them in bags made of hemp, wool, or hair. Then they would place these bags on each other's backs. Locally, these bags are called, *Alayk* the plural of *Alyka* (علائق ،عليقة). Then, the bags are pressed to extract the olive liquid from them, the applied pressure is done using a simple manual machine. They are compressed by male workers who collect the water and oil that comes out of the olives, which is called *Zubar* (زوبار). They dig pits in the ground so that the oil floats and the water and olive bodies remain at the bottom. Then, they collect the oil. However, no matter how hard they tried, according to my father, some of the oil remained in the leftover liquid.

- **Preserving olive oil**

The villagers, after obtaining this olive oil, would preserve it in clay vessels in the form of large jars, called in our region *Khabiya* (خابية), that is, a pottery cache. The oil would remain in the jars for a year or two, preserving its color and taste. These vessels do not change its

characteristics at all. Our olive oil from the southern countryside of Idlib, was characterized by its heaviness and strong taste.

1.10.2.2. Olive oil in food

Olive oil has a clear importance in our food, as there is no type of food or meal that we eat where olive oil is not one of the ingredients, whether it is food prepared at home or a quick meal eaten outside the home. It is part of our culture; it is included in this food and all our memories and parties. In our region, there is a famous dish in which the virgin oil is freshly pressed and bread and food are immersed in this olive oil. It is called *Zanana* (زنانة). We eat it after adding pomegranates, garlic, and bread, and it is one of the owners of the olive trees' favorite dishes.

1.10.2.3. Olive trees and ruins

Our ancestors planted numerous trees and inherited another number of trees from their ancestors. They all loved these trees and were dedicated to caring for them. There are some long-lived olive trees, especially those located among the ruins and monuments, and they were abundant in our region. In the year 1950, a severe frost occurred where the temperature dropped significantly, which led to the freezing of water inside the branches of the trees and then led to their drying out. The farmers cut down the dry trees and left some of their roots buried in the soil, which remained unaffected by the frost so that they would grow and become future trees.

Most of the antiquities in our region lie among the olive groves, so the presence of olive trees is linked to ancient Roman antiquities, and all of the ancient ruins and perennial trees remind us of these ancient people who are remembered with appreciation and respect, even if without academic accuracy. People from the immediate family lived in these ruins, raised livestock, and spent the cold winters inside caves.

Stories about olives and antiquities were passed down through generations. There are many important antiquities in our region near the olive groves. The most important of these are the antiquities of Sarjila and Shinsharah. In my town (Hazarin), the ruins merged with the olive groves, but unfortunately, farmers of the former time did not know the value of the monuments apart from their material value, so they reused the dressed stone material for building new houses. They cut the stones into smaller pieces to carry them easily and then build the new-formed pieces. They also destroyed many of the mosaics unintentionally.

To the north of our village, about 2 kilometers away, there was a patch of land full of old ruins and perennial olive trees. Most of these ruins were demolished, and their stones were scattered in large numbers. They were carved in the form of geometric parallelepipeds, rectangles, and cubes. Unfortunately, whenever someone from the village wanted to build a house, they would go to the antique stones, break them into pieces that could be easily carried to use it for his house. Despite this action by the people of the village, there were still beautiful and wonderful stones scattered among the large olive trees and buildings in the northern part of the village. Our village was located near several ancient Roman grottoes and caves. Some of the caves have an area of approximately 400 square meters, and it is said that it is all connected to each other. When our family entered the cave, there were ventilation holes in it. Local people used the caves for storing figs, grains, and other things in them.

In the east of our village, stands an old tell. It is beautiful and contains various antiquities, including pottery figurines in the form of horses, sheep, and cows and a number of small pottery figurines of girls and women from the era of the tell. At the end of this mound, there is a very deep well. No one knows where it extends. It is said that there is an underground road that connects this hill to our town, but no one has ever found it. During the conflict, around 2012-2013, many locals carried out illegal excavations at the tell since many local stories and legends

are constructed around it. They were hoping to find anything valuable and sell them on the black market for antiquities.

1.10.2.4. Ownership of olive fields in the past

The ownership of olive fields was divided into three parts in the past:

1. The first part represents a kind of patron-client system. The patrons owned the largest part of the fields because they bought olive groves from farmers who needed to sell them at very cheap prices. Under this ownership system, farmers worked for a patron on their farm and in turn received a small portion of the crops they produced.

2. The second part is farmer ownership (private). The number of trees varies from one farmer to another This is my family ownership situation.

3. The third section is ownership by endowment, when the governor and the rich donated some of their lands to places of worship. In our region, most of the land was held in these designed for the care and financial support of mosques and their imams.

1.10.2.5. Feelings, memories and connections with the cultural landscape

In the follow section I will present my father's view of his connection to the olive groves before the family's displacement to northern Syria. His perspective comes from a more traditional time, before the conflict and more closely tied to old tradition in my home area.

> "My relationship with olive trees was one of love and care, as I felt drawn to go down to the olive groves, walk among the trees, and take care of them by weeding them, taking care of their branches, fertilizing them, and watering them if the trees needed water. I felt psychological comfort when I watered the olive trees. For my father who had planted and raised many of the family trees the relationship was even closer."
>
> "For me, even though I felt happy when I walked among trees that I planted, took care of, and which, over the course of time eventually started to bear fruit, I always preferred the trees that I inherited from my grandparents because they

> reminded me of our great ancestors, of the great effort taken to care for these trees, and how several generations rejoiced in the seasons of harvesting, singing songs as they worked in the fields."
>
> "Since most of the olive groves contain ancient ruins from different eras, their walls may remain or may have collapsed over time. As for the stones of the monuments scattered among the olive trees, as well as the pieces of ancient mosaic stones directly under the olive trees, I have a feeling that when I mention the olive trees, I also remember the ruins that are next to these trees, and these thoughts are disturbed. I feel sadness and pain when I remember the archaeological sites among the olive fields, the demolition of antiquities, and the cutting down of trees. The barons of war did not hesitate to destroy the remains of the standing monuments and structures, as well as cut down perennial olive trees."
>
> "The memories of war are all sad memories; including everything: monuments, trees, houses, architecture, gardens, etc. When I remember olive trees and the groves, I feel sadness and pain in my heart because under every tree there are memories, stories and love. Olive trees are ingrained in our conscience, and it is impossible to forget our precious fields and their magnificent, splendid trees. Even if I tried, I cannot forget the fields in which we grew up. Our connection with olive trees is rooted from the time of our ancestors. I remembered the olive fields in our affected (abandoned) town, and feel a deep sadness being apart from those dear groves."

The difference between the memories of the two generations' (my own generation and that of my father) is clear, influenced by my father's accumulated experience on the land and farming knowledge. This deeper experience was noticeable in my parent's memories, some of which I myself heard for the first time. Other memories seem to overlap between us, but that was due to the oral history transferred down over generations. As a child, I was told some of the narratives and memories by my parents and grandparents. These stories constructed another layer of my cultural memories.

Chapter 3: The intertwined notions of landscape, memory, trauma and displacement

The terms memory, landscape and identity are the primary concerns of geographical research - with an emphasis on connections between people, place and culture. However, they are interconnected and impact each other. In this chapter, I am going to provide an overview of the terms cultural landscape, memory, identity, traumas, conflict and displacement. These themes are connected strongly in my research. That is why in the research interviews, I aim at mapping and understanding the connections between cultural landscape, memory and displacement, where most of the interviewees are from the region and have been displaced for many years.

1.11. The Cultural Landscape as a concept

Scholars in the fields of ecology, geography, urban design, landscape architecture, and related fields have long been particularly interested in the term "Landscape," due to its intricate combination of objective and subjective concepts, as well as its wide range of physical and nonphysical aspects.[75] Cultural landscapes are particularly important because they reside at the crossroads of biological and cultural variety, tangible and intangible heritage, and nature and culture. They are a sign of the rising understanding of the essential connections between local communities and their heritage, people and their natural environment, and people and themselves. They depict a finely woven web of interactions between people, events, and places over time.[76] In this part, I will discuss the topic of cultural landscape and its connections.

[75] Amin Mahan and Seyed Amir Mansouri, 'The Study Of "Landscape" Concept with an Emphasis on the Views of Authorities of Various Disiplines.', *Bagh-e Nazar* 14, no. 47 (2017).
[76] Ken Taylor and Jane Lennon, 'Cultural Landscapes: A Bridge between Culture and Nature?', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 17, no. 6 (November 2011): 537–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2011.618246.

1.11.1. Landscape in general

As a technical term used by artists, "landscape" was first used in English (cf. Oxford English Dictionary). Therefore, when used to refer to the innovative way in which a scene is presented artistically, the phrase may also be used to refer to the inventive and creative ways in which individuals situate themselves within their surroundings. Since no two persons can theoretically duplicate the viewed visuals the same way or be able to mentally see the same images, no two people will paint the same landscape. People's perceptions are shaped by the cultural information they acquire by living in a particular social environment.[77]

A landscape, considered as an interpretation of a territory, is a mental, social, cultural and physical reality that produces emotions, conditions and key decisions about the environment. Cultural landscapes can be defined as those landscapes historically constructed by human groups to satisfy the livelihoods of local populations, representing the superposition of different cultures, historical realities and market influences adapted to the heterogeneous characters of climate and terrain.[78] It can also refer to issues surrounding identity, culture, social and local economy.[79]

1.12. Cultural Landscape

Although the term "cultural landscape" has been used in various texts for many years now, there is no universal definition and authors use this term in their own ways.[80] The simplest

[77] Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, eds., *Landscape, Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives* (Pluto Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fsck3.
[78] J.M. García-Ruiz et al., 'Rewilding and Restoring Cultural Landscapes in Mediterranean Mountains: Opportunities and Challenges', *Land Use Policy* 99 (December 2020): 104850, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.104850.
[79] Ahmad Zamil Zakaria, Ismail Hafiz Salleh, and Mohd Sabrizaa Abd Rashid, 'Identity of Malay Garden Design to Be Promoted as the Cultural Tourism Product in Malaysia', *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 153 (October 2014): 298–307, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.063.
[80] Siavash Doroodian, 'Landscape, Natural Landscape, Cultural Landscape', *MANZAR, the Scientific Journal of Landscape* 7, no. 32 (1 October 2015): 82–87.

definition of landscape as a general term describes it as the science of the features of the geographical environment. The concept of cultural landscape refers to landscapes that have been altered by humans during development. Cultural landscapes are dynamic and volatile systems.[81] The cultural landscape, regardless of, more or less, clearly defined boundaries, whether natural or socio-cultural, has the character of a coherent entity with comprehensive features resulting from the integration of man with nature through interactions with nature, specific to a particular region and era.[82] The level of interaction between pattern and process has a significant impact on how landscapes are shaped.

As an academic term, cultural landscape dates back to Friedrich Ratzel (1895-1896) and was adopted by other German geographers in the early twentieth century. The term was introduced to the English-speaking world by Carl O. Sauer and became the central terminology of the Berkeley School of Geography.[83] Different disciplines have used the terminology in different ways, depending on academic traditions and the methods by which practitioners from the different disciplines have been trained or socialized. Starting in the 1960s, the term cultural landscape was increasingly adopted by other disciplines and the term environmental management was introduced.[84] The study of cultural landscapes is becoming increasingly multifaceted and multidimensional.[85] At the same time, the landscape concentrates and reflects people's attitudes to the world.[86] In the 1990s, the notation of cultural landscape was adopted

[81] Urszula Myga-Piątek, 'Cultural Landscape of the 21st Century: Geographical Consideration between Theory and Practice', *Hrvatski Geografski Glasnik/Croatian Geographical Bulletin* 73, no. 02 (1 March 2012): 129–40, https://doi.org/10.21861/HGG.2011.73.02.09.
[82] Viacheslav Andreychouk, 'Cultural Landscape Functions', in *Landscape Analysis and Planning: Geographical Perspectives*, ed. M. Luc, U. Somorowska, and J.B. Szmańda, Springer Geography (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 3–19, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-13527-4_1.
[83] Michael Jones, 'The Concept of Cultural Landscape: Discourse and Narratives', in *Landscape Interfaces: Cultural Heritage in Changing Landscapes*, ed. Hannes Palang and Gary Fry, Landscape Series (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2003), 21–51, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-0189-1_3.
[84] Jones.
[85] Andreychouk, 'Cultural Landscape Functions'.
[86] Urszula Myga-Piątek PhD, 'Transformation of Cultural Landscapes in the Light of the Idea of Sustainable Development', SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, 1 January 2010), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1547769.

as a category of protection by various international bodies.[87] In 1992, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee approved revised operational guidelines specifying that cultural landscapes can be protected under the 1972 World Heritage Convention.[88] Of the sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, there are 53 recognized cultural sites that focus on the distinct interaction between people and their environment.[89] The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as "a part of the land, as perceived by local people or visitors, which evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings."[90] [91]

The cultural landscape is frequently seen as a symbol of significance and is therefore important to the preservation of heritage.[92] The cultural heritage represented by the objects that have been preserved and show the activity of the people who once lived in this region play the most significant role in the cultural landscape that the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria region represent. These features also define the flow of all social processes that occurred on their territory. The complex of historical and cultural sites, as well as the distinctive natural formations, serves as a repository for historical memory.[93] They contain a truly impressive collection of monuments, ancient buildings and objects of the cultural landscape.

However, a cultural landscape is a setting that gives people a sense of their place in the world. As the sole example of an ancient living landscape in the Mediterranean basin, the mountains

[87] Jones, 'The Concept of Cultural Landscape'.
[88] Jones.
[89] Mechtild Rössler, 'World Heritage Cultural Landscapes: A UNESCO Flagship Programme 1992 – 2006', *Landscape Research* 31, no. 4 (October 2006): 333–53, https://doi.org/10.1080/01426390601004210.
[90] 'The European Landscape Convention (ELC) - Landscape Institute', 19 August 2016, https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/policy/13732-2/.
[91] 'The European Landscape Convention - Council of Europe Landscape Convention', Council of Europe Landscape Convention, accessed 12 May 2024, https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/the-european-landscape-convention.
[92] Niamh Moore-Cherry and Yvonne Whelan, eds., *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, Heritage, Culture and Identity (London New York: Routledge, 2016).
[93] Houssin, 'Historical and Cultural Landscape of the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria'.

of the Limestone Massif have historical significance and demonstrate how people have occupied natural areas. While the landscape must be preserved, they must not be turned into museums frozen in time. The challenge is to preserve them, or to preserve their sort of landscape and give local people a chance to grow and develop within them.[94] The area of southern Idlib province is characterized by its well-preserved landscape. Surviving fragments of these ancient villages in northern Syria show that the inhabitants were skilled in agriculture. There are several remains of olive oil and wine production, and mills. The rural lifestyle is evidenced by markets, bazaars, sports facilities and housing, (*figure 10*).

