Vol. 02. Aug/Sept 2023

Fading Cultures
Global Explorer Magazine

Rohingya Journey

Exploring one of the World's most, scattered, and persecuted peoples. Where did they come from and where will they go?

Displaced Heritage

The Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum

In a state of displacement the Burundian people use the language of dance. Dance in crisis brings them together maintaining their heritage story and sense of belonging.

Bricks of Civilisations:

From deforestation to endentured slavery

The art of brickmaking has been an essential part of building human civilisation for thousands of years, spanning cultures and continents but we rarely consider the true impact.

Featured Artisan Ibrahim Khan Reading the Heritage Stories in the Threads of Tribal Carpets:

"Ibrahim Khan's Family Business Breathes New Life into Afghan Traditions, in Support of Afghan Women"

Global ExplorerMagazine
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Welcome to Fading Cultures Global Explorer Magazine

Above: Building a New Beginning: A young boy in Herat, western Afghanistan, works to prepare sun-dried bricks for his family, who were displaced from their farm by drought. They begin a new chapter with determination and hard work and commit to constructing their future." Across Afghanistan, the window to enjoying childhood is often narrow, and many boys and girls are born into a life of labour and debt.

"We are exploring and embracing traditional crafts & knowledge from the past creating beauty for today & tommorrow"

In this month's "Global Explorer Magazine", we thread together the stories of cultural heritage and community with the theme "Cultural Space" from the building blocks of civilisations to the importance of cultural space for performance to our bodies as cultural space to express our way of life, beliefs, heritage or artistic needs.

The Global Explorer Magazine serves as a conduit, offering a profound appreciation for traditional crafts,' artisans and artistry while examining the obstacles and advantages or benefits of documenting or preserving traditional knowledge, skills and ancient techniques. We hope you enjoy this journey and we look forward to your support, feedback or contribution.

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CULTURAL HERITAGE
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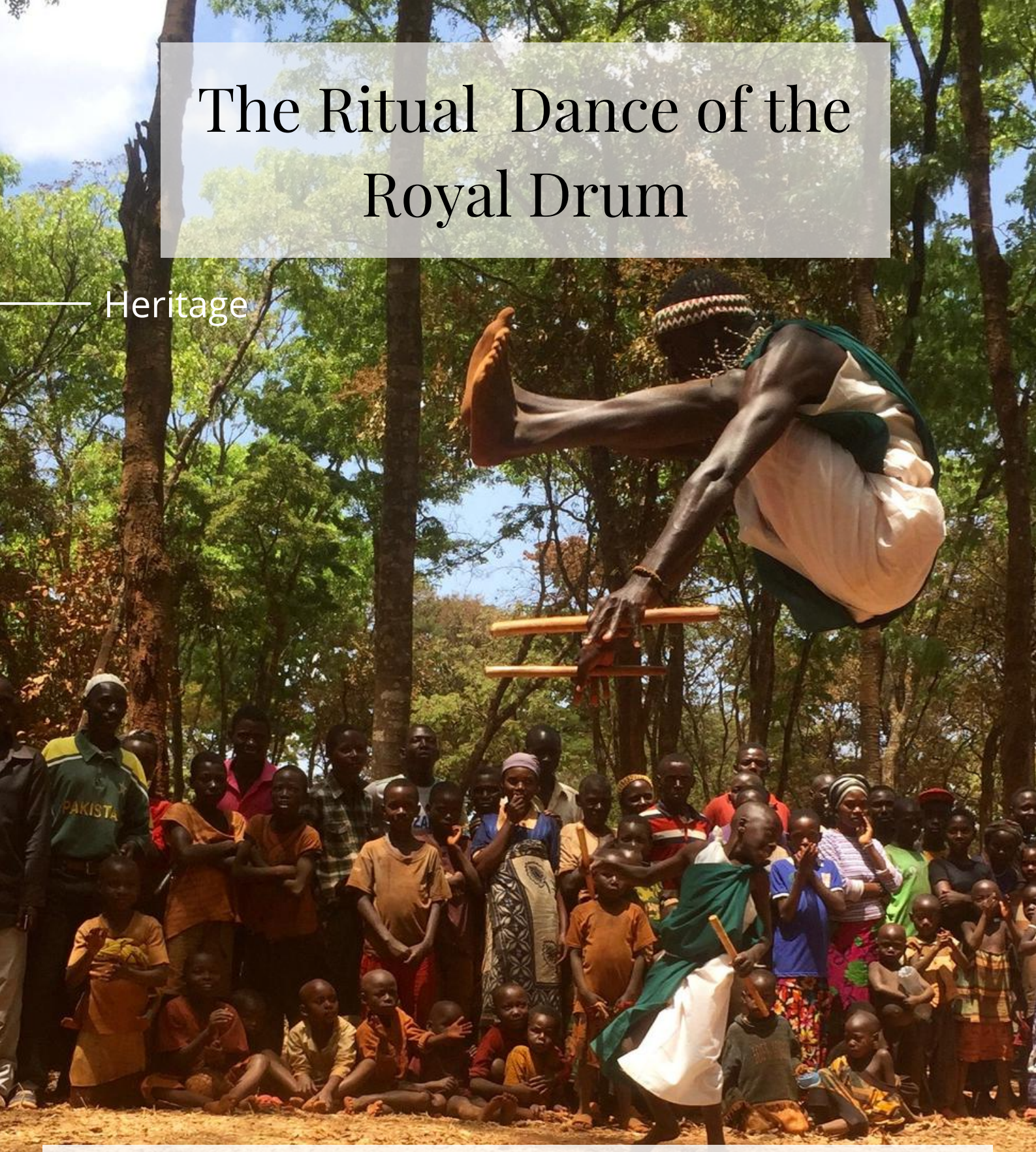


