International Academic Institute for Science and Technology

International Academic Journal of Social Sciences
Vol. 13, No. 1, 2026, pp. 58-65.

ISSN 2454-3918

International Academic Journal of Social Sciences

www.iaiest.com

Postcolonial Approaches to Indigenous Rights and The Effects of Globalization on Cultural Heritage

I Wayan Eka Mahendra [a]

[a] *lecturer, department of public administration, Ngurag Rai University, Denpasar, Indonesia.*
E-mail: eka.mahendra@unr.ac.id

Abstract

This paper discusses the point of convergence of the postcolonial theory, indigenous rights and cultural heritage in relation to globalization. It examines the long-term consequences of colonialism on the indigenous people, particularly the loss of cultural identity, language and land and how the same has continued to affect their ability to uphold their traditional practices and ways of living. The paper not only cites the effect of globalization in exacerbating these challenges but also mentions other factors such as commodification and exploitation of indigenous cultural heritage. The paper, however, also presents the strength of the indigenous people who have used the international law provisions, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), to demand their right to self-determination, land, and cultural continuity. The paper provides case studies of different areas, such as the Americas, Australia and the Amazon, to show how the erosion of the cultures of the indigenous people has been complex. Additionally, the article explains the opportunities that newer technologies, including digital platforms and social media, provide to the indigenous populations in recording and sharing their heritage and preserving it. Lastly, the paper provides suggestions on how to enhance the legal safeguards of indigenous cultures, culture revitalization, and global solidarity to sustain the existence of indigenous cultures in a fast-globalization world.

Keywords: Postcolonial Theory, Indigenous Rights, Cultural Heritage, Globalization, Cultural Preservation, Legal Frameworks, Resilience.

DOI: 10.71086/IAJSS/V13I1/IAJSS1309
Received: 07 January 2026/Revised: 30 January 2026/Accepted: 27 February 2026/Published: 30 March 2026

Introduction

Postcolonial studies address the effects of colonialism on the former colonies and minority groups, especially the legacies of power relations, erasure of culture and economic exploitation. The worst effects have been felt by the indigenous communities, which in most cases bear the dual burden of colonial past and contemporary globalization through cultural loss, displacement and disempowerment. The framework of indigenous rights has been a reaction to these historical wrongs, and seeks to protect and recognize their cultural, political and land-based rights. Although the globalization process has promised interconnectedness and development, it has frequently increased the challenges that indigenous people experience, through developing new modes of exploitation, cultural appropriation and loss of control over traditional lands.

The study examines the use of postcolonial theory in the interpretation of indigenous rights with reference to the two-fold impact of colonialism and globalization on cultural heritage (Zarandona, 2015; Blake, 2011). The natives have been struggling with the issue of preserving their culture in the face of the influx of foreign culture. This has further been worsened by the prevailing influence of colonialism, which was aimed at destroying the original cultures and introducing new systems. These problems are also contributed to by globalization, which has led to the commodification of cultural heritage, displacement and marginalization of indigenous voices in the global discourse (Kania, 2019; Yeh et al., 2021).

In this research paper, the intersection of the postcolonial theory and the indigenous rights and cultural heritage in the globalization process will be discussed. This paper attempts to understand how the postcolonial paradigms can be used to inform the protection and conservation of the indigenous cultures and how globalization is transforming the practices in a positive or a negative way. This research will contribute to the further development of the contemporary debate on cultural sovereignty and heritage conservation because it will explore the historical and contemporary issues that indigenous people have to deal with.

Research Questions

1. What are the postcolonial perspectives of indigenous rights, and what are the cultural implications of this?
2. What are the effects of globalization on the maintenance and change of indigenous cultural heritage?

The paper is organized as follows: Section II provides a literature review of postcolonial theory and indigenous rights, discussing the main ideas and the field's history. Section III elaborates on the effects of globalization on the indigenous cultural heritage and the effects of global integration, which are both positive and negative. Section IV includes case studies of indigenous rights and cultural heritage in various global contexts and considers the real-life examples of challenges and resilience. Section V provides a conclusion on important findings, policy, and research recommendations.