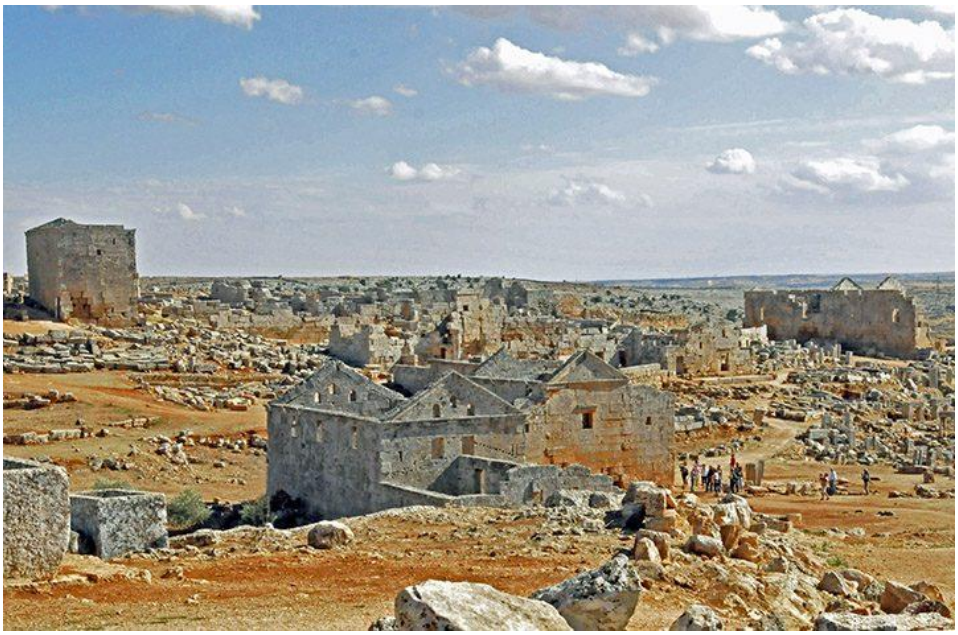

Figure 10: Remains of Serjilla, Syria, (Photo by Don Knebel),
https://www.youarecurrent.com/2017/06/19/column-syrias-dead-cities/

1.12.1. Cultural landscapes and their [trans]formation

Geographers and ecologists often assign the terms "cultural" or "traditional" to farming and grazing areas that are considered relatively well adapted to environmental conditions, based on

[94] Houssin. P:6

a very precise knowledge of the heterogeneity of the territory; however, in some cases, this is an overly romantic view of the relationship between local people and the environment.[95]

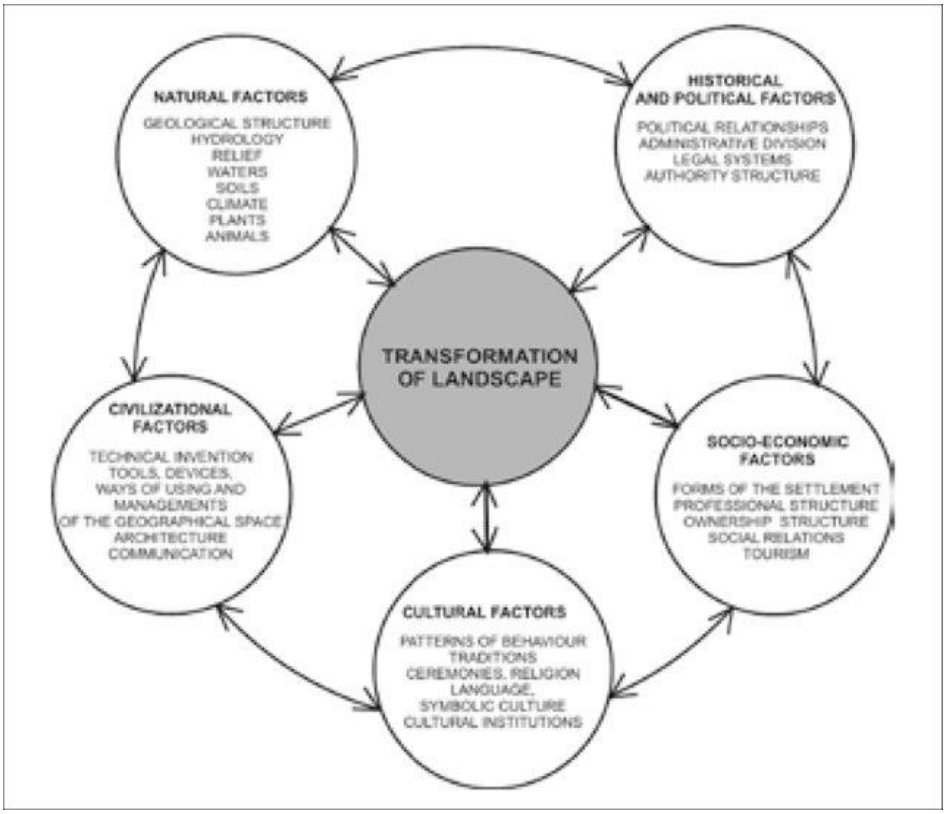

Figure 11: The factors that influence the evolution of landscapes.[96]

The use and transformation of the landscape by humans aims to provide them with suitable conditions for life and development. What enables the realization of certain human goals are relevant functions of the cultural landscape.[97] Humans change the landscape because they are forced to do so by the fact that the landscape is part of the place they are actively living. It is within that landscape that a person is born, grows, learns, implements his creative potential and life plans, changes the lives of others, changes the environment, and also dies and disappears. Thus, the chance for life and self-realization of the people inhabiting that landscape is an

[95] García-Ruiz et al., 'Rewilding and Restoring Cultural Landscapes in Mediterranean Mountains'.
[96] Myga-Piątek, 'Cultural Landscape of the 21st Century'.
[97] Andreychouk, 'Cultural Landscape Functions'.

essential goal of landscape management (transformation, adaptation, etc.) to meet human needs.[98] *Figure 11* shows the factors that fundamentally influence the evolution of landscapes.

The cultural landscape is primarily managed and shaped by humans, while the laws of nature are of secondary importance in its formation. The use and transformation of landscapes is subject to certain objectives of man, which are to create favorable conditions for life and growth. [99] The construction of a cultural landscape suggests that heritage sites are not isolated islands, but that there is an interdependence between people, social structures and agricultural landscapes.[100]

The cultural landscape is created and transformed by human action that have both a practical and a symbolic contact. The cultural landscape brings together evidence of historical cultures that can indicate human activities in the area characterized by geographical features. The Ancient Villages of Northern Syria (The Dead Cities region) consist of the above-mentioned elements from the Roman and Byzantine era such as villas, cisterns, churches, presses, and olive groves. Moreover, these elements do not only take physical forms, but they are also embodied in social relationships, cultural activities, agrarian works, and emotional connections constructed and associated with the physical features of the cultural landscape. [101]

Since limestone was essentially the only locally accessible building material in the ancient villages of Northern Syria, it was frequently used in construction, which is how the astounding preservation we see today came to be. Additionally, by the Early Islamic period, most of the Dead Cities had been abandoned. The area was only sparsely populated after that time, leaving

[98] Andreychouk.
[99] Andreychouk.
[100] Ken Taylor and Jane Lennon, eds., *Managing Cultural Landscapes*, Key Issues in Cultural Heritage (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012).
[101] Jesse Casana, 'The Late Roman Landscape of the Northern Levant: A View from Tell Qarqur and the Lower Orontes River Valley: The Late Roman Landscape of the Northern Levant', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 33, no. 2 (May 2014): 193–219, https://doi.org/10.1111/ojoa.12034.

many of the sites largely undisturbed.[102] The Dead Cities have been the subject of intense controversy regarding the origin of this past wealth, since the monumentality of the structures in the area clearly attest to the former opulence of these settlements.[103]

Although the ancient villages offer a glimpse of a singular moment in time, abandoned towns undergo change; in fact, some of them were changed and repurposed rather than entirely abandoned. Others saw the development of contemporary settlements close by or were subjected to natural weathering while being quarried for building materials. However, the prolonged Syrian conflict in 2011 resulted in a level of change never seen before. This rich archeological heritage has suffered greatly from war and terrorism, and the refugee crisis has created unforeseen administrative challenges. The devastating death toll from the February 6, 2023, earthquake in the region will surely result in more harm to the settlements' structural integrity.[104]

1.12.2. Cultural landscape and identity

Landscape cultural heritage is seen as an important vector of place identity (*genius loci*) as well as the only resource that directly informs contemporary society and plans about past land-use systems and their impacts on landscapes and ecosystems. The heritage of rural and urban landscapes is understood as critical to protecting people's access to and interaction with their (physical) past for obvious reasons such as cultural identity, the transmission of social memories, well-being, education, and recreation,[105] (*figure 12*).

[102] Casana.
[103] Casana.
[104] Abdulkarim, *World Heritage at Risk The Ancient Village of Northern Syria Before &during Crisis of 2011-2021*, 2011–21.
[105] Carole L. Crumley et al., 'Studying Long-Term Changes in Cultural Landscapes: Outlines of a Research Framework and Protocol', *Landscape Research* 42, no. 8 (17 November 2017): 880–90, https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2017.1386292.

Figure 12: A Syrian man writes on the trunk of a tree the Arabic slogan "we will not abandon the olives", near the frontline between Syrian government forces and Turkish-backed opposition fighters in the Syrian Idlib province. (AFP)

Abdul Rahman shared his experience:

> "I planted some groves and helped take care of the trees until they grew, so there was a familiarity between me and those trees. We grew up together."

Also, Razan mentioned similar points to the previous statement:

> "We were raised the way it (the olive tree) was raised. Since we were kids, the olive tree is with us, till we get old and die."

A landscape cannot be imagined without considering the individuals and groups that formed it throughout time.[106] Layers, tangible and intangible, are interconnected in a landscape. The layers are replete with their own stories, some of which are passed down through generations as a part of communal memory processes, but which also have a personal element, helping to shape both individual and group identities.[107] Cultural landscapes are, thus, perceived in both societal and individual contexts, according to the cultural anthropologist, Tim Ingold. [108]

Abdul Rahman states:

> "Most of the olive fields contain between their roots the remains of walls or foundations dating back to ancient periods of time, indicating that the

[106] Wojciech Bedyński, 'Changing Cultural Landscapes: The Case of Post-German Territories in Poland', *European Review* 30, no. S1 (November 2022): S86–93, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798722000412.
[107] Bedyński.
[108] Tim Ingold, 'The Temporality of the Landscape', *World Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (October 1993): 152–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.1993.9980235.

> cultivation of olive trees is linked to the history of the region." and "There are many cemeteries within the olive fields, and many stories were told about what happens in those cemeteries, as well as archaeological finds discovered while planting olive trees."

A historically developed cultural landscape creates a situation where the distinctions between the landscape and architecture are blurred, meaning that the architecture and landscape have come together to form a coherent whole. These abandoned landscape regions outside of megalopolises are crucial for showing how people and the environment may coexist peacefully. [109]

1.12.3. Landscape as a cultural and social construction

The "concept of an active role of intellectual and spiritual activity in establishing a cultural landscape" informs yet another strategy. The emphasis in this instance is on the idea that "cultural, spiritual, and intellectual values that are preserved and transmitted, like the olive trees, from one generation to the next in the form of information not only determine the formation and development of the cultural landscape but are also its part, being at the same time influenced by other, material components of the landscape." This method appears to provide the most complete description of the cultural landscape phenomena.[110]

In this context, many of the responses of the interviewees clarify their perception of the landscape merged with the ruin sites, as in Mohamad's response:

> "If the forest did not have ruins around it or within it, it would not be a beautiful landscape".

Also, My father's response:

> "Most of the antiquities in our region are among the olive groves, so that the presence of olive trees is almost linked to ancient Roman antiquities."

[109] Houssin, 'Historical and Cultural Landscape of the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria'. P:3
[110] Houssin. P:3

A landscape can encompass both tangible and non-material characteristics, as well as human and environmental, mythical, and cognitive components. Landscape can be a human-made artifact, a development resource, or anything with ecological, cultural, economic, or social importance. Landscape can refer to terrain, nature, habitat, and the functioning processes of the environment. It can refer to a place's aesthetic and subjective feelings, as well as its poetic, ideological, and symbolic significance. People use their knowledge and experience with the terrain to provide purpose, clarity, and value to their lives. [111] In this regard, Fatih shared this point:

> "The antiquities were a place of pilgrimage for us, especially during our spring outings, and we would seize opportunities to go to them."

The concept of cultural landscape extends on the idea that a single region might carry hundreds of cultural meanings. It is also a procedure for revealing humans' relationships with land. [112] Connections with the landscape can be lined by individuals and communities. Landscape locals often associate that with themselves. Connecting to this point, Mohamad Saed says:

> "We planted olive trees while we were there, and they grew with us. It is difficult for us to leave the trees there."

Sabah also responded:

> "Olive is rooted in us. We were raised, and the eldest planted the trees and we now plant, and our children eat. Later, our children plant, and their children eat."

Connecting to the previous quotes, I relate to Schama's sentence in this book *Landscape and Memory*:

[111] Janet Stephenson, 'Conflict in the Landscape: A Case Study of the Cultural Values Model', *Public History Review*, 1 January 2006, https://www.academia.edu/105162338/Conflict_in_the_Landscape_A_Case_Study_of_the_Cultural_Values_Model.

[112] Haza Jani and mohd ramzi mohd hussain, 'Cultural Landscape: A New Paradigm for Landscape Architecture', 2011.

"The essential character of a landscape comes from the human imprint."[113]

Some of the cultural landscape forms stories and legends around specific elements and ruins. In my area, I heard many such stories when I was a child. Many were connected to the jinn and supernatural powers that guarded the treasures till the chosen one found it. Some of the participants mentioned that as well. Fatima says:

> "There were stories of elves and so on. We have a field near the antiquities. We did not dare going there after sunset and we felt that the land was inhabited by elves at night."

In addition to Fatima's statement, Sabah made a comment saying:

> "We have a tell where people go and dig trying to find something. They dig, and things are hidden from them, they say, "This is being guarded by jinn." The site is called Tell Hazarin."

Hanna adds to this:

> "When harvesting olives, they tell us that the archaeological areas are watched over by jinn. People come who want to dig and excavate next to the antiquities. Many saying that they are guarded by supernatural powers and there are elves and stories about them. Sometimes the stories are just created to make people afraid to dig and excavate there or even approach the site."

1.12.4. Landscape, place and memory

Studies of memory and the landscape include a wide range of topics and incorporate the domains of power, materiality, and meaning. Furthermore, both emphasize the fluid processes of erasure, improvisation, and adaptation.[114] In his paper 'Temporality of Landscape,' the anthropologist Tim Ingold defines a landscape as "the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them."[115] This idea of

[113] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 1. Vintage Books ed (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1996).
[114] Ben Bridges and Sarah Osterhoudt, 'Landscapes and Memory', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, by Ben Bridges and Sarah Osterhoudt (Oxford University Press, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.013.304.
[115] Ingold, 'The Temporality of the Landscape'.

landscape is also seen as a phenomena of formation, with the body serving as the source of perception of the surroundings through all of its senses.

Value and meaning concepts, local and remote factors, and people and nonhumans all contribute to the production of landscape memories. These linkages frequently give rise to problematic cultural and ecological landscape histories that take us back to periods of political violence, resource expropriation, natural degradation, and environmental injustices.[116]

Also, Khalid responded to clarify the feelings of interconnectedness with the features of the landscape whether natural or human-made:

> "We had one of our groves near ruins of one of the buildings which we called Alburj (the tower), so we would sit next to it in the shade and have breakfast, or for example, we would rest or drink a cup of tea."

Khadija highlighted this point in her answer too:

> "I definitely remember the trees, the smells, people, even the stones and the trees. There are many beautiful memories that I will never forget."

The perceived environments that shape people's feeling of place and community are referred to as the landscape. A place is an identifiable, socially significant area that has a historical component attached to it. In certain situations, a community is a group of individuals who identify with one or more locations based on shared beliefs, commonalities, or acts of solidarity. As a result, landscape serves as a contextual horizon for perceptions, giving people a sense of who they are and where they are in the world. Concepts related to landscape frequently translate time into space or convey time via space.[117] Almost all the interviewees mentioned their connections to the olive groves and monuments nearby as well as their relations with each other. Fatima said in this context:

[116] Bridges and Osterhoudt, 'Landscapes and Memory'.
[117] Stewart and Strathern, *Landscape, Memory and History*.

> "I remember that when we were young, we would go to the olive groves with our grandparents and relatives, and each family would go and help the other family. When one family finished harvesting before the other families, they would go to help them."

When local landscapes change due to hardship, people and groups remember, edit, and rebuild place-based memories in different ways: some decide to reflect nostalgically on the past that is vanishing, others try to recreate it in a useful way, and still others rearrange the physical scene by adding formal monuments and shrines to commemorate significant past place-worlds.[118] People can oppose exclusionary and dominant representations of the past by asserting control over which memories are connected with landscapes and why. The emphasis on landscapes and memories as possible places of being empowered, justice, and creativity demonstrates how this area of study strives to not only understand the past, but also affect the future.[119]

The place, which is a socially built environment, is defined by its landscape. It is not only the result of the natural phenomena of the terrain, but also of individual and group memories. A place's memories build up over time as a palimpsest, forming the layers of place memory. The location memory's recall components are known as mnemonic devices in landscapes. They may be employed to retrieve information from our subconscious, the past, an occasion, a person, or deeper still. [120] It is also possible to propose that people move in accordance with their own inner landscapes. People may create these mental landscapes through stories heard from others, movies, or photos, or they may recall specific locations by picturing how they seemed and felt. These landscapes, to which they have a connection, are what they are recalling or creating here.