"Jean Marie leaps high into the air, propelled by his athleticism and the ancestral spirits. To the outsider, It is a mesmerising, graceful and athletic performance you never tire of watching. To Burundi's people, it is a critical part of their being, their way of life, and a way of unifying their community spirits."

Heritage & Spirit of Burundi

Nestled in the heart of East Africa, Burundi is a landlocked country that boasts a captivating human history and heritage of oral traditions; through spoken word, poetry, song, and performances, the oral traditions serve as a powerful means of preserving and transmitting the cultural heritage, values, and beliefs of the Burundian people. These narratives often revolve around ancestry, community, bravery, and the interconnectedness between humans and nature. Through these oral traditions, such as the *"Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum",* the people of Burundi celebrate their heritage and reinforce their sense of identity. Storyteller, dancer and oral traditionalist Jean Marie Nshimirimana explained to me how much of the Kingdom's oral history was lost when Europe occupied Burundi under German East Africa in 1899. During that time, Germany merged Burundi with neighbouring Rwanda, referring to it as "*Ruanda-Urundi*". He posits that the heritage he works to keep alive today through the Royal Dance, is only a slice of the rich tapestry of this ancient civilization's culture, arts and traditions that have since faded.

Despite tpday, being a country in economic turmoil, we know that Burundi had a highly evolved, centralised and hierarchical political system referred to as the *"Ganwa".* It once flourished, with an infusion of heroic leaders, victories in epic battles, and complete with intricate social and political systems.

The Burundi language *'Kirundi'* stems from Bantu, belonging to the Niger-Congo language family. Kirundi has evolved over time, particularly being influenced through contact with neighbouring languages, such as Kinyarwanda, Swahili, and French. It is a tonal language, meaning a word's pitch or tone can change its meaning. It has four tones: high, low, rising, and falling. The tonal aspect adds complexity to the language and requires speakers to pay attention to pitch variations. Tonation gives it a lyrical quality that has thrived as a vibrant embodiment of the nation's identity. In the *Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum*, the poetic songs, chants, or spoken word in Kirundi drives the beat of the giant hand-carved hardwood drums. There is an enduring linguistic legacy that defines this often-overlooked once powerful African Kingdom.

We Dance; We Unite

As the dancers gracefully sway to the resounding percussion, the poetry unfurls, telling tales of heroic exploits and ancestral stories, connecting humanity and nature. Each movement invokes emotions painting vivid imagery that transports the onlookers almost into a trance-like state.