Literature Review

Postcolonial theory became one of the critical approaches to the interpretation of the long-term effects of colonialism on the colonized countries and aboriginal populations. The institutions of power and domination that were being unleashed upon the native peoples by the colonial empires have been critiqued by such distinguished intellectuals as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. The violence of colonization that is a subject of the postcolonial discourse is not only the physical violence but also the violence of erasing the indigenous languages, traditions, and worldviews (Langton, 2012). Postcolonial critiques have been employed to influence indigenous rights movements, particularly during the second half of the 20th century, which demanded the recognition of indigenous sovereignty, self-determination and cultural preservation. Central to these rights is the right to cultural identity, which includes the protection of the knowledge systems, the traditional practices and sacred places that have been historically threatened by colonial and postcolonial policies.

As a result of centuries of colonialization, various international legal frameworks have been created in a bid to take into consideration the rights of indigenous people. A significant document in the fight to champion the rights of the indigenous people in the world is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007 (Coombes et al., 2013). UNDRIP recognizes the right of indigenous people to their land, territories and resources and the right to their own cultural practices, languages and traditions. Various regional agreements and national legal frameworks have also influenced indigenous rights, with some being more implemented and effective than others. Nevertheless, these rights have been a significant issue, especially insofar as indigenous communities face the rising pressures of globalization, which tends to marginalize their cultural and political autonomy.

Table 1: Comparison of Global Legal Frameworks and Their Impact on Indigenous Rights

Legal Framework	Year Adopted	Key Provisions	Impact on Indigenous Rights
UNDRIP	2007	Recognition of land, self-determination, language, and cultural practices.	High symbolic value and global recognition; however, legal enforceability is low as it is a non-binding declaration.
ILO Convention 169	1989	Protection of land, culture, language, and consultation in development.	Legally binding for ratifying states; provides enhanced protections, though enforcement remains uneven globally.
National Frameworks	Varies	Varies based on region (e.g., native title laws, cultural protection acts).	Mixed effectiveness; impact is highly dependent on domestic political will, judicial interpretation, and resources.

Table 1 shows, some of the major legal frameworks (UNDRIP, ILO Convention 169, national laws) are contrasted, and their provisions and effects on indigenous rights are brought out. It shows how these frameworks have been effective to different degrees in safeguarding indigenous sovereignty, land, and cultural practices.

Globalization is the process by which the world is getting more interconnected in terms of economic, political and cultural exchange. Though it has led to improvements in communication, trade and technology, globalization has also led to the loss of indigenous cultural heritage (Nicholas, 2014; Francioni, 2011). With the transformations of indigenous territories into the markets of the world, the traditional knowledge and practices are frequently commodified, misused or distorted. To illustrate, when indigenous symbols are appropriated by various industries such as fashion, media, and tourism, they are usually deprived of their cultural meaning. Moreover, globalization helps to propagate the dominant cultural narratives, which tend to overlook the indigenous cultures in favor of globalized values and practices. One more reason why indigenous languages are being lost is globalization, where young people are gradually abandoning their native languages and adopting the dominant languages due to international media and education systems.

Although these are the adverse impacts of globalization, it has also brought new avenues of interaction and representation of the rights of the indigenous peoples. The emergence of digital technologies and social media has enabled indigenous communities to create awareness of their plight, record their cultural heritage, and connect with other indigenous communities around the world Giblin, (2015). Globalization in this regard poses a paradox because, on the one hand, it is one of the major threats to cultural preservation, on the other hand, globalization opens up possibilities of cultural revival and activism.