[118] Bridges and Osterhoudt, 'Landscapes and Memory'.
[119] Bridges and Osterhoudt.
[120] Arzu Güler, 'Evoking the Rural Memory Through Urban Landscapes', *CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN ARCHITECTURE: Development, Memory, Environment*, 1 January 2021, https://www.academia.edu/71049416/Evoking_the_Rural_Memory_Through_Urban_Landscapes.

These kinds of landscapes may travel with individuals, providing them with a feeling of "home" even when they are not "at home."[121]

In short, we contend that landscape offers a more expansive framework within which concepts of place and community may be located.[122] Incorporating history into these trends gives them temporal dimension and subjectivity, which is one of the key principles here. The past, in our opinion, is always creating and recreating concepts of place, realigning or setting it apart from ideals of community. Cultural landscape features and history is part of locals. That is expressed clearly in a quote from Razan:

> "I remember the stories that our grandparents used to tell us in the past, when we were with grandparents, or the elders. They used to tell how they lived. I mean, people here also lived with olive trees, picked olives, and worked in olives groves."

Besides Razan's quote, Usama said*:*

> "The antiquities in our area are something that existed from the time of our ancestors. Our grandparents talked to us about these antiquities around us a lot, about how it was before, from a time in which the Romans lived and after them to this day."

I believe that concepts of memory and place are two important factors influencing identity. Through the use of landscape, memory and place may be understood as essential mediators that bring the local, national, and global into harmony, or as locations where tensions between these influences are expressed.[123] Studies reveal that a person's or a group's identity can be closely linked to the environment and its cultural norms. Ancestral connotations can be instilled into the environment by persons who have a long history with that location. Because they

[121] Stewart and Strathern, *Landscape, Memory and History*.
[122] Stewart and Strathern.
[123] Stewart and Strathern.

reinforce the enduring bond that exists between people and place, custom, ritual, and myth can deepen attachment to place. [124] As Hoskins says:

> "the … landscape itself, to those who know how to read it aright is the greatest historical record we possess."[125]

1.13. Memory, Identity and sense of belonging

The terms "identity" and "memory" are widely used and controversial nowadays.[126] Memory is a powerful tool. It evokes the senses: a smell, a familiar touch, an image, or a sound heard before can transport us not only to different times but also to different places. With each memory stimulus, we evoke the context of those places, whether they are spatially specific, geographically defined or immaterial, or metaphorical places: we are placing our memories in space and time.[127] Memory is the "other" that constantly haunts history. Memory is a self-constructed image of the past in the present. Hence, it is subjective. It may also be irrational, inconsistent, deceptive and self-serving.[128]

Like memory, identity is constructed on many levels, from the individual to communities to nations.[129] Identity can be approached on both the philosophical and the everyday level. Both levels seem to have a certain affinity: perhaps there is even a causal relationship between them.[130] The basis of identity in a cultural perspective is the natural and cultural values that

[124] Stephenson, 'Conflict in the Landscape'.
[125] William G. Hoskins and Keith Thomas, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005).
[126] Allan Megill, 'History, Memory, Identity', *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 3 (1 August 1998): 37–62, https://doi.org/10.1177/095269519801100303.
[127] Danielle Drozdzewski, Sarah De Nardi, and Emma Waterton, eds., *Memory, Place and Identity: Commemoration and Remembrance of War and Conflict*, Routledge Research in Culture, Space and Identity (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).
[128] Megill, 'History, Memory, Identity'.
[129] Gail Weldon, 'A Comparative Study of the Construction of Memory and Identity in the Curriculum of Post-Conflict Societies: Rwanda and South Africa', *History Education Research Journal* 6, no. 1 (1 January 2006): 55–71, https://doi.org/10.18546/HERJ.06.0.09.
[130] Megill, 'History, Memory, Identity'.

have two dimensions, tangible and intangible.[131] An identity guides individual behavior and goes beyond the empirical, brilliant, logical and rational thinking that leads people to "do untold things for each other".[132] Hence, speaking in the context of Syria, specifically, the northwest of the country, cultural landmarks and archaeological sites are important components of national identity, however, they are actually understood by locals somewhat differently.[133] In this next section, I am going to delve into the topics of memory, identity and sense of belonging. I grouped them together since they are interrelated and part of my research.

1.13.1. Anthropological notions of memory and personal identity

Memory plays a role in society on several levels: at the level of the individual, the group, and society as a whole, and as a "shared" or "collective" memory in the context of nationalism and the construction of collective national identities. Memory has been used to refer to the contents of the past as they become present, and to the process that transfers the past into the present; as an alternative to date and as a supplement to history.[134] According to Winter (2000), more attention was paid to collective memory issues in the 1980s and 1990s, when PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) became more widely recognized with the realization that there are men, women and children among us, in our families, who are overwhelmed by traumatic memories.[135]

[131] Laleh Ramezani et al., 'Cultural Identity in Conservation of the Cultural Landscape Values in Uraman Takht Village—Iran' (Preprints, 28 January 2019), https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints201901.0278.v1.
[132] Weldon, 'A Comparative Study of the Construction of Memory and Identity in the Curriculum of Post-Conflict Societies'.
[133] Tsuneki et al., 'A Series of Photogrammetry for Protection of Syrian Cultural Heritage Ancient Villages of Northern Syria'. P: 12.
[134] Weldon, 'A Comparative Study of the Construction of Memory and Identity in the Curriculum of Post-Conflict Societies'.
[135] J. Winter, 'The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the "Memory Boom" in Contemporary Historical Studies', *Canadian Military History*, 2000, https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Generation-of-Memory%3A-Reflections-on-the-Boom%E2%80%9D-Winter/60769dadd3c77c9697352944181e104e939f85bc.

Memory processes constantly alter the intrinsic relationships between forgetting and remembering throughout time. Memory occurs when forgotten details are continuously recollected together with newly discovered types of forgetfulness. A mechanism known as the background-foreground mechanism appears to define memory functioning in situations where a complete erasure of the past is uncommon. Rather, some elements are more frequently subject to brief periods of oblivion; once placed in the background and narcotized, they always have the potential to return to the foreground and be reactivated, again becoming crucial to the collective memory of a particular community.[136]

Memory can connect us to our individual past and to the past (as we know it) of our closest relatives, and it does so by recounting family history. These links can be facilitated by sharing heirlooms, passing on photos and surnames, and reciting common practices such as cooking recipes, singing, and speaking other languages.[137] Our ability to locate memories shows how the absence of memory is evoked, and made present, in and through the folded mixture of the visual, the physical, the tactile, the auditory, the olfactory, the emotional, and the spiritual.[138] Remembering the past is an essential part of the present and is important for several reasons. Not only is it closely linked to our sense of identity, but it is also an inherent part of the heritage process, in which we remember the past in light of our current needs and aspirations.[139] Memory is defined as "the retention of, or the capacity to retain, past experience or previously acquired information."[140] However, memory encompasses not just the act of remembering the past, but also the act of forgetting. What distinguishes the two parts of memory is that

[136] Patrizia Violi, 'Spaces of Memory and Trauma: A Cultural Semiotic Perspective', in *Semiotics and Its Masters*, ed. Kristian Bankov and Paul Cobley (De Gruyter, 2017), 185–204, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501503825-010.
[137] Drozdzewski, De Nardi, and Waterton, *Memory, Place and Identity*.
[138] Drozdzewski, De Nardi, and Waterton.
[139] Sara McDowell, 'Heritage, Memory and Identity', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, ed. Brian Graham and Peter Howard (Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 37–54.
[140] Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2. ed., 11. printing (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009).

forgetfulness cannot be controlled or targeted by the individual.[141] Sabah tried to emphasis several times the point of past being as important as future. A person without a past, lacks a present and future:

"Memories are part of us. Who does not have a past, does not have a future."

Individuals' memories are shaped by their own prior experiences, which emerge in reaction to certain triggers in the surroundings or an emotional condition they find themselves in. Memory has a distinct function when the displaced memories are concentrated rather than where they are dispersed. Memory has a different influence on historical identity, homeland imagination, and the myth of return, depending on the location.[142]

Forgetting and memory seem vital to our shared lives, and it is also possible that we can have too much of both. Excessive forgetting turns us into leaves scattered by the wind. Too much memory will deprive us of the future and close off the possibility of opening up to others who are not part of our memory community. In the end, it may be best to forget, or at least allow the acts of time to have their natural, devastating effects on past realities.[143] The common feature underlying most contemporary manifestations of memory paranoia seems to be an insecurity about identity, an insecurity that generates an excessive occupation of memory.[144]

Only one of the interviewees mentioned that he would like to forget and erase his memory of both the bad and happy, as he feels the pain of both since the displacement. Interviewee 38:

[141] Zeynep Ece Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory: Post-Conflict Memorialisation for Recovery and Reconciliation', *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 12 April 2022, https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-06-2021-0103.
[142] Mateja Celestina, *Living Displacement: The Loss and Making of Place in Colombia*, 1st ed. (Manchester University Press, 2018), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvnb7pm4.
[143] William James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Cornell University Press, 2006), https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501726866.
[144] Megill, 'History, Memory, Identity'.

> "It is difficult for someone to forget memories if he tried to forget them a lot, which means they will remain engraved in the memory: but I would like to forget them so that I do not continue to suffer a lot."

Other participants commented on that, but they limited memory erasure to the war and displacement time only.

1.13.2. Cultural and collective Memory

Halbwachs discusses the concepts of cultural and collective memory and makes the case that, when remembering, an individual's memory interacts with the collective memory.[145] Memory remains constant both throughout and after going through terrible experiences.[146] People are able to learn and remember details about past experiences and how they relate to one another in location and time because of episodic memory.[147] Memories, whether individual or collective, are always double-edged since they provide either solace to some or cause hatred in others. In the 80s of last century's literature, collective memories are typically associated with power dynamics, relativism, and cultural creation.[148] Memorialization's purpose is to create a "realm of memory" where the past may be met, faced, overcome, and even forgotten.

3.3.2.1. Cultural Memory

Cultural memory, is a collective concept of all the knowledge that guides behavior and experience within the interactive workings of society and that is acquired over generations in repeated societal practice and initiation.[149] Complicating the delicate balance between getting beyond the past and learning from it are sometimes unstable socio-political situations and rival

[145] Maurice Halbwachs, Lewis A. Coser, and Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, The Heritage of Sociology (Chicago London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
[146] Bessel A. Van Der Kolk, 'Trauma and Memory', *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 52, no. S1 (September 1998), https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1819.1998.0520s5S97.x.
[147] Endel Tulving, 'How Many Memory Systems Are There?', *American Psychologist* 40, no. 4 (April 1985): 385–98, https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.40.4.385.
[148] Inga-Lill Aronsson and Susanna Price, 'Culture, Heritage, Memory: Toward a Resonant Cultural Solution for Resettlement', *Human Organization* 0, no. 0 (2024): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1080/00187259.2024.2307845.
[149] Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125, https://doi.org/10.2307/488538.

"regimes of memory" that compete for legitimacy and the ability to interpret the past.[150] Cultural memory, according to Jürgen Straub, is the sociocultural medium and scripts that people use to organize and systematize their memories of the past.[151]

By highlighting its complexity beyond the processual basics of encoding, storing, recording, and retrieving experiences that can occur sequentially or not, voluntarily and involuntarily (un/consciously), in the long or short term, as well as in a sensory manner, Jones Owain affirms this enrichment of memory in geographical studies. "*Memory is a key means by which the present is practiced*," he says, placing the imaginative and creative part of memory in the performativity of practice embodied spatially across time.[152]

The past is something to be remembered as much as it is an integral part of one's own identity and feeling of duty. [153] Locals of southern Idlib feel and perceive the cultural memory as part of them, part of their identity. So, by asking about the meaning of cultural memory to them, Fatima said:

> "Everything we went through in life and was throughout our lives is considered part of our cultural identity. Yes, my memories are part of my cultural identity."

3.2.3.2. Collective Memory

Since the 1980s, there has been a true global resurgence of interest in collective cultural memory. The social constructs of the past that help people and groups to locate themselves in place and time are known as cultural memories. An interdisciplinary approach has become necessary for the study of cultural memories, but geographical inquiries about places, spaces,

[150] Craig Larkin and Inna Rudolf, 'Memory, Violence and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Rebuilding and Reimagining Mosul', *Peacebuilding* 0, no. 0 (2023): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2023.2247722.
[151] Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies* (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co.KG, 2008), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110207262.
[152] Owain Jones, 'Geography, Memory and Non-Representational Geographies: Geography, Memory and Non-Representational Geographies', *Geography Compass* 5, no. 12 (December 2011): 875–85, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2011.00459.x.
[153] Barry Schwartz, 'Culture and Collective Memory: Comparative Perspectives', in *Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, ed. Laura Grindstaff, Ming-Cheng M. Lo, and John R. Hall (Routledge, 2010).

and landscapes of memory have taken on a particular importance.[154] Collective memory can be defined as "social representations concerning the past, which each group produces, institutionalizes, guards and transmits through the interaction of its members."[155] Therefore, it gives these groups a way to create unique social identities and set themselves apart from others.[156]

Presentism and traditionalism are two models of collective memory. Presentism is a political and postmodern paradigm. The traditionalism paradigm is a realist model that assumes the past has an authentic heritage that may provide moral guidance for learning from the past, but that might change as history progresses. The past is more than just history; it provides a foundation for cultural creativity and evolution.[157] In this research, I focus on a traditional view of memory, based on ethnographic accounts of suffering, which people do not forget, and which still resonate in their memory of a long-lost place.

When the collective memory is traumatic, there can be tension between those who think it is better to forget the traumatic past than to remember it and those who think it should be remembered.[158] If we accept collective memory, we must also accept collective trauma.

1.13.3. Memory of places and Places of memory

According to Assman, when an event in history is ingrained in a community's memory, it takes on the function of a transmitter, forming a part of the impacted community's mental system through the lessons, symbols, and conceptions it transmits. To avoid forgetting, societies strive

[154] Peter Meusburger, Michael Heffernan, and Edgar Wunder, eds., *Cultural Memories: The Geographical Point of View*, vol. 4, Knowledge and Space (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8945-8.
[155] Paolo Jedlowski, 'Memory and Sociology: Themes and Issues', *Time & Society* 10, no. 1 (2001): 29–44.
[156] Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers, and Eyal Zandberg, 'On Media Memory: Editors' Introduction', in *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age* (Springer, 2011), 1–24.
[157] Schwartz, 'Culture and Collective Memory'.
[158] Weldon, 'A Comparative Study of the Construction of Memory and Identity in the Curriculum of Post-Conflict Societies'.

to spatialize their memory, linking time and location, since "memory needs places and tends toward spatialization."[159] When a place, location or a building was bombed, people linked the place with the time of this traumatic event, and subsequently, sometimes referred to the event by the place where it took place.

Lieux de mémoire, or "realms of memory," are locations that are linked to a community's identity and existence as "fermented" memory sites.[160] James Young claims that monuments, or lieux de mémoire, take the place of and bear the memory-work of communities, relieving them of their "memory-burden." Such are place memories surrounding the ruins scattered among the olive groves locals visited on a daily basis. He makes the argument that "the initial impulse to memorialize events...may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them."[161] Since the source of continuity is located there, the *lieu de mémoire* also serves as a tool for safeguarding things that one fears will be lost. In addition to being a part of cultural legacy, the built environment offers a site where all cultural creations occur and are conserved.[162]

Places make strong connections with people's memory. That was mentioned by Fatih:

> "Whenever I see any landmark or picture of an area in which I lived, I recall everything I went through in that area."

Identities are frequently most tightly linked to perceptions of landscape, or how a location appears as an ordered form of environment that shapes perceptions of place and community.[163] Places and people should not be seen as separate entities; rather, they are parts of a shared and

[159] Jan Assmann and Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, 1. Engl. ed (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), p.47.
[160] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations* 26 (1 April 1989): 7–24, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520.
[161] James E. Young, 'The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today', *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992): 267–96.
[162] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.
[163] Stewart and Strathern, *Landscape, Memory and History*.

interactive totality.[164] For example, in southern Idlib, particular olive groves and ruins were very strongly linked to individual events.