Not surprisingly, anyone who has had the pleasure of experiencing the Ritual Dance can't help but be moved by its grace, power, rhythm and skill. The dance itself is a vessel for storytelling and cultural expression, capturing the essence of a vibrant heritage and captivating audiences with its timeless allure. In 2008, the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was developed, and by 2014 the centuries-old tradition of 'The Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum' was recognised by UNESCO as internationally important to humanity.

My first encounter with the "Ritual Dance" unfolded during a survey of forest land while I was mapping the boundaries of the Nduta refugee camp in Tanzania. Today, the camp is home to approximately 200,000 Burundian individuals who sought refuge across the borders from their strife-ridden homeland in 2015. As I traversed the forest hillsides, a hypnotic, rhythmic tapping of machetes on wood echoed through the air. As tree cutting was illegal, I was eager to reach the culprits before the camp authorities arrived. Among the largest trees in the Miombo woodlands, I came upon a spirited group of Burundian men diligently hollowing out a large recently felled tree trunk cut into various size sections. The group assured me that the Tanzanian camp commander had permitted them to cut down one large tree. They sang as they worked to create their drums, and their skilled hands breathed sound and life into the wood. From there, I became an avid supporter and true drum enthusiast.

As I got to know the group, I learned the intricacies, value and importance of The Ritual Dance itself. Jean Marie explained that it is a symbolic representation of the cycle of life and the unity of the community. In the camps, the front of the drum displays the letters TCRS (the local NGO supporting their work), but also HTT (Tutsi, Hutu, Twa), highlighting the unity between the three main Burundian ethnic groups.

The structure of the performance was said to comprise the birth, the life journey, and the transition to the ancestral realm. Each phase is marked by distinct drum rhythms and dance moves that depict life's joys, trials, and triumphs. The Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum begins with meticulous preparations. The drummers, dancers, and other performers traditionally gathered in a designated space, usually in the presence of a royal court or on sacred grounds, but in the refugee camps, there is no allocated performance space. The performers, dress in traditional attire, which often includes vibrant costumes adorned with intricate patterns, feathers, and accessories, symbolising their cultural identity.

The dance does not start without a spiritual invocation to seek blessings from ancestral spirits and invoke their presence. This ritual involves prayers, chants, and the performance of traditional ceremonies, sometimes conducted by religious leaders or designated spiritual figures. The purpose is to establish a connection between the performers and the spiritual realm, setting the stage for the sacred dance. The Royal Drum, a central instrument in this dance, takes the spotlight. Skilled drummers beat it with precision, creating a pulsating rhythm that serves as the backbone of the entire performance. The beats gradually intensify, captivating the audience and infusing the dancers with a sense of energy and purpose.

The Value of Cultural Heritage to Burundi People in Displacement

The Transformative Power of Cultural Heritage in Displacement

In the hustle and bustle of a humanitarian cris, the significance of cultural heritage often remains an untapped resource, overlooked amidst the urgency of life-saving interventions and resource allocation. However, re-establishing cultural heritage in refugee camps or urban environments can prove to be an unparalleled game-changer for displaced communities and humanitarians striving to make a difference in times of immense difficulties. Crossing borders into unknown territories, displaced communities are almost always challenged by unfamiliar languages, customs, and ways of life, leaving them grappling with the strains of an uprooted existence amongst powerful strangers. Within the folds of their shared experiences lies cultural familiarity that can ease their burden of great loss.

The Burundian refugees that embarked on their forced journey across borders share stories of how a connection to their cultural heritage offered solace amid the trials of displacement. As a Swiss medical student observed in 1688, those yearning for their lost homelands during conflict and displacement experienced a peculiar malaise he medically described as *"nostalgia."* The term, derived from the Greek words "nostos" (homecoming) and "alga" (pain), captures the profound ache of longing for a home left behind that has driven severe depression and a vast array of ill-health conditions.

From time immemorial, dance has served as a bridge, connecting people across time and space, transcending barriers and offering glimpses of cultural roots. For these displaced communities, the power of dance becomes more than just a spectacle; it becomes a lifeline. Embracing their cultural heritage through dance ignites a renewed sense of belonging and instils a pride that helps alleviate the pangs of "nostalgia."

Nietzsche suggests that without such expressions as dance, we lose our ability to understand the good in life and our senses are dimmed to our surroundings. He asks;

> *"where are the books that teach us to dance."*

Helen Thomas, a scholar of dance and culture, points to the lack of understanding of our relationship between the body and culture. It is linked to the creation of values and training sensory awareness. We underestimate the power of dance.