The tangible and intangible cultural heritage are an important element of indigenous peoples' identity Coombe & Weiss, (2015). Cultural heritage is a wide concept that incorporates a wide array of aspects such as languages, customs, rituals, sacred locations, and traditional knowledge systems (Wiktor-Mach, 2019). Nonetheless, these aspects have been challenged by colonialism and globalization. Colonial forces would not only occupy the native lands, but also impose external educational systems, laws and religions that weakened the native lifestyles. In the modern world, these legacies remain evident in the disappearance of indigenous languages, culture and the commercialization of sacred traditions.

Cultural heritage conservation has been on the rise during the postcolonial period (Colomer, 2017). International organizations like UNESCO have come up with programmed to conserve indigenous cultural heritage, including intangible cultural heritage (Meskell, 2013). Even local governments and local indigenous groups themselves have launched a series of preservation programs, yet the challenges they face include a lack of funding, political opposition and loss of traditional knowledge, which continue to hamper their success.

This section sets the context of the identification of the theoretical and practical landscape of indigenous rights and cultural heritage in a globalized world dominated by colonization. The threats of globalization and the power of indigenous communities, which still have to fight to make their cultures survive and prosper, are also among the threats, as stated in the literature.

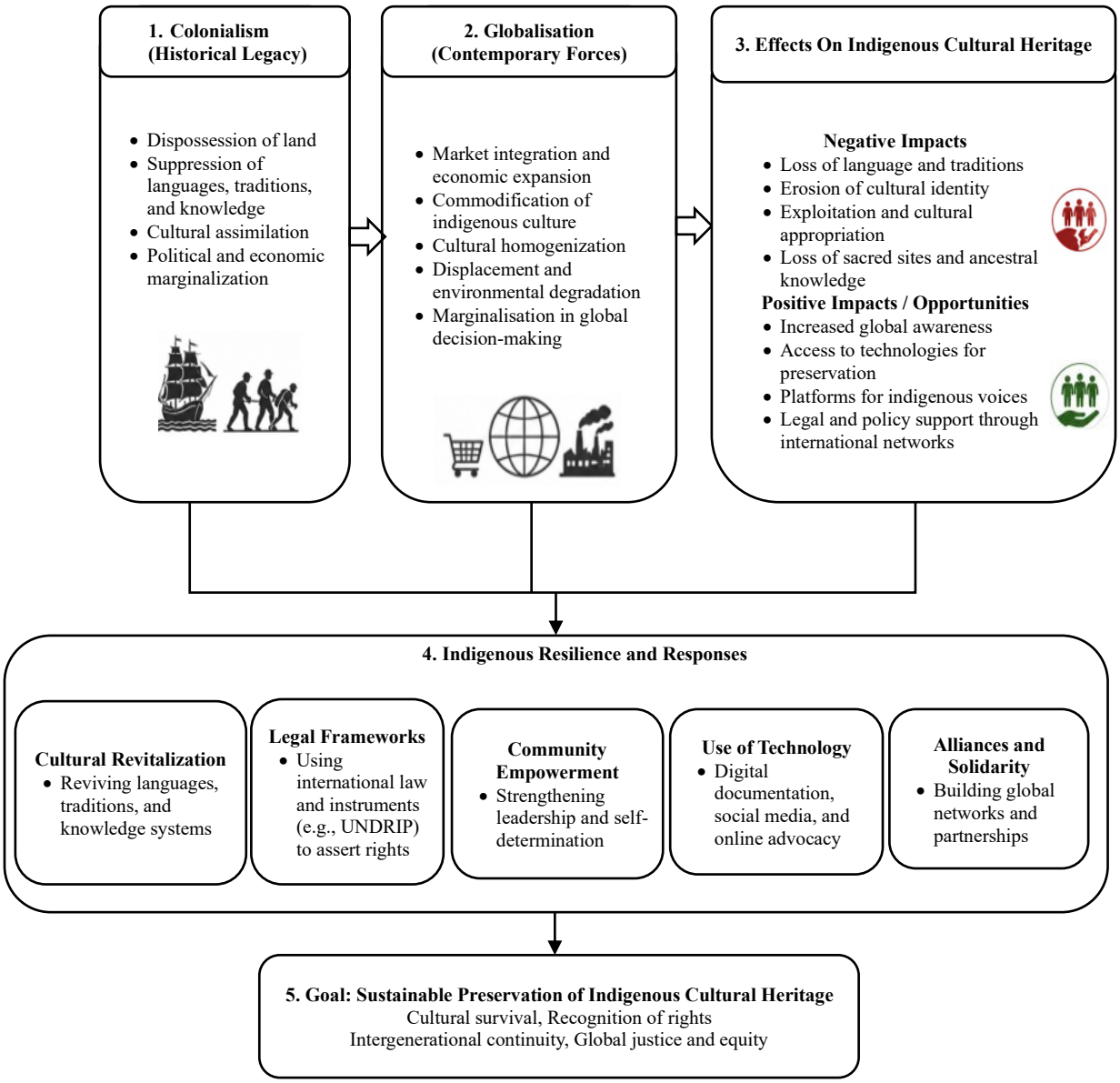


Fig. 1: Interconnection of Colonialism, Globalization, and Indigenous Cultural Heritage

Fig. 1 illustrates the relationship between colonialism, globalization, and the preservation of indigenous cultural heritages. It shows how the effects of colonial histories and globalization on indigenous cultures are two-fold, and how the issue of focusing on cultural resilience and conservation has become a priority.

Cultural Erosion and Loss of Identity