Places make culture tangible, and people develop attachments to specific places. In this regard, most of the interviews contained responses about memory of places. Fatima said:

> "It brings back memories about when I took a walk among the olive trees, and even sometimes during the olive harvest season when I see people picking olives, I remember these memories."

Also, Razan response was:

> "When I hear the word "memory," I remember the places we used to go, for example, the ruins: the ruins of al-Barah, the ruins of al-Rabi'ah, and al-Khirba, the olive lands, there are many places. We hear the word "memories," and we also remember close people."

Besides the previous words, participant 27 was more direct about loss connected to people in the context of memory:

> "I remember my school, my grandfather's house, our house, our fields and picnics. Also, the pictures of my childhood friends who died."

The social, political, and cultural implications of places linked to pain and suffering are intricate and multidimensional. In addition to discussing memory, identity, reconciliation, justice, reparations, and loss, difficult heritage sites may also bring up topics of hatred, segregation, humiliation, and placing blame on others.[165]

[164] Zeynep Gül Ünal and Saadet Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting: The Contribution of Cultural Heritage to the Return Home After Forced Migrations Due to Human Induced Disasters Yeniden Bağlanmak: İnsan Kaynaklı Afetlere Bağlı Zorunlu Göçler Sonrası Eve Dönüş Sürecine Kültür Mirasının Katkısı', *İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları*, 1 January 2020, https://www.academia.edu/44062032/Reconnecting_The_Contribution_of_Cultural_Heritage_to_the_Return_Home_After_Forced_Migrations_due_to_Human_Induced_Disasters_Yeniden_Ba%C4%9Flanmak_%C4%B0nsan_Kaynakl%C4%B1_Afetlere_Ba%C4%9Fl%C4%B1_Zorunlu_G%C3%B6%C3%A7ler_Sonras%C4%B1_Eve_D%C3%B6n%C3%BC%C5%9F_S%C3%BCrecine_K%C3%BClt%C3%BCr_Miras%C4%B1n%C4%B1n_Katk%C4%B1s%C4%B1.

[165] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.

1.13.4. Traumatic memory

Most social trauma analysts concur that there are several ways to deal with traumatic memories, but not all of them think that the traumatized community must deal with the memories in a predetermined order.[166] The development of a community's collective identity and history may include trauma if the majority of the population accepts it as part of its history and identity. Not every community that recalls a social trauma will go through each stage in the sequence, and various coping mechanisms commonly coexist and are used by various social groupings and institutional contexts.[167]

Even though painful memories, especially traumatic ones, can occasionally be primarily personal, they frequently are not; instead, they are sometimes deeply entwined with how society functioned in the place where individuals live.[168] Memory issues are among the most common consequences of traumatic events. An individual's post-traumatic memory is frequently characterized as partial, disjointed, and disorganized. This personal painful memory and the physical post-traumatic state of a city are similar in this way.[169] Regarding this point, Fatih says:

> "I do not want to remember the disasters that the war caused in my country, including the destruction of buildings, people, trees and stones, but in vain I tried, as the tape of its painful memories does not cease from my memory."

Since it is a very sensitive and delicate topic to deal with. I tried to avoid going deep asking questions provoking traumatic memories. But some of the responses were aimed at this

[166] B. Giesen, 'Social Trauma', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001), 14473–76, https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/00386-7.
[167] Giesen.
[168] Nigel Hunt, 'Memory and Social Meaning: The Impact of Society and Culture on Traumatic Memories', in *Hurting Memories and Beneficial Forgetting*, ed. Michael Linden and Krzysztof Rutkowski (Oxford: Elsevier, 2013), 49–57, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-398393-0.00004-3.
[169] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.

issuedirectly together with their feelings towards such events. That can be seen in one of the answers from interviewee 27:

> "When someone hears the word "memory" it is necessary to have happy memories in most cases. But after this displacement, and what happened to us, so they are bad memories. Sometimes, they would overcome the happy ones due to the amount of bombing that one witnessed, I remember the bombing and the moments of our worries that overshadowed the happy moments that we lived."

It shows how memories are changed and associated with war as Saad says:

> "We remember our schools and our friends who have died or emigrated. Every person here still has some of their old friends, but most memories have been destroyed by the war and we have lost a lot of dear people."[170]

Mohamad Saed adds to that:

> "After displacement, I want to erase everything. Since the time of displacement, our lives have been considered nothing."

Following the previous quotes, another answer was clearly stated about the traumas in the displaced people's memory: Heba said:

> "It is difficult for a person to forget. There were many painful scenes, so many bad memories stuck in our memories. For example, there were regime bombings, victims of aircraft bombings. We wish we could erase these things from our memories, but unfortunately, it is impossible to forget them,"

She adds*:*

> "Feelings of joy when the beautiful memories come back, we smile indirectly because we were very happy in those days, and it is a bad memory and bad feelings because we deprived all of this area and those monuments. Even though the olive harvest season has become that which we fear as much as we used to love it before."

[170] 'Idlib before the War: Carpets, Olives and Handcrafts', 9 March 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51535996.

1.13.5. Memoryscape

Memoryscapes are specific groups of places and areas that hold special meaning for the ways that people connect with them and tell stories about the past.[171] Memoryscapes are shaped by a variety of contextual elements that influence how cultures react to them through their tales, rather than being fully and explicitly written in the place itself. Memoryscapes take on several discursive meanings when they are integrated within a contentious and dynamic socio-political environment. That is to say, memoryscapes preserve public memory narratives while, critically, providing a means of challenging deeply ingrained narratives by rewriting history.[172]

"The locus of memory lies more readily in place than in time," according to David Lowenthal.[173] Memoryscapes are defined by Phillips and Reyes as " a complex and vibrant plane on which memories emerge, are contested, transform, encounter other memories, mutate, and multiply."[174] The concept of memory, particularly memoryscape, is seen as a critical component in the rebuilding of home and identity.[175] Post-conflict memoryscapes connect the past with the present, the past with the future, and the past with repair. They establish a connection between immaterial regions of situated memory and actual sites of conflict.[176] Even if they are peripheral, these stories and memoryscapes serve to ground collective memory in tangible locations and to encapsulate the social and cultural information required to support the idea that peace is more than just the absence of violence.

[171] Stefanie Kappler, 'Sarajevo's Ambivalent Memoryscape: Spatial Stories of Peace and Conflict', *Memory Studies* 10, no. 2 (April 2017): 130–43, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698016650484.
[172] Kappler.
[173] David Lowenthal, 'History and Memory', *The Public Historian* 19, no. 2 (1 April 1997): 30–39, https://doi.org/10.2307/3379138.
[174] Kendall R. Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes, *Surveying Global Memoryscapes: The Shifting Terrain of Public Memory Studies* (na, 2011).
[175] Sana Murrani, Helen Lloyd, and Ioana-Cristina Popovici, 'Mapping Home, Memory and Spatial Recovery in Forced Displacement', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 23 March 2022, 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2022.2055777.
[176] Teresa Lappe-Osthege and Jovana Diković, 'Constructing Postconflict Memoryscapes: From Narratives of Division to Coexistence', text/html, 14 September 2023, https://doi.org/10.5282/RCC/9684.

Given that social discourses and practices give memoryscapes their meaning, memoryscapes are relational in nature, these customs result from interactions between individuals that surround those mementos as well as from interactions between individuals and the location in question.[177] Landscape ambience is significant for storing and recalling memories in the scape itself. That was clearly indicated by Fatih:

> "When I hear the sounds of the birds that inhabit those ruins and the smells of daffodils and lavender, I remember those ruins."

Individual or collective memory is essential to the perception and interpretation of landscapes.[178] Individuals' and people's collective sense of place is a product of culture as well as a biological reaction to the physical surroundings. People develop attachments to locations that are important to them or that bring them pain. Environmental features of the landscape are basic elements of memories and recalling memories alike. Adding to that aspect, interviewee 27 said:

> "The sound of a bird recalls my memories; its name is the fig bird or the catnip bird."

1.13.6. Displaced memories and memories of displacement

Displacement degrades cultural places, reducing historical and aesthetic qualities and affecting future generations' bequest values.[179] All the olive trees bequeathed by our ancestors as well as the trees raised by my father are gone as physical bequests linking generations of our family.

Memories of displacement might be very painful and traumatic. People seek shelter, safety and possibility to survive. Most of the displaced recall memories of home. When this aspect was raised, Abdul Naser responded:

[177] Kappler, 'Sarajevo's Ambivalent Memoryscape'.
[178] Emma Hanna, 'Landscape and Memory', in *Televising History*, ed. Erin Bell and Ann Gray (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 107–21, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277205_8.
[179] Schwartz, 'Culture and Collective Memory'.

> "After displacement, I remember the most important thing about my home and my land, which are the olive fields."

Abdul Naser added to that when he was asked about memory erasure:

> "I want to erase displacement from my memory and return to my region, my fields, my work, and my environment in which I grew up."

The displaced compare life before and after displacement as a way of analysing the shock. Some try to ignore that but in vain. The tone of the voice can explain further more than words. In this aspect, voices of the interviewees replying to specific question were a bit different from other questions. I am not going in this analytical aspect in this thesis, but I want mention it here at least. Sabah explained in sorrow:

> "Whenever I hear word memories, I cry over our situation of how we were and how we became. We had many means of making a livelihood, and most of it lay in the olive groves, but we went out, only in our clothes, leaving everything behind."

The memories of the local folk from my town are not so much about what they could see than about what they could decipher about the olive groves from familiar sounds and smells. Past emotions and perceptions remain powerful throughout life, and perhaps even more so when one's destiny is to leave your homeland by forced to another landscape. Fatih said:

> "I am full of nostalgia for those fields and the region in general, and its images will never leave me. I am full of nostalgia for it and I cannot forget it as long as I am alive."

1.13.7. Memory and senses and materials

Researchers from a variety of disciplines investigate how people feel about, engage with, and value landscapes, emphasizing our sensory reactions to the places we live in.[180] Senses and emotions are not just physiological tools for capturing inputs about the surroundings, but also

[180] Christine Berberich and Neil Campbell, *Affective Landscapes in Literature, Art and Everyday Life*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2016), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315565873.

an tool that continually updates our place in the world.[181] The senses are involved in the interpretation of history because they lie at the heart of or observations and are the custodians of tangible events. Memory connects the other senses.[182] The senses are fundamental to the formation of contemporary identity, spatial awareness, and recollections of the past.[183] The senses combine to generate meaning.

One participant, Usama noted:

> "I remember the sound of birds and the voices of my friends when we were talking and laughing, how we used to laugh. I also remembered the smell of barbecue."

This clarifies the point that senses such as hearing and smell are also strongly connected to landscape memories.

Food also becomes a vehicle for recalling 'home' and arousing sensory memories in transnational situations, where emotions, memory, food, and the senses are all intricately linked.[184] The taste sense connected to landscape and memory may be projected onto events in the cultural landscapes as the interviewees experienced them. Most of the participants mentioned that. I am going to insert some of the answers. Participant 27:

> "When we were picking olives, we took with us paprika bread, Tanoor bread (homemade), and we used to bring fresh oil (Khreej). This olive oil has a unique taste. These are the tastes and smells that bring back my memories."

Razan:

> "When I taste new freshly pressed olive oil, all the memories are recalled."

[181] José Roberto Pellini, *Senses, Affects and Archaeology: Changing the Heart, the Mind and the Pants* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018).
[182] C. Nadia Seremetakis, 'The Memory of the Senses, Part I: Marks of the Transitory', in *The Senses Still* (Routledge, 1994).
[183] Joy Damousi and Paula Hamilton, *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory and the Senses*, ed. Joy Damousi and Paula Hamilton, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2016), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315445328.
[184] Noorman Abdullah, 'Comfort Food, Memory, and "Home": Senses in Transnational Contexts', in *Everyday Life in Asia* (Routledge, 2010).

Hanna:

> "The taste of olive oil freshly pressed, the smell of earth when it rains the first time in the year, those things remind us of when we were picking olives."

And here comes what Khadija said:

> "I feel sad and cry, especially during the time of olive harvest. The taste of olives and oil here is different from the taste of olives and oil in our region."

The senses' interpretation leads to a rediscovering of reality as a shared, concrete experience. As observers or guardians of material experience, the senses are crucial to the interpretation of history. Across all other senses, memory transports, bridges, and crosses itself as a distinct meta-sense.[185] Memory and materiality are interwoven, producing what we call memory effects. Memory is a 'effect' created by and with materiality, not just by a human-centered awareness. Thinking of memory as a scale allows us to perceive memory as both physical and temporal.[186]

Objects, settings, and actions are powerful memory triggers, particularly in cases of displacement.[187] A material component of memory is important for all groups to relate to their history and sense of self. Buildings, items, and the remnants of them serve as significant catalysts for shared identities and experiences.[188] Objects and materials preserving memories are considered very important as they are the holders of the memoir. However, some of these holders may get lost or disappear creating a feeling of vulnerable memories and frugality in front of oblivion. I would like to highlight some points from the interviews. Abdul Naser said:

[185] C. Nadia Seremetakis, ed., *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, First edition (London: Routledge, 2019).
[186] Katrina Schlunke, 'Memory and Materiality', *Memory Studies* 6, no. 3 (July 2013): 253–61, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698013482864.
[187] Mastoureh Fathi, 'Memories of Material Home: Refugee Women's Depiction of Absent Objects', in *Memory, Mobility, and Material Culture* (Routledge, 2022), 97–111.
[188] Sarah Surface-Evans, 'Traumascapes: Progress and the Erasure of the Past', in *Blurring Timescapes, Subverting Erasure*, ed. Sarah Surface-Evans, Amanda E. Garrison, and Kisha Supernant (Berghahn Books, 2022), 149–70, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781789207118-012.

> "I was storing photos on the phone's memory, but the phone crashed, and everything went with it. This also means that it saddens me that even documented memories are gone."

Fatima:

> "I have pictures of the ruins and they remind me of my childhood."

Khadija:

> "I Never want erase my memories, not from my memory, not even a picture on a mobile phone or a photograph".

The resulting sensations and emotional imprints can infiltrate and adhere to materiality, and materialism is built into landscape, in contingent, unexpected, and incomprehensible ways.[189] The landscape that these locals possess is one of memory, emotions and perceptions using all the senses.

1.14. Identity and sense of belonging

Identity is nowadays viewed as a community's defining feature. The concept of having something in common is what drives the desire to become collective. Furthermore, the point at which one becomes distinct from another is when they share something. As a result, through similarity, the community is able to construct the notion of the other.[190] Nonetheless, identity has a significant social meaning as it is collectively or group-defined and is interpreted, mediated, and disputed.[191] One of the most essential requirements of humans is to give meaning to the intricate interactions between nature and communities.[192] The need to feel emotionally and mentally attached to someone or something is innate to human nature. Since maintaining

[189] Owain Jones, '"Not Promising a Landfall ...": An Autotopographical Account of Loss of Place, Memory and Landscape', *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (1 May 2015): 1–27, https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3615880.
[190] Ziya Kıvanç Kıraç, 'Identity, Belonging, and Conflict: Symbolic Borders of Community', in *Advances in Religious and Cultural Studies*, ed. Emilia Alaverdov and Muhammad Waseem Bari (IGI Global, 2022), 153–68, https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8911-3.ch010.
[191] Narayana Jayaram, 'Identity, Community, and Conflict:A Survey of Issues and Analyses', *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (22 September 2012): 44–61.
[192] Kıraç, 'Identity, Belonging, and Conflict'.

positive interpersonal relationships and social connections is a fundamental human need, the need to belong is crucial to our overall development and well-being.[193]

Feeling "at home" is a common metaphor for belonging, with "home" standing for security, warmth, and attachment.[194] Individually, a sense of belonging indicates a personal connection to and engagement with one's surroundings.[195] A feeling of belonging is "*the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment*," according to Hagerty et al. (1992).[196]

Consequently, individuals are drawn to a sense of belonging since it serves as the thread that binds an individual to other people, places, and things. This suggests that a person's sense of belongingness is intrinsically contextual and arises as a result of their social, cultural, and emotional condition inside a particular place, or at the time of a particular event, as opposed to the basic urge to belong. Engagement in social surroundings and personal experiences form the foundation of a sense of belonging.[197]

This definition of belongingness refers to the process of identification and contestation that arises from migrants' attempts to make sense of who they are via emotional ties to certain places.[198] As Elspeth Probyn has emphasized, the concept of "belonging" permits the emergence of an emotive component that encompasses both "being" and the desire for

[193] Saga Pardede and Velibor Bobo Kovač, 'Distinguishing the Need to Belong and Sense of Belongingness: The Relation between Need to Belong and Personal Appraisals under Two Different Belongingness–Conditions', *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education* 13, no. 2 (1 February 2023): 331–44, https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe13020025.
[194] Vidur Chopra and Sarah Dryden-Peterson, 'Borders and Belonging: Displaced Syrian Youth Navigating Symbolic Boundaries in Lebanon', *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 18, no. 4 (7 August 2020): 449–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2020.1744428.
[195] Pardede and Kovač, 'Distinguishing the Need to Belong and Sense of Belongingness'.
[196] Bonnie M.K. Hagerty et al., 'Sense of Belonging: A Vital Mental Health Concept', *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* 6, no. 3 (June 1992): p. 173, https://doi.org/10.1016/0883-9417(92)90028-H.
[197] Pardede and Kovač, 'Distinguishing the Need to Belong and Sense of Belongingness'.
[198] Anastasia Christou, 'Narrating Lives in (e)Motion: Embodiment, Belongingness and Displacement in Diasporic Spaces of Home and Return', *Emotion, Space and Society* 4, no. 4 (November 2011): 249–57, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2011.06.007.