As the dance draws to a close, the performers feel fulfilled and united. The final moments of the performance often involve a collective expression of joy and gratitude. It is a time for the community to come together, reinforcing their cultural identity, strengthening bonds, and fostering a shared understanding of their heritage.

> *"We have to find home within us and we use our dance to express that memory of home regardless of where we are, and as difficult as it gets."*
>
> *Jean Marie, Nduta."*

"Harmonious Euphoria: Burundian men captivate with their incredible drumming skills, effortlessly balancing the beats on their heads while their rhythmic feet bring the drums alive in a vibrant dance of music and culture."

""Crafting Rhythms: Burundian artisans channel their ancestral traditions as they skillfully transform freshly cut trees into sacred objects of life amidst the enchanting depths of the forest."

The Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum

Cultural Significance: The Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum holds immense cultural significance for the people of Burundi. It is deeply rooted in the country's history, representing the power and prestige of the Burundian monarchy.

UNESCO Recognition: In 2014, the Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This recognition highlights its importance and promotes its safeguarding and transmission.

Historical Origins: The dance can be traced back to the royal courts of ancient Burundi, where it was performed exclusively for the reigning king (mwami) and during important ceremonies. It served as a symbol of royal authority and the kingdom's unity.

Symbolism: The Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum is rich in symbolism. Each movement, rhythm, and beat of the drums carries a specific meaning, often relating to the Burundian people's history, culture, and spiritual beliefs.

Role of Drums: Drums play a central role in the dance. The royal drums, known as "karyenda," are considered sacred objects and are entrusted to skilled drummers who have inherited their ancestors' knowledge and techniques of drum playing.

Dance Movements: The dance itself involves a combination of coordinated movements, steps, and gestures. Dancers, often wearing traditional attire, display grace, agility, and precision as they interpret the rhythms of the drums.

Oral Transmission: The Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum has been orally transmitted. Skilled drummers and dancers pass their knowledge and expertise to younger generations through apprenticeships and direct practice.

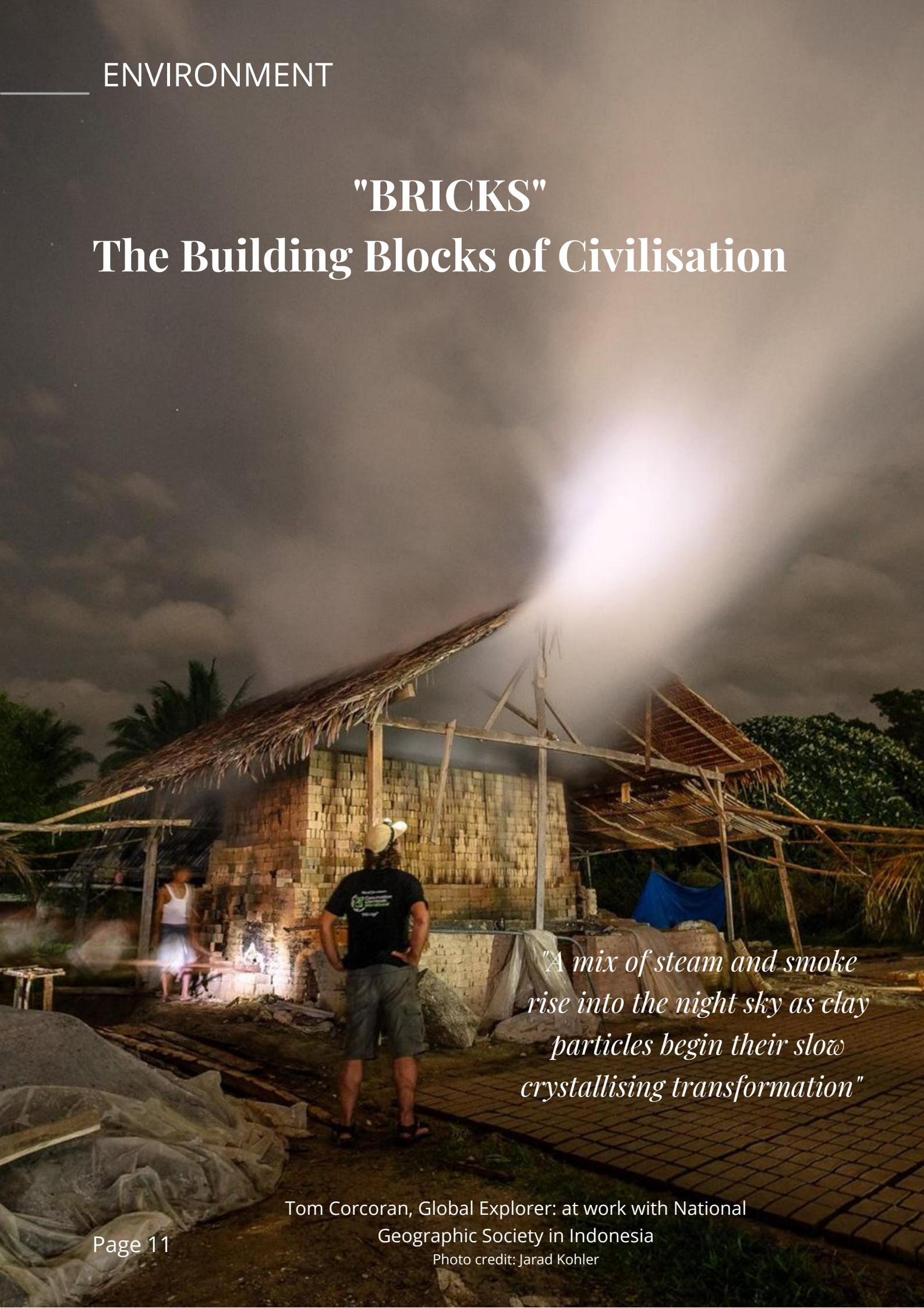
Social Importance: Gishora serves as a social and communal event, bringing together the Burundian community for celebrations, ceremonies, and important milestones. It strengthens social cohesion, fosters cultural identity, and reinforces intergenerational bonds.