Globalization, as it is often characterized by the increasing movement of goods, ideas and technologies across borders, has brought about significant cultural changes, most especially among indigenous people. Among the most evident effects has been the loss of indigenous languages, which are a fundamental element of cultural identity. The world domination of languages as the dominant languages of education, media and trade has led to the loss of native languages and most of them are considered to be endangered. With the younger generations being pulled into the globalized economy, a demand to fit the mainstream cultural demands has seen the discarding of traditional lifestyles and erosion of indigenous world views.

Others under threat include cultural practices, which have been passed across generations. There has been a replacement of cultures, practices and native wisdom regarding ecosystems and health by mainstream, often westernized, modes of thinking. These losses contribute to the poor cultural identity, which, in turn, affects the social solidarity of indigenous people. Not only is the process of cultural assimilation of these communities due to globalization compromising the heritage of these communities, but it also makes them less successful in their struggle to resist political and economic exploitation.

Economic and Political Pressures

One of the effects of globalization is economic integration, and in most cases, the native people are forced from their ancestral lands. Major development programs such as mining, deforestation and development of infrastructure are usually found in the indigenous lands, and tend to be implemented without the consent or participation of the local communities. These projects are often aimed at the economic development of the region, at the cost of cultural heritage preservation and the fact that the given projects lead to the destruction of holy places, the loss of biodiversity and the disruption of traditional lifestyles.

There is also the factor of political pressures, whereby the indigenous communities are further marginalized in decision-making processes, as far as land, management of resources and development are concerned. The necessity to sell natural resources such as oil, timber, and minerals in the global market has subjected the indigenous territories to greater pressures, which, more frequently than not, have placed economic interests in direct opposition to the preservation of cultural heritage. These strains have ensured that more social and environmental injustices are being imposed on the indigenous people as their cultural practices and ways of living are being destroyed by mega corporations and state actors.