"longing." A person's sense of self and their (dis)connection to people and places that are associated with their ancestry and family history can be shaped by their perceptions of belonging.[199] Loures proposed that a cultural landscape can give a group of individuals a sense of belonging and identity.[200]

Abdul Rahman notes:

> "Existing antiquities in our region are part of our identity, and I work in the field of protecting antiquities as well as cultural heritage. Likewise, when we think of a trip, the first thing that comes to mind are the nearby archaeological sites."

Fatima:

> "My memories are part of my cultural identity, because everything we went through in life and throughout our lives was considered part of our cultural identity. I remember that when we were young, we would go to the olive fields from my grandfather's house along with my relatives."

1.14.1. Sense of belonging and displacement

In this research, it is necessary to take into consideration the sense of community in the context of conflict, forced immigration, resettlement and displacement. 'Home' and 'belonging' are sometimes very subjective and conceptual ideas.[201] The sense of belonging for refugees is complicated by forced displacement. Conflict-related displacement caused by a state's use of force or inability to safeguard and maintain the rights of its citizens can represent a sort of "failed citizenship", shattering refugees' feeling of national belonging in regard to their home country.[202] These notions of belonging may be particularly important in the context of

[199] Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York London: Routledge, 1996).
[200] Luis Loures, '(Re)Developing Postindustrial Landscapes: Applying Inverted Translational Research Coupled with the Case Study Research Method', n.d.
[201] Susannah Eckersley, 'Changing Places, Changing People: Critical Heritages of Migration and Belonging', *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 26, no. 2 (1 September 2017): 1–5, https://doi.org/10.3167/ajec.2017.260202.
[202] Chopra and Dryden-Peterson, 'Borders and Belonging'.

migration (including forced migration), border changes, or displacement, allowing people to carry their beliefs and experiences of "home" into new environments.[203]

Feelings of (dis)connection with "home" might be a reflection of a torturous quest for (ontological) stability and (emotional) purpose. Performative spaces of bodily representations of being/longing can be created by routine actions. Performativity that memorialize and emotionally reflect where one's belonging rests, as well as performativity that reenacts painful periods in this process, can become pervasive in the lives of migrants.[204]

1.15. Disasters

The definition of a disaster is not the event itself, but rather the degree of human susceptibility to it; the only thing limiting the effects of a potentially catastrophic event is society's ability to withstand it. Furthermore, disasters have a specified spatial scope. They unavoidably lead to the disturbance or loss of certain environmental, economic, and sociocultural resources because they take place in settings or locales that are distinctive in these respects.[205]

Disasters affect cultural heritage on all the levels. Discussing disasters affecting cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, are either natural such as floods, earthquakes, or man-made disasters such as armed conflicts and war. Disasters cause temporary or permanent displacement of people and areas, displacing their past, present, and future cultural heritage.

[203] Eckersley, 'Changing Places, Changing People'.
[204] Christou, 'Narrating Lives in (e)Motion'.
[205] Richard Sharpley, 'Displaced Heritage: Responses to Disaster, Trauma and Loss', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 22, no. 3 (15 March 2016): 274–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2015.1112947.

1.15.1. Nature disaster (Earthquake)

Natural disasters include earthquakes, droughts, floods, and volcanic eruptions.[206] Natural catastrophe frequency and intensity have begun to have an impact on immovable cultural heritage globally in recent decades.[207]

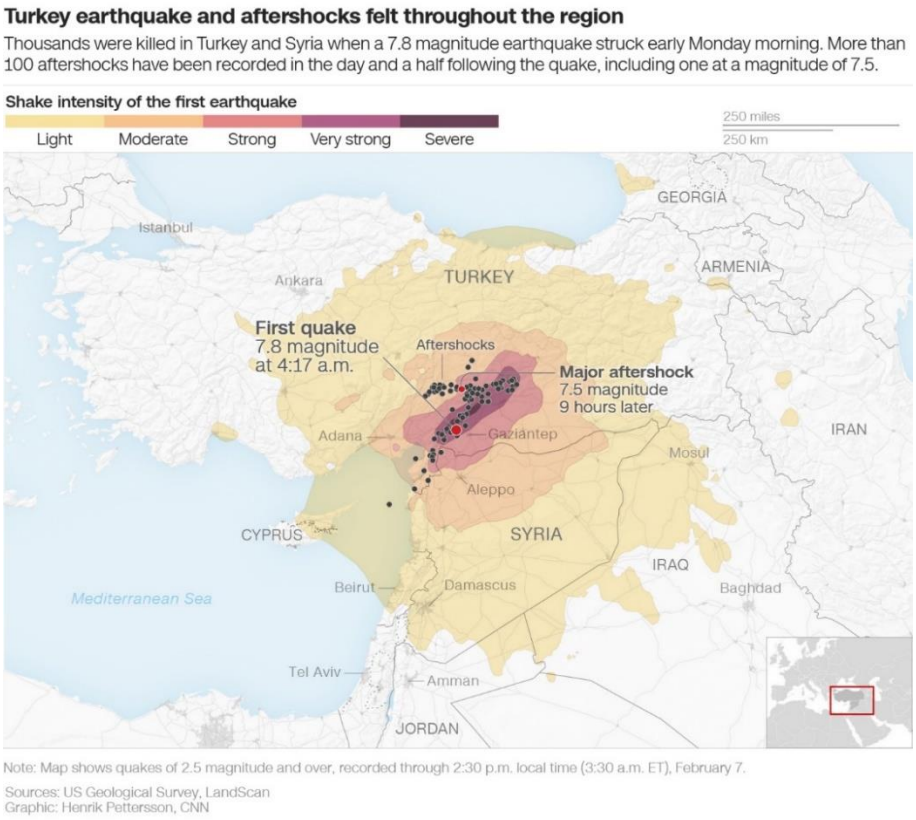

Figure 13: Map showing the quakes of February 2, 2023.[208]

A 7.8-magnitude earthquake that rocked Syria and Turkey on February 6, 2023, (*figure 13*). It caused the largest natural calamity to hit the area in a century. The number of fatalities in both nations as of March 1 exceeded 51 000. According to the Syrian Assistance Coordination Unit, more than 4518 people have died in northwest Syria, which is not under the jurisdiction of the

[206] Sharpley.
[207] Ionut Cristi Nicu, Alin Mihu-Pintilie, and Erich Nau, eds., *Cultural Heritage and Natural Disasters* (MDPI - Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2021), https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-0365-1079-8.
[208] CNN, 'February 7, 2023. Turkey-Syria Earthquake News', CNN, accessed 14 May 2024, https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/turkey-syria-earthquake-updates-2-7-23-intl/index.html.

Syrian regime and is home to some 4.5 million people, 65 percent of whom are internally displaced.[209]

A humanitarian catastrophe and further cultural devastation ensued from the devastating earthquakes These earthquakes marked a further tragedy for Syria, a nation that had already experienced several interconnected problems in recent years, such as the protracted war, infectious disease outbreaks, economic downturns, assaults on medical facilities and related infrastructure, and the forcible eviction of substantial segments of the populace from their homes.[210]

The earthquakes that struck Syria on February 6th affected around 8.8 million people and severely damaged residential structures and infrastructure in the governorates of Idlib, Aleppo, Lattakia, and Hama.[211] One of the areas of Syria most impacted by these problems and the earthquakes is the northwest. I participated in preparing a report about the damage to the ancient villages of Northern Syria caused by the earthquake, it became clear that some of the sites had been affected by the earthquake to different degrees. Approximately 4.5 million people reside in this region under rebel control, and since 2014, they have mostly depended on humanitarian supplies sent across the border. Along with the general population, individuals again suffered trauma, loss, and forced relocation, which had and has a significant psychological cost.[212]

[209] Munzer Alkhalil et al., 'Inequitable Access to Aid after the Devastating Earthquake in Syria', *The Lancet Global Health* 11, no. 5 (May 2023): e653–54, https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(23)00132-8.
[210] Erva Nur Cinar, Aula Abbara, and Ebru Yilmaz, 'Earthquakes in Turkey and Syria—Collaboration Is Needed to Mitigate Longer Terms Risks to Health', *BMJ*, 8 March 2023, p559, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.p559.
[211] Joseph DAHER, *The Aftermath of Earthquakes in Syria: The Regime's Political Instrumentalisation of a Crisis.* (LU: Publications Office, 2023), https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2870/167974.
[212] Cinar, Abbara, and Yilmaz, 'Earthquakes in Turkey and Syria—Collaboration Is Needed to Mitigate Longer Terms Risks to Health'.

1.15.2. Armed conflict

Since the start of the twenty-first century, conflicts occurred all over the world, endangering cultural properties and the people who use them while causing permanent harm. Communities that have owned and used cultural properties for centuries, and who were responsible for shaping and preserving them, have been forcibly uprooted from their homes. This results in a shift in the original users of these properties as well as the migration of collective memory, which is shaped by the connections between locations and activities.[213]

Armed conflicts result in casualties and widespread destruction. Conflicts also leave people whose lives are shattered by fighting with profound and enduring scars in their memories.[214] Violent conflicts have long-lasting effects on societies. People's national identities are no exception to this. The sparse literature that does exist claims that ethnic and national identities are "softened" or "hardened" by war and violence.[215] The conflict goes beyond violence to include the erasure of the place's culture, heritage, landmarks and traditions. Large-scale damage brought about by war and other conflicts leads to a high death toll, the forced evacuation of entire cities, and unspeakable misery, especially for women and children.[216] My hometown of Hazarin and the lands surrounding it witnessed a large scale destruction, destroying houses, cutting trees and planting mines since the town lies along a front line between the conflicting parties. All locals have been displaced, and these towns are now military bases for the Assad regime.

In an effort to harm and completely erase any remnants of the besieged communities' history and legacy, heritage elements (olive groves and monuments) and structures (homes) have been

[213] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.
[214] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.
[215] Syed Azim, 'Ethnicity, Conflict and Identity: The Sense of Belonging among Pakhtuns in Swat, Pakistan' (2018).
[216] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.

purposefully targeted and destroyed during the conflict around my hometown causing ingrained traumas on people from these societies.

Wars and conflicts cause the destruction of cultural assets, either directly or indirectly by the destruction of other properties including historical settings, archeological sites, properties of exceptional global value, and local resources. Apart from these, there exist additional noteworthy risks to the conservation of cultural property, including inadequate upkeep and restoration, reduced efficiency resulting from a decrease in visitors, unauthorized excavations and the smuggling of antiquities, among other issues caused by administrative misdirection, and new security weaknesses arising from conflict-ridden settings.[217]

Protracted military conflicts not only affect political, legal, and socioeconomic systems, but they also have long-term effects on human migratory patterns.[218] Conflict causes internal displacement (IDPs) within the affected country, as well as external displacement (also known as refugees or prospective refugees) across international boundaries.[219]

The conflict in Syria, the most significant cause of human-caused displacement in the Middle East over the last decade, has altered the area and left millions displaced with no hope of safe return in their lifetimes. The circumstances that prompted people to emigrate in the first place—repression, government brutality, and the exploitation of sectarian and religious divisions—have remained largely unchanged in Syria.[220] Since the war has damaged the environment and forced more than half of the population to flee their homes due to armed conflicts, there is a

[217] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.
[218] Naser Morina et al., 'Psychiatric Disorders in Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons After Forced Displacement: A Systematic Review', *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 9 (21 September 2018): 433, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2018.00433.
[219] Sarah Kenyon Lischer, 'Causes and Consequences of Conflict-Induced Displacement', *Civil Wars* 9, no. 2 (1 June 2007): 142–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/13698240701207302.
[220] Kelsey Norman, 'Migration and Displacement in the Arab World Demands a More Equitable Response - Disruptions and Dynamism in the Arab World', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed 30 April 2024, https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/05/03/migration-and-displacement-in-arab-world-demands-more-equitable-response-pub-89520.

new and ever-present risk of continued "tangible and intangible cultural heritage loss" in Syria.[221]

1.15.3. Cultural heritage and conflict

Cultural heritage is the result of people, location, and time coming together. Their combinations are ever changing, getting updated, their answers customized to fit different situations. Culture is a dynamic phenomenon that is shaped by human influence and is always evolving.[222]

The wars and conflicts that erupted in many parts of the world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have irreversibly damaged many nations' cultural heritages, including Syria's.[223] The most obvious result of conflicts, apart from the terrible death toll, is the devastation of the built environment. Sites of religious, historical, and cultural significance that form the social fabric and character of a rural area or a town or even a nation are frequently attacked on purpose both during and after a war.[224] Destruction is a deeply felt emotion that is difficult to understand and articulate.[225] Targeting cultural properties in particular during conflicts aims to destroy the place and personal identities of people and groups, destroy cultural values within societies, and break the bonds that bind them as a society by severing their ties to specific locations.[226]

Cultural heritage evokes people's creativity and might serve as an inspiration. A person's memory is lost when they pass away, but it also vanishes when their cultural heritage is destroyed. People associate locations with physical cultural heritages with their history, memories, and belonging because of the uniting force of cultural heritage. When this is

[221] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.
[222] Ünal and Gündogdu.
[223] Ünal and Gündogdu.
[224] Sultan Barakat, 'Postwar Reconstruction and the Recovery of Cultural Heritage: Critical Lessons from the Last Fifteen Years', 2007.
[225] Aronsson and Price, 'Culture, Heritage, Memory'.
[226] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.

interrupted, the items that reflect people's origins and roots disappear, eventually reducing people's attachment.[227]

Since the start of the Syrian Crisis in March 2011, the Ancient Villages in Northern Syria have been continuously threatened. The settlements experienced the effects of armed conflict almost immediately after they were inducted into the World Heritage List. These effects included wartime destruction and damage, looting by treasure seekers, stone quarrying, and unauthorized building construction.[228] In addition, local homes were torn down and groves of precious olive trees ruthlessly and purposefully cut down.