Challenges: Despite the recognition and efforts towards preservation, the Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum faces challenges in terms of sustainability and transmission. Modernization, urbanization, and globalisation's impact threaten the continuity of this ancient tradition.

Safeguarding Measures: To address these challenges, ongoing efforts are being made to document, revitalize, and safeguard the Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum. These initiatives involve collaborating with local communities, cultural organizations, Burundi and Tanzania government authorities and the UNHCR and its partners.

If you would like to support the Ritual Dance of the Royal Drum and the refugee performers to expand their arts and their reach, contact us for more information www.fadingcultures.org.

"BRICKS"
The Building Blocks of Civilisation



"A mix of steam and smoke rise into the night sky as clay particles begin their slow crystallising transformation"

Tom Corcoran, Global Explorer: at work with National Geographic Society in Indonesia

Photo credit: Jarad Kohler

"In the Garaman Forest, Sumatra 7,000 Hectares of Forest is lost annually to Brick Making"

On the edge of the Garaman Forest, West Sumatra, Indonesia, lies the district of Lubuk Alung, where the age-old tradition of fired brickmaking has thrived for centuries. But with this age-old craft comes a significant ecological challenge. The brick-making process relies heavily on clay, sand and wood sourced from the surrounding tropical forests, contributing significantly to Indonesia's high deforestation rates and driving illegal logging. Alternatives to wood can decrease the industry's impact, safeguarding much of the environment while maintaining livelihoods, but change, as always, requires a holistic approach and much effort. Here, solutions go way beyond science; solving environmental challenges from brick-making while preserving this traditional and economically important craft which has profound social interconnectedness. This particular brick-making area spans 18 sub-districts, forming a tightly-knit cluster that can be easily mapped around the periphery of the forest. While a view from the road indicates few kilns, we soon discovered that this small area housed as many as 856 kilns that produced an astounding 256,800,000 bricks annually. In this area, what sets this industry apart from other regions is that the majority of the brickmakers are women. This is the centre of the Minangkabau matrilineal ethnicity, and land ownership primarily rests in the female line. The traditional brick-making industry in Lubuk Alung alone carries immense economic importance, generating an annual worth of more than 6.5 million USD in 2023. Locally, a significant portion of this revenue, amounting to 2.5 million USD, is spent on procuring wood for brick-making kilns. This alarming dependence on wood severely threatens the surrounding forests and the delicate ecosystems they harbour.