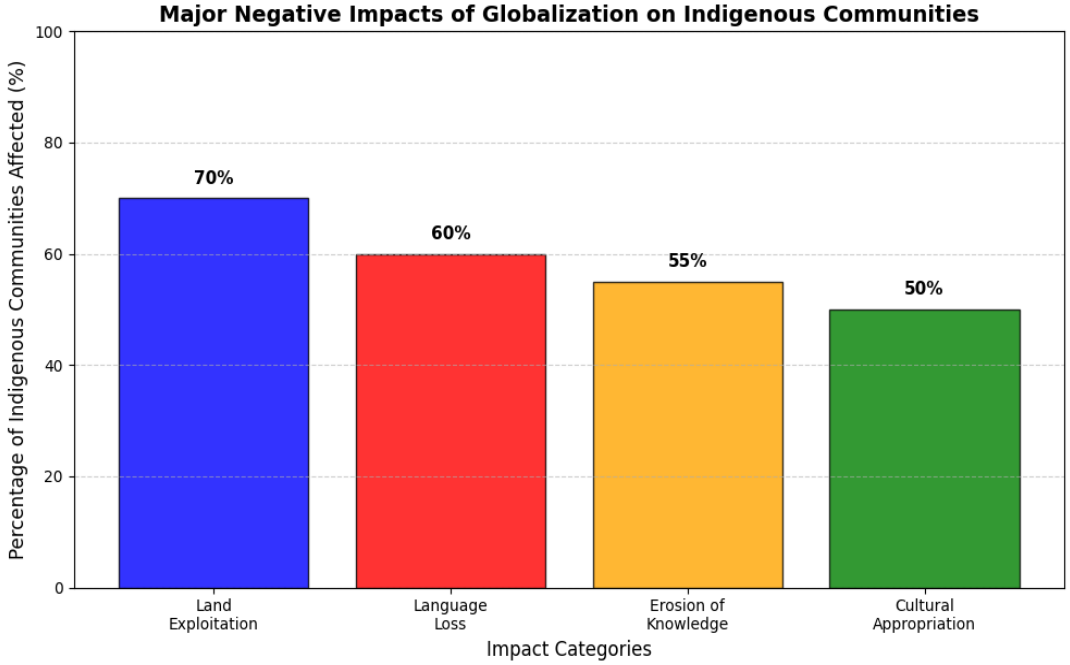


Fig. 2: Impact of Globalization on Indigenous Cultural Heritage

Fig. 2 shows the proportion of indigenous peoples who suffered in terms of language loss, land exploitation, cultural appropriation and digital preservation. It brings to the fore the great effects of globalization and how digital tools can help in preserving indigenous cultural heritage.

Cultural Appropriation and Exploitation

Commodification of indigenous cultural aspects has also been a result of globalization. Cultural appropriation is the misrepresentation of indigenous culture (clothing, music, and spiritual artifacts) by removing it out of context and commodifying it. These products of culture are mostly sold in such a manner that they misinterpret or distort the original meaning. An example is the fashion industry, which has been accused of appropriating indigenous designs and symbols without consulting or contributing to the communities these designs and symbols belong to.

In tourism, indigenous cultural practices, including dances, rituals, and arts, are usually presented as spectacles to generate profit, and the sacred traditions have become commodities to be consumed by tourists. Not only does this exploitation diminish the importance of these practices, but it also propagates stereotypes and diminishes the indigenous cultures to objects of exoticism. Although there are examples of communities that have used globalization to utilize their cultures to their economic advantage, there is still the issue of the excessive exploitation of their own cultures.

Preservation Efforts in the Face of Globalization

Although globalization has brought about negative effects, there has been a concerted effort to protect the indigenous cultural heritage in the contemporary world. The digital technologies e.g. have given the indigenous communities the means to record, exchange and preserve their cultural practices. Oral histories, traditional knowledge and indigenous languages can be preserved through websites, social media sites and online databases. These tools are being utilized by many native communities to foster cultural rejuvenation, not only within their own community, but also to the general world.

International systems such as the Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage created by UNESCO and the above UNDRIP have served significant purposes in promoting the importance of protecting indigenous cultural heritage in the wake of globalization. In these frameworks, there has been an urge to ensure that the rights of indigenous peoples are more acknowledged to safeguard and regulate their cultural heritage, and to be compensated whenever their cultural aspects are used to make a profit. Nevertheless, hurdles exist especially in areas where political goodwill and funds are too little to execute such safeguards in totality.