The intangible cultural heritage cannot be safeguarded until the actual locations that comprise the tangible cultural heritage are preserved along with the people who originally inhabited these locations. Humans and places are parts of a whole that they share and interact with; they should not be viewed as distinct entities.[229]

1.16. Displacement

People who are displaced must migrate; this is known as forced migration. Displacement is defined by the International Organization for Migration (2020) as the movement of people who have been compelled to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, either because of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, circumstances involving widespread violence, human rights violations, or natural or man-made disasters [230] Globally, the issue of displacement is becoming worse every year.[231] In the literature on migration, conflict is just one of several factors that lead to displacement. Environmental deterioration, natural disasters,

[227] Ünal and Gündogdu.
[228] Abdulkarim, *World Heritage at Risk The Ancient Village of Northern Syria Before &during Crisis of 2011-2021*, 2011–21.
[229] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.
[230] Randall H. McGuire, 'The Materiality and Heritage of Contemporary Forced Migration', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 49, no. 1 (21 October 2020): 175–91, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-010220-074624.
[231] Murrani, Lloyd, and Popovici, 'Mapping Home, Memory and Spatial Recovery in Forced Displacement'.

and economic incentives are additional causes of migration.[232] People are escaping war, abuse, poverty, violence, and catastrophic natural catastrophes on a global scale.[233]

1.16.1. Forced immigration and displacement

Every year, millions of individuals escape their homes due to violent conflict. Even within its wide definition, the word "conflict" cannot adequately capture the variety of reasons why individuals flee violent situations.[234] It is helpful to take into consideration further variations in forced migration. For example, it matters if those who are displaced are persecuted due to characteristics unique to their group (religion, race, etc.), or if they are escaping natural catastrophes that do not specifically target any one person.[235] Individuals who are displaced confront a number of issues related to the forced moving, including increased vulnerability.[236] The implications of forced displacement may also vary depending on whether the affected individuals are internally displaced or compelled to traverse international boundaries.[237]

Numerous studies have emphasized the negative effects of forced migration, however the focus has primarily been on more recent instances of forced immigration, if not actual occurrences, like the present Syrian refugee crisis.[238] By the end of June 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported an unprecedented number of 110 million people worldwide who had been forcefully relocated as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights abuses, and events that gravely disrupted public order.[239]

[232] Lischer, 'Causes and Consequences of Conflict-Induced Displacement'.
[233] McGuire, 'The Materiality and Heritage of Contemporary Forced Migration'.
[234] Lischer, 'Causes and Consequences of Conflict-Induced Displacement'.
[235] Sascha O. Becker, 'Forced Displacement in History: Some Recent Research', *Australian Economic History Review* 62, no. 1 (2022): 2–25, https://doi.org/10.1111/aehr.12237.
[236] Murrani, Lloyd, and Popovici, 'Mapping Home, Memory and Spatial Recovery in Forced Displacement'.
[237] Becker, 'Forced Displacement in History'.
[238] Becker.
[239] 'Mid-Year Trends', UNHCR, accessed 30 April 2024, https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends.

Forced displacement has many consequences on individual displaced and communities. It is not limited to the loss of homes and shortage of basic needs; it is more than that. It is peoples' social lives, feelings of security, connections to places, it includes shocks and traumas with psychological consequences. Elaborating on these points, there two quotes from Abdul Naser are applicable here:

> "Our environment is rural, so there was solidarity, sympathy and compassion among the people. Now, in displacement, we have become every person under a star. Compassion decreased and it affected us greatly."

And:

> "During displacement, I am far from my family, my companions, my land, and my area - I miss them all. Displacement has had a physical effect on me. I mean, even my appearance changed as a result. I feel nostalgic for the past, the region, the trees, and the land, which are not absent from me."

1.16.2. Internally displaced people and heritage

The International Organization for Migration defines Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) – "Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border."[240]

Massive displacement resulting from wars or other conflicts in historical contexts also presents a serious risk to the preservation of both physical and intangible cultural heritage in these abandoned places. Mass displacements cause people to migrate and end up in different places, which disrupts the continuity of their customs, rituals and cultural values that are based on and

[240] 'Key Migration Terms', International Organization for Migration, accessed 30 April 2024, https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms.

related to particular places and cultural landscapes. These are all significant components of what it means to be a community.[241] In addition to immediate effects, forced displacement brought on by armed conflicts, civil unrest, or natural catastrophes can have long-term negative effects. [242] According to Becker and Ferrara, the experience of forced migration might have unique repercussions for the migrants themselves due to the coercive character of the displacement process and the confiscation of belongings and residences without their consent.[243]

According to International Organization for Migration, by the end of 2022, the Syrian Arab Republic had approximately 6.9 million internally displaced people, the most of any country.[244] Syria still faces one of the worst and longest-lasting internal displacement crises in the world; as of the end of 2023, there were 7.2 million IDPs, up 6% from 2022. For the first time since 2019, there were more displacements reported during the year, particularly in the northwest governorates of Aleppo and Idlib, which were already housing 52% of all internally displaced people in Syria, (*figure 14*).[245] In total, since March 2011, over 14 million Syrian people have been internally and externally.[246]

Conflict and natural catastrophes in 2023 led to fresh and recurring migrations, extending the requirements of internally displaced people (*figure 15, 16*). The sequence of powerful

[241] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.
[242] Becker, 'Forced Displacement in History'.
[243] Sascha O. Becker and Andreas Ferrara, 'Consequences of Forced Migration: A Survey of Recent Findings', *Labour Economics*, Special Issue on "European Association of Labour Economists, 30th annual conference, Lyon, France, 13-15 September 2018, 59 (1 August 2019): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.02.007.
[244] 'Internally Displaced Persons', World Migration Report, accessed 14 May 2024, https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-2/internally-displaced-persons.
[245] 'Syria - Disasters Compound Challenges for IDPs and Drive First Increase in Displacements in Four Years', IDMC - Internal Displacement Monitorning Centre, accessed 14 May 2024, https://www.internal-displacement.org/spotlights/Syria-Disasters-compound-challenges-for-IDPs-and-drive-first-increase-in-displacements-in-four-years.
[246] Rodrigo Ugarte, 'Resisting Memoricide: On the Destruction and Reconstruction of Memory', *Items* (blog), accessed 17 May 2024, https://items.ssrc.org/where-heritage-meets-violence/resisting-memoricide-on-the-destruction-and-reconstruction-of-memory/.

earthquakes that occurred in February 2023, with its epicenters in neighboring Turkey, demonstrated how war and natural disasters compound to increase the danger of displacement. Millions of Syrians were left living at increased risk because of these events.[247]

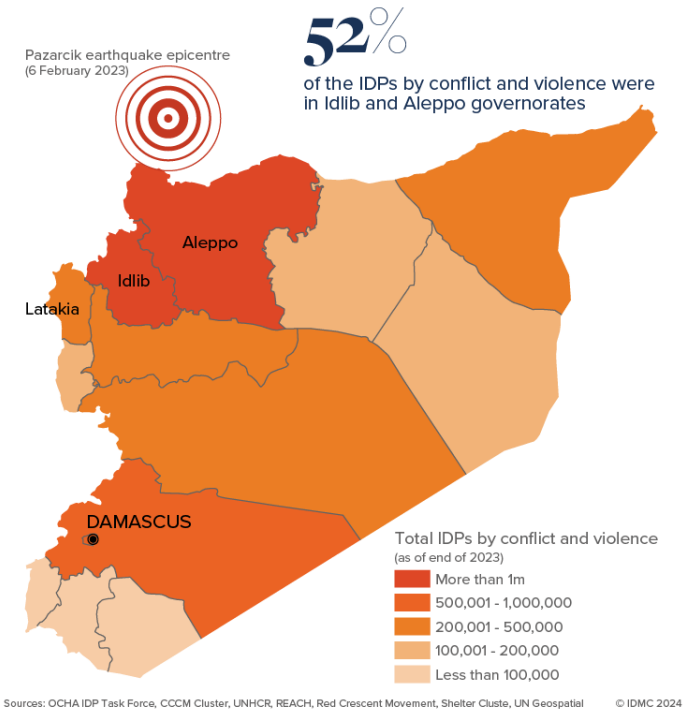

Figure 14: Total IDPs by conflict and violence in Syria.[248]

The earthquakes in Northwest Syria on February 6th resulted in yet another round of displacement for 89% of those affected by the Syrian conflict. According to a survey published by the NGO, Action for Humanity, 9 out of 10 persons in northwest Syria, who had already been affected by the violence, were displaced once more as a result of the earthquake.[249]

[247] 'Syria - Disasters Compound Challenges for IDPs and Drive First Increase in Displacements in Four Years'.
[248] 'Syria - Disasters Compound Challenges for IDPs and Drive First Increase in Displacements in Four Years'.
[249] 'No Place But Displacement: A Report into Multiple Displacement of IDPs in Northwest Syria Due to 12 Years of Conflict and February 6th's Earthquakes - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb', 16 March 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/no-place-displacement-report-multiple-displacement-idps-northwest-syria-due-12-years-conflict-and-february-6ths-earthquakes.

In addition to the destruction caused by the bloody wars in Syria, another risk that comes with displacement, both internal and external, is the changing of users of a location and the ensuing break in the place-user-activity link, which hastens the loss of cultural assets.[250]

Figure 15: An aerial view shows the Atmeh camp for displaced Syrians close to the border with Turkey in Syria's northwestern Idlib province, on 19 April 2020 (AFP).[251]

Figure 16: Displaced Syrians at a newly created camp in Idlib province on Feb. 22, 2020. Aref Tammawi—AFP/Getty Images.[252]

[250] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.
[251] 'Atmeh: The Syrian Village Transformed from Rural Idyll to Islamic State Hideout', Middle East Eye, accessed 15 May 2024, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-atmeh-village-rural-idyll-islamic-state-hideout.
[252] 'Syrian Refugees Fleeing Assad's Onslaught in Idlib Have Nowhere Left to Hide', TIME, 25 February 2020, https://time.com/5790278/syria-idlib-humanitarian-catastrophe-assad/.

1.16.3. Cultural landscape as shelters in displacement

The Dead Cities' amazing level of preservation provides protection not just from the regular shelling in the area, but also from the harsh winters. Many refugees not only build temporary shelters, but also burrow beneath the rubble for protection: "These Dead Cities have become home to thousands of refugees who have fled from the civil war and now live in the caves beneath the ruins. Some have even dug up the ancient stone graves and are using them as makeshift homes. There is little or no access to places like this while war rages, so the true nature of the devastation will not be known for some time." Many refugees who left the civil war reside in the caves or cellars beneath the ruins of these Dead Cities, where the ruins once stood.[253] Others also sought refuge in the ancient carved tombs, cellars and caves as the only places protected from the bombings and airstrikes, (*figure 17, 18*). The images show the way that IDPs are seeking shelter in the ruins of the ancient villages in Idlib.

Figure 17: Many families uprooted by war have settled among the shrines of Baqirha. Northwest Syria is home to 40 UNESCO World Heritage-listed villages. Abdulaziz Ketaz/AFP via Getty Images.[254]

[253] Emma Cunliffe et al., 'Satellite-Based Damage Assessment to Cultural Heritage Sites in Syria' (United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), 2014), chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://unosat.web.cern.ch/unitar/downloads/chs/FINAL_Syria_WHS.pdf. P:38.

[254] David Rose, 'Syrian Refugees Find Shelter in the Home of Zeus Close to the Turkish Border', 22 May 2024, sec. world, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/refugees-find-shelter-in-the-home-of-zeus-rbz6rqjgg.

Figure 18: Sami, 32, steps into an underground Roman tomb used for shelter from Syrian government shelling and airstrikes, Jabal al-Zaweya, Idlib province, Syria, Feb. 28, 2013.[255]

Since the Assad regime targeted standing houses and buildings, people seek shelter in underground structures and ruins. In the summer of 2012, when the bombing escalated during one of the nights, almost all the town and neighboring town's residents escaped to the nearby groves, farms and, still unfilled in, caves. One of the caves was full of children and women hiding for the whole night. That image still lingers in my mind, whenever I recall those events. I return to the memories and feelings of fear from the bombings. Since most of the ruins and caves in the area were used as shelters, they have somehow become connected in my mind to such events, escape, feelings and trauma. They have become sort of signifier and signified in my mind.

In 2014, as I recall, my family and I had to escape my town away from the brutal bombing during the day. Every day, for two weeks, we went to a grove owned by my family. We hid in a cave with three niches and an arched opening. Before using it, we cleaned the soil and stones from inside the cave. The cave lay in the middle of olive and fig tree groves. I never thought

[255] 'Syrians Take Shelter in Ancient and Medieval Sites', Voice of America, 1 March 2013, https://www.voanews.com/a/syrians-seek-shelter-in-antiquities/1613251.html.

as a child I would someday use it as a shelter. It had only been part of the landscape and a source of wonder and curiosity for the child I had been. My memories of this cave, as a result, are complex and multilayered. It is very difficult to control these memories when they are recalled. Some of the memories recall my pleasant childhood around the cave and others recall it as a shelter during the time of the bombing.

1.16.4. Heritage in displacement

Displaced people appreciate and carry their local heritage as part of their identity. They themselves strive to enforce their connections to heritage and culture. That was very clear in most with most of the participants' answers. Here are some of responses. Mohamad Saed:

> "In displacement, we appreciate our customs, our traditions and the olive. We cannot manage without olive oil."

Razan:

> "In displacement we have our popular dishes, such as Dukkah (دقة), its main ingredients are olive oil, pepper and salt. We smash them with a stone (pestle) and eat it."

Participant 27:

> "Our customs and traditions did not remain in our region only, but they spread. When we were displaced from our region, we took our traditions with us, and we took with us our heritage."

Khadija:

> "*Jounieh* (جونية) is part of our local heritage, it is impossible to find anyone making it here nowadays."

1.16.5. Landscape alteration

Landscapes have always been dynamic, meaning that humans and other factors constantly change their shapes. Turbulence may affect both landscapes and the people who live in them. Natural catastrophes and conflicts, on the other hand, most usually damage the physical aspects

of the terrain, but a certain continuity of the story remains intact due to the people who survive and remain in the given area.[256] However, as a result of conflict and displacement, the transformation and alteration of the cultural landscape of Southern Idlib that had previously been slow and confined has become fast and widespread, (*figure 19*).

Figure 19: Damage observed in a town in southern Idlib. Approximately 30% of the structures have been entirely or partially destroyed.[257]

Although the Ancient Villages offer a singular moment in time, the abandoned villages have always been influenced by change; in fact, some were never fully abandoned but rather were modified and repurposed. Others saw the development of contemporary settlements in the vicinity or were mined for building materials; all have experienced the aging process that comes with time.[258]

[256] Bedyński, 'Changing Cultural Landscapes'.
[257] 'Syria War: Satellite Images Reveal Idlib Destruction and Displacement', 4 March 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51734748.
[258] Abdulkarim, *World Heritage at Risk The Ancient Village of Northern Syria Before &during Crisis of 2011-2021*, 2011–21.

Targeting cultural traits during conflicts is inflicted purposefully to subvert social norms, destroy individual as well as collective identities, and break the links that unite people as a society by irrevocably disconnecting their attachments to places.[259] However, the ongoing Syrian Crisis of 2011 has resulted in a level of upheaval never previously witnessed. This rich archeological legacy has suffered greatly from war and terrorism, and the refugee crisis has created unanticipated management challenges. The devastating deaths brought about by the February 6, 2023, earthquake in the area will surely result in even more harm to the Villages' structural integrity.[260]

1.16.6. Uprooting memories, identity and attachments

Despite rising studies on the causes and consequences of urbicide in places such as Sarajevo, Jerusalem, Beirut, and Aleppo,[261] little emphasis has been placed on cultural landscape destruction. Uprooted people and forced migrants experience a sense of being "imprisoned" in a state of flux that oscillates between a depressing realization of the absence of "their things," places, people, rituals, and, ultimately, of their own identities, and a yearning for a familiar reality and the necessity for it in the receiving place.[262] Communities that have owned and used cultural properties for centuries, and who are responsible for shaping and preserving them, are forcibly uprooted from their homes, the olive and fig groves that provided their livelihoods and shaped their cultural identities cut down.

