**International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

'Culture' and Post-Conflict Recovery: The Case of Kuwait

Alkindi Aljawabra, PhD Candidate, University College London, Qatar Campus
Email: alkindi.jawabra.13@ucl.ac.uk

Supervisors:
Dr Karen Exell, University College London, Qatar Campus
k.exell@ucl.ac.uk
Prof Murray Fraser, University College London, The Bartlett School of Architecture
Email: murray.fraser@ucl.ac.uk
Dr Robert Carter, University College London, Qatar Campus
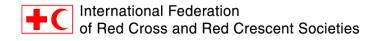Email: robert.carter@ucl.ac.uk

Abstract text

It is widely perceived that the Middle East is one of the world's most conflict-prone areas. Indeed, since December 2010, many countries in the region have witnessed massive popular uprisings. These events, and accompanying large -scale conflicts that are considered as continuations -- i.e. as post-uprising conflicts -- have resulted in radical social and political changes, including toppling the political regimes in some countries or full-scale war in others. Significantly, the development models, represented mainly by the neo-liberal development, that were adopted during the last three decades by Middle Eastern countries are now considered to have been a key cause of the uprisings and subsequent conflicts. While the planning for a 'new phase' of rebuilding is proceeding internationally and nationally for each country, the need for fresher and more contextualised urban development models is urgent.

This paper presents part of a PhD research project that seeks to critically analyse the discourse of post-conflict reconstruction and development, with a special focus on the position and role of 'culture' -- in its broadest meaning -- within this discourse. The thesis explores the various ways in which the idea of 'culture' has been discussed, theorised and used for the purposes of reconstruction, urban regeneration and development. The thesis aims to develop a model for

integrating a broader vision of 'culture' within the study of reconstruction and urban regeneration in Middle Eastern contexts. Current models tend to mobilise the 'cultural heritage' argument, which focuses on the reconstruction and restoration of heritage monuments, as the link between past, present and future. By instead considering the concept of 'culture' in terms of more everyday lived practices within post-conflict reconstruction and development projects, it becomes possible to push the boundaries of knowledge on topics of recovery, development, culture, and heritage as well as highlight new avenues for further investigation. The ongoing PhD research focuses on the Middle East in general and highlights several initial case studies to support developing the main themes of the in-depth case study, Syria. This paper presents one of the initial case studies, the case of Kuwait in the Arabian Peninsula, an area usually overlooked in discussions of post-conflict reconstruction and development.
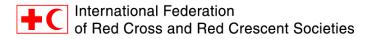
In terms of research methods, the thesis initially aimed to employ a qualitative framework whereby semi-structured, in-depth interviews will be conducted with various actors such as governmental agencies, NGOs, cultural bodies, civil society groups, and key informants. However, the thesis will also problematise the uncritical use of research methods developed in western academic contexts that do not take into account different cultural and situational—e.g. conflict/post-conflict—contexts and how these impact the implementation and effectiveness of the method and the validity of the data. In terms of the comparative case study, Kuwait, discussed in this paper, the data has been drawn from secondary sources such as scholarly literature and reports.

In terms of structure, the paper starts by mapping the landscape of post-conflict reconstruction / urban development in a selection of Middle Eastern representative countries where the neoliberal post-conflict redevelopment or 'renewal and regeneration' model is being implemented. The paper then moves to focus on Kuwait as a unique case study where in contrast to the common model of post-war reconstruction, Kuwait's post-war recovery was funded by its wealthy government not by international donors. Therewith, the paper discusses the post-war

recovery operations in Kuwait in general and particularly focuses on the position of culture in these operations, which were recently, in the context of Arab Spring, regarded as a missed opportunity that could offer better political and socio-economic solutions had it taken a different shape. Next, in the context of the Arab Spring and the recent political crises in Kuwait, the paper moves to discuss individual, non-governmental, initiatives that took recourse to different development trajectory and cultural discourse than the ones applied by the government.

The case of Kuwait's post-war recovery demonstrates that 1) even when the fund of the post-conflict recovery operations comes from within the effected country, the needs of the ordinary people might not be served. 2) In post-conflict contexts, even in a very wealthy state such as Kuwait, culture is not a priority and is usually mobilized within traditionally-identified models that mostly don't serve the public needs. These two points underline the critical need for exploring alternative models to integrate culture in post-conflict recovery and development plans with a special focus on serving the needs and aspirations of the ordinary local people. Hence, in this context, the case study of Kuwait, takes us back to the main argument of the ongoing PhD project that the utilisation of alternative forms of everyday cultural practices would be far more effective than promoting and implementing the same pre-conflict models of reconstruction and development, with its focus on traditionally-identified cultural heritage.
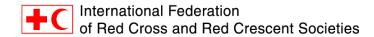
Keywords: Post-conflict development; Culture; Middle East

Abstract Reference Number: 20

Author's Biography

Photo here (optional)	Alkindi Aljawabra is a Syrian architect who is currently a PhD candidate at University College London's Qatar Campus. He has also been a part-time curator & architect at the HBKU Student Centre Art Gallery within the Education City in Doha since 2013. Previously, he participated in several cultural and architectural projects in Syria, where he also worked as an architect and senior teaching and research assistant in the Department of Architectural Engineering at the International University of Science and Technology in Damascus from 2006-2013. Alkindi has a MA in Museum Studies from University College London, Qatar Campus (2014), in addition to an MSc in Architectural Design (2013) and a BA in Architecture (2006), both from the University of Damascus.