Cultural Resilience and Adaptation

There has been great strength among the indigenous communities in the face of globalization. Although the stresses of economic and cultural assimilation are great, not all indigenous groups are merely passive observers of globalization; they are participants in their own future. Globalization has been exploited to the benefit of indigenous movements across the globe as they have linked hands with other indigenous movements and allies, create awareness of their plight and demand protection of their heritage.

An example is the international advocacy and policy change of the global indigenous rights movement that has gained a lot of traction. The indigenous people are regaining their identity and urging the government to recognize their culture and land. Also, most communities are adopting hybrid cultural practices, which combine traditional knowledge and new technologies, to ensure that they are able to navigate the complexities of globalization without losing their cultural identities.

Case Studies of Indigenous Rights and Cultural Heritage in the Context of Globalization

Case Study 1: Indigenous Rights in the Americas

Historically, indigenous communities in the Americas, Native American tribes and First Nations in Canada have struggled to retain their cultural identity and ensure recognition of their land rights. Cultural practices and sacred sites have been preserved due to legal struggles such as those that were fought under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. Moreover, the Dakota Access Pipeline protests are a milestone event in the struggle against land exploitation and cultural appropriation by the world industrial forces. These actions reflect the continuous struggle of indigenous sovereignty, and the necessity to have international assistance in the struggle of cultural conservation and environmental justice in a globalized world.

Case Study 2: Aboriginal Rights in Australia

The colonial and postcolonial policies that have been faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia have historically been the root of marginalization (such as the forced removal of children (the Stolen Generations) and the destruction of religious sites). A key success in the struggle regarding the right to land and cultural sovereignty was the Mabo decision of 1992 that acknowledged native title. Nonetheless, globalization forces continue to take their toll especially through mining activities and commercialization of the indigenous culture to draw in tourists. In spite of these obstacles, Aboriginal communities are still reclaiming their cultural heritage by engaging in projects to preserve their traditional lifestyles such as language renewal projects and political activism, in an effort to defend their ancestral lands against the influences of globalization which want to exploit them.

Case Study 3: Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon

The globalization and the forces of globalization which include deforestation, mining, and large-scale agriculture pose a serious threat to the native population of the Amazon like Yanomami and Kayapo. The rise of economic development has contributed to the invasion of multinational corporations in the indigenous lands, which worsens environmental pollution and cultural displacement. Regardless of all these, the indigenous people in the Amazon, including the Kayapo, have been able to utilize the world to create awareness over the need to conserve their territories and cultures. Their activism does not just protect their traditional way of life, but also helps in the global fight to preserve biodiversity and fight climate change, making the indigenous rights to be associated with the sustainability of the environment.

Case Study 4: Maori in New Zealand

The Maori of New Zealand have been to the forefront of promoting their cultural and political rights especially against colonial oppression. Although this treaty was violated historically, the Treaty of Waitangi has emerged as an important legal tool in the struggle of land rights and cultural conservation. Maori language revival and recovery of traditional practices has gained momentum with such moves as kura kaupapa Maori (language immersion schools). Also, the revival of cultural activities, like the haka has enabled the Maori to maintain some form of identity as they interact with the rest of the globalized world. This mix of tradition and modernity is an indication of the strength of the indigenous people against globalization.