Assad regime forces have felled large areas of olive trees in the area. The systemic cutting process in the southern countryside of Idlib has mainly included olive trees. This devastation

[259] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.
[260] Abdulkarim, *World Heritage at Risk The Ancient Village of Northern Syria Before &during Crisis of 2011-2021*, 2011–21.
[261] Larkin and Rudolf, 'Memory, Violence and Post-Conflict Reconstruction'.
[262] Laia Colomer and Anna Catalani, *Heritage Discourses in Europe: Responding to Migration, Mobility, and Cultural Identities in the Twenty-First Century* (Arc Humanities Press, 2020). P: 13

was concentrated in the Kafranbel area and its countryside, Maarat Harmah, Hazarin, and the Shahshabo area, (*figure 20*).[263] These groves were privately owned by displaced populations who were forced to flee to opposition-controlled territories in northwest Syria.[264] The Assad dictatorship has plundered, damaged, and destroyed properties, particularly in places where anti-Assad protesters were known to dwell. The Assad dictatorship has recently enacted new legislation providing it extensive authority to seize land and property.[265]

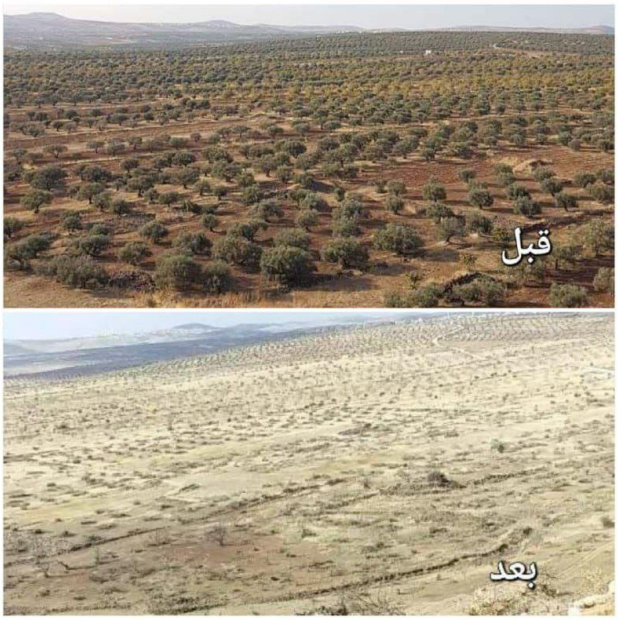

Figure 20: Pictures show the land, ped of trees, in the countryside around the city of Kafranbel, south of Idlib, by members of the regime. The pictures show the landscape before and after the groves were cut down.[266]

The armed forces of the Assad regime are creating a barren landscape. Some of the olive trees that were wantonly destroyed were more than 400 years old and had been passed down within particular families for multiple generations. The Syrian regime forces are working hard to kill

[263] 'Destroying stones and trees... Regime forces kill the last hope for life in a number of towns in Idlib and Hama (دمّرت الحجر والشجر.. قوات النظام تقتل آخر أمل للحياة في عدد من بلدات إدلب وحماة)', Syria TV, 5 December 2023, https://www.syria.tv/دمّرت-الحجر-والشجر-قوات-النظام-تقتل-آخر-أمل-للحياة-في-عدد-من-بلدات-إدلب-وحماة.

[264] 'Regime Cuts Down Olive Trees on Displaced Farmers' Lands in Idlib', Syria Report, accessed 16 May 2024, https://hlp.syria-report.com/hlp/regime-cuts-down-olive-trees-on-displaced-farmers-lands-in-idlib/.

[265] 'Syria: Could Making "domicide" a War Crime Bring Justice? – DW – 01/31/2024', dw.com, accessed 15 May 2024, https://www.dw.com/en/syria-could-making-domicide-a-war-crime-ensure-justice/a-68128860.

[266] 'Destroying stones and trees... Regime forces kill the last hope for life in a number of towns in Idlib and Hama (دمّرت الحجر والشجر.. قوات النظام تقتل آخر أمل للحياة في عدد من بلدات إدلب وحماة)'.

all forms of life in the areas they controlled during the years 2019 and 2020 in the countryside of Idlib and Hama, through systematic cutting down of trees and destroying the roofs of houses, thus, killing any dream of return among their displaced people in opposition-controlled areas.[267]

Some said the systemic cutting ways was carried out to sell the wood and for economic reasons. However, it is just one side of the story. Destroying the groves represents a sort of systemic uprooting and revenge against displaced locals who have been always against the regime. Since the area is very famous for its olive agriculture, this tree cutting is a way to hit them with the dearest thing left that they cannot carry with themselves. Cutting down olive trees, besides destroying housing, monuments and other properties in south Idlib means erasing identity, uprooting heritage, cleansing the cultural landscape and killing hope. The destruction and cutting down actions that the Syrian regime forces are taking to end any hope for the displaced to return saw down tens of thousands of trees and strip agricultural lands of their green cover in the southern and eastern countryside of Idlib, and in the northern and western Hama countryside.[268]

Video clips leaked on social media indicate that these farms have become barren, although they had been among the farms with the densest groves of olive trees in southern Idlib province. The brutal destruction of the trees began along the front lines with the opposition, under the pretext of exposing the area and preventing opposition fighters from hiding and infiltrating over the frontlines through the olive trees. I could not ask interviewees about that topic as it is very painful topic to bring to the surface, it is shocking and painful. I can project those feelings on myself and I know how it feels. Even I did not have the courage to raise this question and

[267] 'Destroying stones and trees... Regime forces kill the last hope for life in a number of towns in Idlib and Hama (دمّرت الحجر والشجر.. قوات النظام تقتل آخر أمل للحياة في عدد من بلدات إدلب وحماة)'.
[268] 'Destroying stones and trees... Regime forces kill the last hope for life in a number of towns in Idlib and Hama (دمّرت الحجر والشجر.. قوات النظام تقتل آخر أمل للحياة في عدد من بلدات إدلب وحماة)'.

ask it of my father. So, I depend on secondary resources in this part. Here, I am going to insert some of the quotes because they are very revealing, and many emotions are hidden between the words.

Hussein Al-Muhammad, a displaced farmer from the southern countryside of Idlib, says that he feels suffocated whenever he remembers this matter, and it is the same feeling he experienced when hearing the news that the olive trees had been destroyed, news that spread more than a month ago after the circulation of videos filmed by loyalists from the region who visited their lands with the approval of the regime...

> "I could not sleep all night. Olive trees like my children were raised by the hands of more than 30 years of fatigue and sweat, until they were cut down in a day and a night."

He added:

> "I cannot imagine myself when I return to the village and do not have land with olive trees, because since the day I was born I have not bought olive oil and I used to distribute it to people, and after that I will have to buy it! O God, it is more difficult than displacement." [269]

1.17. Trauma and post-conflict

In this section of the chapter, I am going to discuss the notion of traumas, rehabilitation and post-conflict recovery in the cultural landscape context. Since the trauma topic is very complex at all levels, I am not going to delve deeply into but just highlight specific aspects of it and provide a brief an overview which connects to my research.

[269] Ahmed Alakla, 'To Sell Them as Firewood. Regime Forces Cut down Olive Trees in the Idlib Countryside (لبيعها كحطب تدفئة. قوات النظام تقطع أشجار الزيتون في ريف إدلب)', accessed 15 May 2024, https://ayn-almadina.com/details/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%87%D8%A7%20%D9%83%D8%AD%D8%B7%D8%A8%20%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A6%D8%A9..%20%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%20%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%B9%20%D8%A3%D8%B4%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%20%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8/5024/ar.

1.17.1. Trauma

Trauma is an outside occurrence that directly results in a traumatic effect that even becomes objectified within the brain. Applying the same paradigm from individual psyches to communities and bigger groups, communities too seem directly impacted by objective external occurrences.[270] Traumas are emotional reactions to stressful events, any upsetting event that leaves a person feeling significantly afraid, powerless, disoriented, confused, or experiencing other disruptive emotions strong enough to negatively impact their attitudes, behavior, and other areas of functioning over time. Traumatic occurrences can be brought about by either natural or human action, such as earthquakes, war, rape, or industrial catastrophes. These experiences frequently cast doubt on a person's belief that the world is fair, secure, and predictable.[271] Based on this notion, it is clear that conflict-affected communities experience trauma.[272] Most people who have experienced war and conflict trauma have a deep longing for the things they lost before the war.[273]

According to ethnographic reports, trauma amplifies a yearning for shelter in familiar cultural practices, settings, artifacts, and landscapes of meaning— things which may already be lost, eroding a sense of individual and community identity.[274]

Trauma builds up over time and experiencing unpleasant sights or situations repeatedly can drastically change our perception of the outside world. Social workers and psychologists have also observed that trauma has a temporal and social component and that it can be passed down through the generations as "historical trauma."[275] The concept of "trauma exposure response"

[270] Violi, 'Spaces of Memory and Trauma'.
[271] 'APA Dictionary of Psychology', accessed 1 May 2024, https://dictionary.apa.org/.
[272] Morina et al., 'Psychiatric Disorders in Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons After Forced Displacement'.
[273] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.
[274] Aronsson and Price, 'Culture, Heritage, Memory'.
[275] Surface-Evans, 'CHAPTER 9 Traumascapes'.

is further explained by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, who states that it is "the transformation that takes place within us as a result of exposure to suffering," making the "world look and feel like a different place to you as a result."[276] Trauma becomes ingrained in the social environment when communities are physically cut off from their history and identity.[277]

1.17.2. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

According to the American Psychiatric Association, Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is "a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, series of events or set of circumstances. An individual may experience this as emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening and may affect mental, physical, social, and/or spiritual well-being. Examples include natural disasters, serious accidents, terrorist acts, war/combat, rape/sexual assault, historical trauma, intimate partner violence and bullying".[278]

In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association recognized the new diagnostic category of PTSD. Many circumstances can cause intrusive memories in people with PTSD, including ones that don't seem to have a clear relationship to the event and ones that the person is unaware of as triggers.[279]

1.17.3. Traumascape

Places can become traumascapes as a result of seeing or experiencing the trauma and the societal and personal transference of these memories. Consequently, it is feasible to comprehend that a variety of traumascapes, some more dangerous than others, may exist.

[276] Laura van Dernoot Lipsky and Connie Burk, *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others*, 1st ed, A BK Life Book (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009).
[277] Surface-Evans, 'CHAPTER 9 Traumascapes'.
[278] 'What Is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?', accessed 19 May 2024, https://www.psychiatry.org:443/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd.
[279] Ehlers, 'Understanding and Treating Unwanted Trauma Memories in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder'.

Nevertheless, even the act of forgetting can be violent.[280] According to Maria Tumarkin (2005), traumascapes are areas that have been marked by traumatic experiences.[281] The historical relevance that results from the trauma that individuals encounter, see, or experience at these places, as well as the strange ghosts that such trauma leaves behind on the remembered landscape, is the unifying theme and distinctive feature of traumascapes. Stated differently, locations are shaped and linked to their tragic history.[282] The erasure of authority and the repression of some voices confound memory narratives at these traumascapes, making it difficult for communities to preserve their unique identities.[283]

This is relevant since my research focuses on how people interact with their surroundings and environment. In other words, trauma can become connected with or embedded in specific areas. However, traumascapes can also include a broader range of places. Some of the interviews' answers stated it directly, just as it is connected in their memories. In other words, trauma can become associated with or embedded in places. Both Heba and Khadija mention traumatic memory. Heba:

> "After 2011, olive harvesting has become a source of fear and anxiety because, at the same time, we cannot abandon this season, it is a source of livelihood for us. Unfortunately, it has become a source of fear because the regime's bombings, shells, and snipers specifically target workers or activists who go out and pick olives. We are areas of direct contact with the regime. When workers go out and pick up olives, they are directly targeted. Instead of being about olive harvesting, it becomes about victims and a source of pain and a lot of ugly memories.''

Khadija:

> "One time we were picking olives, and all the while the olives were being bombed by the plane, I remember this situation was difficult for us. When the plane struck, the whole world left the village, and we remained for

[280] Surface-Evans, 'CHAPTER 9 Traumascapes'.
[281] Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2013).
[282] Surface-Evans, 'CHAPTER 9 Traumascapes'.
[283] Surface-Evans.

> approximately ten days until it was safe for us to return and complete the olive season. We go back and continue picking, but we cannot pick it well due to fear of bombing."

1.18. Rehabilitation and recovery

War-affected sites serve as symbols of a community's collective memory, identity, and source of strength and resilience, memorializing these locations is crucial to post-trauma rehabilitation and can aid in the reconciliation of various parties engaged in a conflict.[284] According to Relph, for many people, a strong attachment to their surroundings may be "as necessary, and perhaps as unavoidable, as close relationships with people."[285]

In many ways, society may aid in a person's trauma recovery. It is typical to recognize people's experiences through memorialization and commemorative activities as well as through the media, giving individuals a platform to speak, recognizing what has occurred, and creating a comforting environment.[286]

The greatest course of action to take during post-disaster recovery operations is to integrate local people into the recovery process, as people prefer to stick to their traditions and daily routines. In the aftermath of disasters, the behaviors and actions of local communities provide valuable knowledge for cultural heritage preservation.[287] Cultural heritage has a direct and substantial impact on social cohesion, long-term growth, mental health, and sustainable development as a way to address certain environmental, social, and economic problems.[288]

[284] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.
[285] Edward Charles Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, Réimpression datée de 2008 avec une nouvelle préface par l'auteur, Research in Planning and Design 1 (London: Pion, 2008).
[286] Hunt, '4 - Memory and Social Meaning'.
[287] Ünal and Gündogdu, 'Reconnecting'.
[288] Ünal and Gündogdu.

1.18.1. Cultural heritage and post-conflict

Local residents' attitudes and impressions of the archaeological sites and olive groves have a great impact on how they behave in terms of preserving history and raising public awareness.[289] Although heritage may be utilized discursively to construct boundaries between the included and the excluded, it may be unclear who is defining these boundaries, why they are drawn, and what impact they actually have on traumatized populations.[290]

According to Laurajane Smith, the process of heritage creation and negotiation involves remembering and is an active one. "Performances of remembering, helps to bind groups or populations together" is another term for memory sharing.[291] It is for this reason that most of the displaced people from the same towns gathered in same camps, some of the camps are named after those remembered towns.

Discussions and disputes about heritage discourses, meanings, sites, and artifacts are likely to arise since "heritage" is a process that is created by people, for people. Thus, depending on what is being memorialized, who is presenting the site, to whom it is being memorialized, and how it is presented, problematic history also has the capacity to "hurt," to start or prolong disputes.[292]

Heritage conservation, restoration, and remembrance in post-conflict environments are fraught with dangers and polarization. Some of them stem from vulnerabilities related to heritage and context-specific factors, which in turn fuels disputes and leads to the recurrence of the conflict even among displaced people living away from the conflict zone.[293]

[289] Tsuneki et al., 'A Series of Photogrammetry for Protection of Syrian Cultural Heritage Ancient Villages of Northern Syria'. P: 12
[290] Eckersley, 'Changing Places, Changing People'.
[291] Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, Repr, Heritage Studies (London: Routledge, 2010).
[292] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.
[293] Atabay et al.

1.18.2. Cultural heritage as a recovery tool

Cultural heritage offers a foundation for post-trauma rehabilitation and reconciliation.[294] Even if today's conflicts are sometimes stoked by the willful destruction of cultural heritage, cultural heritage remains the constant thread through customs and behavioral patterns.[295] Research indicates that intangible cultural assets can play a major role in helping people overcome the difficulties associated with displacement and help restore their sense of cultural identity.[296]

Heritage is important for people's social lives and economies, as well as for sustainable development and as "an identity marker and a social cohesion factor" in trauma situations, according to the International Council on Monuments and Sites' (ICOMOS) "Guidance on Post Trauma Recovery and Reconstruction."[297] In essence, these locations and activities may assist people who experienced such traumatic events cope and heal, facilitate intergroup peacemaking, or even exacerbate existing wounds.[298]

Though there is no agreement on what constitutes good practice, both academics and practitioners are beginning to recognize the importance of memory in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.[299] As cultural resources have differing meanings for many groups or even within the same group, remembered or forgotten heritage may also be as source of conflict.[300]

[294] Barakat, 'Postwar Reconstruction and the Recovery of Cultural Heritage'.
[295] John Warren, 'War and the Cultural Heritage of Iraq: A Sadly Mismanaged Affair', *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 4–5 (June 2005): 815–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590500128048.
[296] Colomer and Catalani, *Heritage Discourses in Europe*. P: 13
[297] *ICOMOS Guidance on Post Trauma Recovery and Reconstruction for World Heritage Cultural Properties.* (ICOMOS, 2017), p.6, https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/1763/.
[298] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.
[299] Larkin and Rudolf, 'Memory, Violence and Post-Conflict Reconstruction'.
[300] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.

The displaced community can benefit from recovery of the memory of cultural heritage because it serves as a link to their shared history, roots, and collective memory.[301] Intangible cultural heritage, its absence, and the capability for aspiration in relation to displacement are related. This relationship offers a helpful framework for critical and original reflections on the significance of cultural heritage in difficult times and the potential for its revaluation among those who have been displaced as a result of its absence.[302]

1.18.3. Locals' involvement, rehabilitation and reconstruction

Certain built-environment characteristics may need to be restored during recovery and reconstruction efforts in order to attract locals and revitalize the area's social and economic fabric. At the same time, recently discovered characteristics may need to be included, such as the fresh memories that have been made there.[303]

In order to ensure that recovery and commemoration plans are in line with stakeholder expectations and local contexts, it is necessary to take into account the goals, motivations, justifications, and expected outcomes of all potential recovery options during recovery and restoration works. This will help to include and respect any new or remaining features, address any associated sensitivities, take into account the sustainability of interventions, and rebuild local capacities and social cohesion.[304]

It is very interesting to observe the opinions of displaced locals concerning their local heritage in any post-conflict phase. I am going to list some of these answers.