The industries demand for wood to fuel the brick-making kilns has rapidly increased as Indonesia's prosperity increases and the demand for masonry houses rises. Like many industries, technology has continued to lag behind the demand, and while there are positives when traditions prevail, there are also negatives. Each day, tonnes of hardwood goes up in smoke to meet the need for bricks. Adding fuel to the fire, about 40% of the bricks produced in the traditional way are of poor quality, and worryingly, they will be put into the walls of a house and other buildings in one of the world's most earthquake-prone regions.

In 2009 a 7.6 Magnitude earthquake struck the city of Padang, encompassing the area of Lubuk Alung. 135,000 Houses were destroyed, which in turn caused the death of over 1,100 people, and around 1.25 million people loss their homes and livelihoods. Impact assessments after the earthquake highlighted the high percentage of clay bricks that had simply crumbled under pressure. While we often view construction as modern, up until the start of the century, approximately 95% of the World's buildings were still considered vernacular, which can have extreme consequences in earthquake zones. While many vernacular buildings perform well in earthquakes, there are many advances in earthquake-resistant construction, with improved materials just one area. As economies like Indonesia grow, people demand change from materials such as bamboo and timber, considered 'old fashioned and poor' and aspire to ridged heavy materials such as bricks, stone and concrete, 'masonry construction'. considered 'modern' and a show of success.

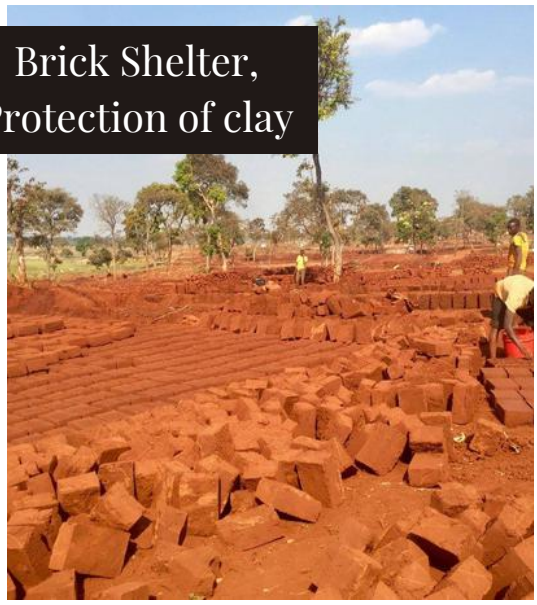
Forest turned to Fuel

It requires more than a cubic metre of wood to produce a cubic metre of bricks. Yet, the calorific value of the wood is highly variable and wood is often left outside in the rain.

Mixing Traditional Knowledge with Science

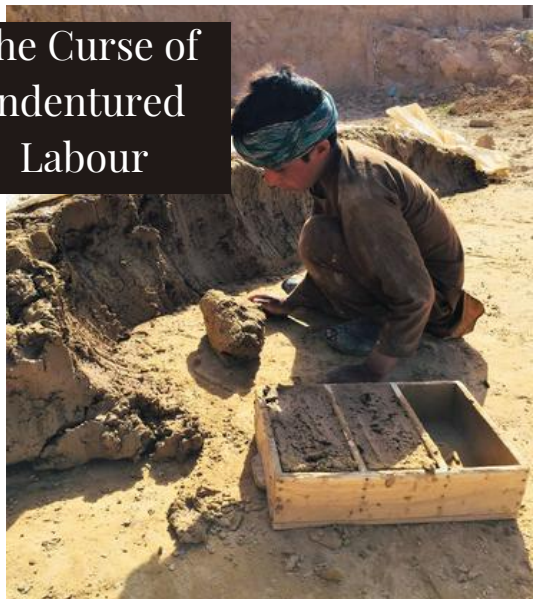
Some simple techniques of using metal rods to measure the temperature inside the kiln can save days of firing, improve quality and reduce the demand for wood.

Brick Shelter, Protection of clay



Bricks are often sun-dried, such as in Tanzania, where lime has been added to the clay bricks as a stabiliser to steadily harden the bricks over time.