Case Study 5: The Sami People

As the native inhabitants of the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, the Sami people have been a victim of cultural oppression and displacement as a result of colonialism and globalization forces. Due to the high demand of natural resources such as oil and timber among people worldwide, the reindeer herding culture among these people has been threatened. Sami parliament, which was founded in the 1980s, is important in the advocacy of rights and cultural preservation of the Sami with emphasis on land, language and traditions protection. The issues of globalization have placed the Sami in a challenging position, but the cultural revitalization efforts as well as legal advocacy have helped the Sami to remain strong in the face of the globalization process through the need to have indigenous self-determination in the fast-changing world.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has discussed the overlap between the postcolonial theory, the rights and cultural heritage of indigenous people in the context of globalization. The analysis has highlighted the long-term effects of colonialism on the original cultures and how globalization, though it provides a chance to develop economically, has led to the exploitation, commodification and erosion of the original cultural heritage. Rather, indigenous communities have proven to have an impressive strength and resilience, utilizing such legal frameworks as UNDRIP and digital platforms to protect their rights and keep their cultural identity intact. In spite of these attempts, the issues of land expropriation, loss of language and cultural appropriation in most parts of the world continue to be a problem which has been enhanced by globalization. To maintain the native cultural heritage, governments and world authorities are supposed to strengthen the laws and ensure that they enforce the laws such as UNDRIP which recognizes the rights of the indigenous people over their land, culture and traditions. Also, there should be cultural revitalization programs that include language preservation programs, documentation of traditional knowledge, etc. The decision-making of the projects that are going to affect their land and cultural sites should also involve the indigenous people so that the heritage they have will not be abused. With the help of the latest technologies, e.g., digital archives and social media, it is possible to preserve indigenous knowledge and raise awareness of the world about the threat of its destruction. Future studies need to consider the further effect of globalization on indigenous cultures, both in terms of what the future holds in terms of challenges and opportunities to the existence of the indigenous cultures. Lastly, policy re-formulation, international collaboration and local intervention will be needed in order to preserve the local cultural heritage in the face of a rapidly globalizing world.

References

Zarandona, J. A. G. (2015). Heritage as a cultural measure in a postcolonial setting. In *Making Culture Count: the politics of cultural measurement* (pp. 173-190). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-46458-3_12

Kania, M. (2019). Indigenous peoples' rights and cultural heritage: Threats and challenges for a new model of heritage policy. *Latinoamérica. Revista de estudios Latinoamericanos*, (68), 121-157. https://doi.org/10.22201/cialc.24486914e.2019.68.57064

Nicholas, G. (2014). Indigenous cultural heritage in the age of technological reproducibility: Towards a postcolonial ethic of the public domain. *Dynamic fair dealing: Creating Canadian culture online*, 213-224. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442665613-017

Giblin, J. (2015). Critical approaches to post-colonial (post-conflict) heritage. In *The Palgrave handbook of contemporary heritage research* (pp. 313-328). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137293565_20

Coombe, R. J., & Weiss, L. M. (2015). Neoliberalism, heritage regimes, and cultural rights. *Global heritage: A reader*, 43-69. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781394261154.ch2

Wiktor-Mach, D. (2019). Cultural heritage and development: UNESCO's new paradigm in a changing geopolitical context. *Third world quarterly*, *40*(9), 1593-1612. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1604131

Colomer, L. (2017). Heritage on the move. Cross-cultural heritage as a response to globalisation, mobilities and multiple migrations. *International journal of heritage studies*, *23*(10), 913-927. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2017.1347890

Meskell, L. (2013). UNESCO and the fate of the World Heritage Indigenous Peoples Council of Experts (WHIPCOE). *International Journal of Cultural Property*, *20*(2), 155-174. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0940739113000039

Langton, M. (2012). The 'Wild', the Market and the Native: Indigenous People Face New Forms of Global Colonization. In *Decolonizing nature* (pp. 79-107). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199264520.003.0014

Blake, J. (2011). Taking a human rights approach to cultural heritage protection. *Heritage & Society*, *4*(2), 199-238. https://doi.org/10.1179/hso.2011.4.2.199

Yeh, J. H. Y., Lin, S. C., Lai, S. C., Huang, Y. H., Yi-Fong, C., Lee, Y. T., & Berkes, F. (2021). Taiwanese indigenous cultural heritage and revitalization: Community practices and local development. *Sustainability*, *13*(4), 1799. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13041799

Francioni, F. (2011). The human dimension of international cultural heritage law: an introduction. *European Journal of International Law*, *22*(1), 9-16. https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chr018

Coombes, B., Johnson, J. T., & Howitt, R. (2013). Indigenous geographies II: The aspirational spaces in postcolonial politics–reconciliation, belonging and social provision. *Progress in Human Geography*, *37*(5), 691-700. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512469590