[301] Atabay et al.
[302] Colomer and Catalani, *Heritage Discourses in Europe*. P: 15
[303] *ICOMOS Guidance on Post Trauma Recovery and Reconstruction for World Heritage Cultural Properties.*
[304] Atabay et al., 'Destruction, Heritage and Memory'.

Abdul Rahaman:

> "I would prefer that intervention be carried out to restore the remaining archaeological monuments, and that documentation of the antiquities during this period should be preserved in order to be a witness to what happened to the antiquities during the conflict period."

Fatima:

> "They should be left as witnesses to the destruction. Because the devastating effects will be the greatest witness and evidence of the regime's crimes. This means that even the monuments that are the symbol of our ancestors were not spared from this crime and bombing."

Heba:

> "Of course, I would not like it to be reconstructed because if it is reconstructed, it will not be called antiquities anymore. All the ancient features will change. They must remain as they are and remind us that our ancient ancestors lived in them, and, at the same time, they will bear witness to future generations about the extent of the damage and destruction that befell us under the regime atrocities."

Khalid:

> "I prefer such areas or archaeological areas to be restored, because with the years, if left like this, it will lead to their annihilation, or they will cease to exist. It is better to restore them so that we can keep the memories in them present, even if restoring them is taking away facts of our actual present."

Participant 38:

> "Reconstruction is a good thing, but if you restore it, you will find it has become artificial, so it is better to keep the demolished one because it is all a trace of our heritage."

Mohamad Saed:

> "… restore them to as normal as before, trying to forget that happened in the war. We hope to return everything will be as it is and not be reminded of the war."

Usama:

> "Restoration must be done in a way that there remains a witness to the steadfastness of what happened in the war."

Looking at these opinions, it will always be crucial to involve locals in deciding about their heritage in the post-conflict phase, once it happens.

Chapter 4: Content Analysis and useful suggestions for the wartime displaced

1.19. Findings

In this chapter, I am going to discuss the findings from this research, elaborating on specific points from what can be learned from the interviews and the experience of my family and myself. I will also clarify some issues for further research.

The North Syrian landscape with its olive groves is culturally interesting and important. In the study region, olive cultivation has been the most important traditional agricultural activity, possibly for millennia. Places and the feelings evoked by memories nurturing the olive trees and working with their products interanimate one another and establish a co-constitutive relationship. The physical, social, and cultural landscapes themselves have undergone multi-level changes as a result of displacement brought on by armed wars. Landscapes are more than simply physical environments; they are also stores of collective and individual memories, demonstrating how the physical environment impacts our cultural identities and views of the past. In this regards, Schama states in this book *Landscape and Memory*: *"Landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.*"[305]

Cultural landscapes are inextricably linked to our collective consciousness, shaping our interaction with nature, feeling of location, and knowledge of the world. Exploring cultural landscapes allows us to discover layers of significance, symbolism, and the intricate relationships between humans and their environment. The complex relationship between

[305] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*.

practice, time, space, memory, image and materiality that goes into creating a landscape, are all condensed into an emotional object.

The concept of landscape provides us with a relevant environment within which we may situate conceptions of place and community. Perceptions of place work as hooks for humans to attach memories and interpret events. Landscapes we live in are more than simply physical environments; they are also stores of collective and individual memories, showing how the physical environment impacts our cultural identities and views of the past. Monuments are sometimes portrayed as the physical embodiment of the community that controls them, a representation of a collective identity. Ruin sites from war, mishap, and natural calamities have existed for as long as there have been structures. In addition, the ruins may alternatively function as tumultuous areas, beautiful landscapes, and representations of loss and tragedy.

We also need to recognize that the story is just partial, with some voices not being given equal weight due to societal inaccessibility that prevents some tales from being told, forgotten, or even given the opportunity to be heard.

Cultural landscape is a touchstone of identity and defines our identity as societies. However, landscapes also become battlegrounds because they undergo rapid, widespread and targeted changes in times of conflict. The past lives on, no matter how hard you try to push it down and out of your mind. It arises in response to something overheard, a sight, a location, an item, a melody, or even a smell. A community's collective memories may be preserved in a landscape. Likewise, those memories can be recalled or triggered by encounters with some elements from the cultural landscape. Often, while I was intensely writing this thesis, I had many complex dreams about home, about certain settings as they formerly existed. Also, almost always, I had flashbacks of many buried memories associated with smells, tastes and other physical features, which provoked my memories, in a way, calling to them unconsciously.

1.20. Analysis

The study approach was based on qualitative research techniques to organize the story into two parts: before and during the conflict. Unfortunately, the conflict has not yet ended in the research region in southern Idlib province. Thus, there is no way for me to consider the possibilities of a post-war period. Internally displaced people participated in these in-depth, semi-structured and structured interviews.

Based on the research, memories of sites, landscape and activates can provide insights into their pasts, with geographical attributes helping to shape people's memories and social relationships and sense of belonging in displacement. Places established by humans, the customs that have developed and been repeated in these locations, and the customs that are still practiced come together to form a whole.

Many interviewees noted that the nostalgic feelings of olive culture were being displaced. The painful feeling of being away from home and the olive groves at the time of the olive harvest was repeatedly mentioned. The senses certainly play a big role in recalling memories, joyful or painful alike.

There were different opinions regarding the post-conflict phase concerning monuments and heritage. Practical choices of what to do with the damaged cultural heritage should certainly take into account a bottom-up approach rather than top-down. Such approaches may contribute to healing people from traumas by allowing them to be decision-makers. Most of the participants' answers stated their strong ties with the cultural landscape created by both monuments and olive groves.

Some of the interviewees answered using the third person pronoun, others used the 'we' form. They somehow tried to avoid speaking using the singular personal pronouns suggesting that

the pronoun forms must be connected to the displacement which affects individual identity as it tries to associate with communal "we'' or using an absent form of a person.''

From the interviews, the displacement and being away from ones familiar, local landscape, the disrupted connections from a former social life cause many negative effects and feelings of being uprooted. In some cases, particular questions were left without answers, participants could not/would not answer them. Here, there may be several explanations. The interviewees may have felt confused about the topic since it focused on sensitive things, difficulties in recalling particular memories, avoidance of further painful memories and nostalgia etc.

Many of the participants highlighted the importance of maintaining their memories. But almost all of them directly stated that they wanted to erase the memories of war and events after displacement. One interviewee even said he would like to erase memories from before the war as it makes him feel suffering. The participants' tones of voice changed depends on the nature of the questions, as some traumatic memories were recalled. Some repeated sentences in sequence are noticeable. The regular sequence was clearly intended to emphasize spoken points that were very important to them and needed be noticed and given proper significance.

I noticed some differences in memories, and histories from the participants concerning individual questions. These variations were mostly related to age differences between generations, gender, and profession. The most important point in my opinion concerns having been torn from their former home environment landscape and knowledge of brutal changes and erasure of their cultural landscape. This recognition created shocks and feeling of being uprooted, totally similar to the way the olive trees were uprooted and cut down. Olive trees possess a common association in southern Idlib province as symbols of resistance and steadfastness. So, cutting them also means the cultural uprooting of the people who owned

them. The local people identify themselves with olive culture and their loss makes them feel erased.

I would like to highlight a significant point connected to the remembrance and memories of the displaced. The surroundings might well have impacted the way memories were recalled, so we need to distinguish between internally displaced people and refugees now living in other countries. The new host landscape plays a role in the way memories are recalled and in provoking traumas.

Landscape memories in displacement take the form of a set of events in which memories are altered, relocated, or re-contextualized as a result of psychological trauma or cultural shift. This concept must be understood in order to meet people's psychological needs as well as in developing cultural preservation activities for displaced communities. Cultural landscape memories emphasize the complicated link between earlier experiences and contemporary identities, regardless of whether the perspective is psychological or connected to cultural studies.

1.21. Results discussion

The Syrian's tangible and intangible history has suffered greatly as a result of such memoricide, which has triggered a memory boom in the past ten years as individuals fear sociocultural forgetfulness. With millions of people forced from their homes, it is becoming more and more imperative to seek out and record these lost worlds and lost pasts.[306]

This study demonstrates the persistent ability of landscape to influence and perpetuate people's memories, even in the face of displacement. The landscapes are more than simply physical areas; they are also stores of memory, history, and culture, influencing our identities and

[306] Ugarte, 'Resisting Memoricide'.

perspectives. This research should contribute to a deeper understanding of the interwoven features of landscape, memory, culture and conflict in the Syrian context. The resources offered here go deep into the themes of landscape and memory, especially as these are connected to war and displacement.

Cultural landscapes may generate strong emotions and memories, shaping our vision of the world around us. For example, seeing a familiar scene from our childhood might evoke feelings of nostalgia and sentimentality, reminding us of our past experiences and altering our perception of who we are. Similarly, landscapes connected with catastrophic events, such as battlefields or natural catastrophe sites, can elicit sentiments of grief and introspection, pushing us to confront the darkest parts of human history and our own mortality.

Thus, the concept of landscape may be used to both support and enhance concepts of place and community, as well as to modify them. Additionally, landscapes and memories of them can serve to strengthen feelings of social identity and belonging as these are shaped personal experiences from our pasts.

The process of felling the olive trees by the Syrian regime falls within a broad and systematic operation practiced or sponsored by the military, accompanied by militias close to it, in the areas it controlled in the southern countryside of Idlib. It began with house furniture, went on to the removal of the doors and the windows, and even included roofs that were destroyed to extract iron nails from them. Cutting down the olive trees not only has an economic dimension such as selling their wood, but it represents a systemic uprooting of memories, identity and social attachments as well as merciless revenge. Naturally, these are fundamental problems that cut to the heart of what it means to be human in the modern period, when place and home are routinely and purposefully destroyed, depreciated, and weakened in at least some significant

ways. These investigations are linked to wider discussions about diasporas, large-scale displacement, and other forms of (forced) movement.

Cultural heritage and memories are essential elements in rebuilding in a post-disaster scenario to aid community recovery. Culture is important. Without it, there will be no balance between reviving the past and preparing for the future. The process of increasing resilience and rebuilding better can only be effective if it includes a people-centered approach, a place-based strategy, and integrated policies, all of which are anchored in the cultures connected to the place and local community. Without the cultural heritage binding communities together, there will be no reconciliation in conflicted areas.

The violence has made memory issues more pressing for a lot of Syrians. There are still many questions unanswered in the broader context. What is the appropriate balance between remembering and forgetting? How can we save the culture and maintain Syria's cultural heritage? Which historical events ought to be brought to light and which forgotten?

Conclusion

Overall, landscapes and memory provide a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of how our surroundings influence our experiences, perceptions, and emotions. By investigating the interaction of nature, history, and culture, we may obtain a better understanding of the cultural landscapes that surround us and their effect on our collective consciousness, especially in rural areas.

This study of a specific cultural landscape in Syria's southern Idlib province aims to highlight the fact that heritage places are not isolated and that there is an interconnectedness between people, social life, landscapes and associated ecosystems. Landscapes have helped narrate and negotiate the stories of people, events, and places throughout time, conveying a feeling of continuity and the passing of time. They also provide a contextual environment for cultural values. The elements of the landscape serve as storage and access points for memories. In times of conflict, landscape may also provoke memories both pleasant and terrible. It is common for terrible memories to be written over landscapes.

This study adds to the body of knowledge about landscape and place-making practice in rural settings as they relate to loss, displacement, time, and memory. It examines the concepts of absence, loss, and displacement in landscape practice, as well as how specific kinds of materiality—in this case, monuments and olive groves—becomes imbued with a range of feelings connected to individual histories. The absences caused by exile and displacement are linked to previously lost homes and territories, which cohabit in complex ways with the newly occupied environments. Cultural landscape memory involves a complex process including interactions between bodies, memories, perceptions, and materiality.

With millions of people fleeing for their lives every year, we need to continue the fight to remember hope even in times of crisis. This hope is our collective resistance against the forces of memoricide.

Through my own narratives and other people's responses about their cultural landscape together with the cadence of the trauma of displacement and the loss of place, I have shown the various perspectives on how displacement can affect presence-absence from a place and how this can manifest itself in landscapes. I am also deeply connected to powerfully lived geographies of remembering and forgetting. Through this personal experience I want to add something to the humanities discourse on presence/absence, memory, landscape, and displacement, especially in the lived cultural geographies and heritage of southern Idlib province.

It is very crucial to focus on dealing with both tangible and intangible heritage and not create a false dichotomy between the two concepts. Both should be taken into consideration in post-conflict topics. This study was carried out with a relatively a small sample of 15 persons. However, systemic work using samples with a broader range and larger numbers of participants will be useful, covering internally and externally displaced people. Differences in their surroundings, environment, and cultural differences may have serious implications for the results presented here. It is also useful to compare the issues presented in this thesis with displaced memories from other regions hit by conflict and disaster, nationally or internationally.

Based on the literature review and this study, I believe that cultural landscapes could be useful in reinforcing the damaged cultural identity of people brutally torn away from everything they valued. The research's conclusions shape a broad, situation-specific understanding that will help individual rehabilitation efforts and the eventual and restoration of cultural landscape to make communities more resilient in the face of displacement and conflict.

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Appendix A

- Questions of the interviews

Part 1

1. Tell me about your life before displacement, age, profession, region, place of living?
2. What do you think when you hear the word “memory”? What places bring back memories?
3. What are the memories of your region that you would like to recall before displacement?
4. If you could edit your memories of the fields and traditions of your region, which memories would you want to erase, and why? Which ones would make it clearer?
5. Do you think it would be easier to erase bad memories of agricultural fields and heritage/relics? Will you do it?
6. Do some photographs of your area and agricultural fields bring back memories? Is there a special photo that reminds you of good memories?
7. Do you think that your memories are part of your cultural identity? Why?

Part 2

1. What do you know about olive cultivation in your region? Are there stories about its history or origins?
2. What comes to mind when you remember olive cultivation before 2011? How do you deal with these memories? Do you want to keep it, or do you want to forget it? And why?

3. What is your relationship with olive trees/olive fields? Do you have an olive field? Does your family have an olive field? How do you deal emotionally with olive trees?
4. Do you have any photo albums or records of olive fields? What are the documented activities and events of the olive harvest season?
5. Have you been directly involved in olive growing and olive oil production? Can you share some personal stories about the olive harvest or olive planting season?
6. What is the importance of olive oil in the food you prepare? Do you think it is part of your cultural identity? And why?
7. What smell or taste brings back memories?
8. Does your family have traditional sayings or expressions about the surrounding fields? What is it?
9. Are there ruins near the olive fields? What do you think of the presence of trees near the monuments?
10. What are the stories about monuments in your area? What are the stories about caves and ruins in your area?
11. What feelings do you feel when you remember the ruins and the olives? How do you feel when you remember the archaeological sites and olive groves after the revolution/conflict? What is the relationship between local heritage and war in your memory?
12. What do you like most about olive culture and cultivation? Why is it yours?

Part 3

1. What is your personal relationship with the monuments in your region? How do you describe your relationship with your effects during walks?
2. What are your favorite monuments in the region? And why?

3. Do you feel proud of the local heritage in your village or town? Why? Do you think it's part of your identity?
4. How do you feel when you think about archaeological sites after the revolution/conflict?
5. Do you have any photo albums of antiquities from the picnic times? Does it bring back the memory more clearly?
6. What sounds and smells remind you of the ruins around the picnic area? Do you remember only the monuments, the trees, or the people with whom you shared those memories?
7. What types of local gatherings and events were there? What memories come to your mind?
8. If you could draw your memories of your local heritage, what would they be?
9. In your opinion, what is best for devastating effects? Rebuilding or leaving them in their current state as witnesses of destruction, steadfastness, and resistance? And why?
10. What do you value most about your heritage and traditions in displacement? And why?