The Curse of Indentured Labour



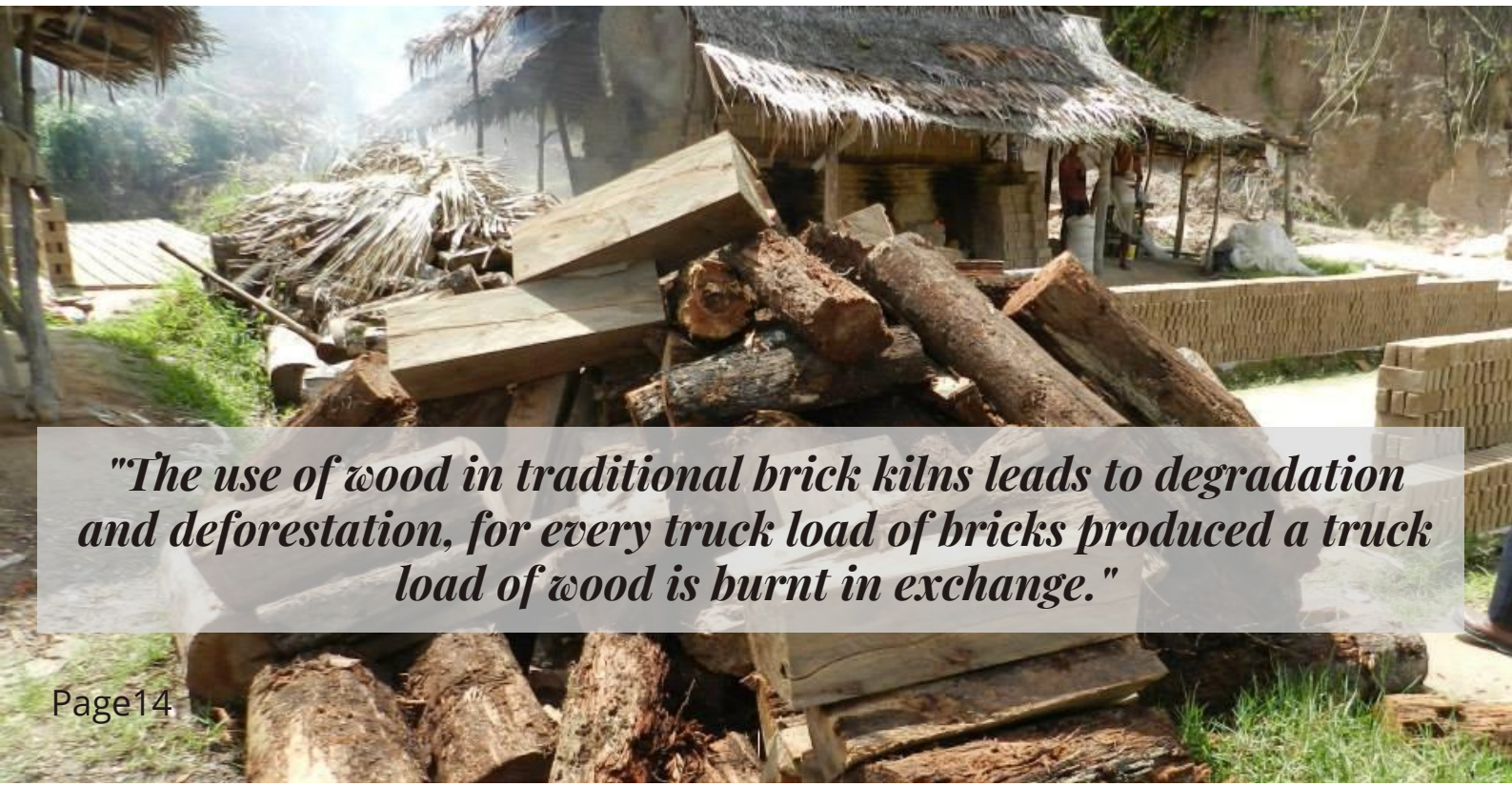
In Afghanistan, many families turn to brick making as the only option, drawing children into a life of cyclical debt as indentured slaves. Children as young as five-years of age can be found working to repay family debt

Transition to New Fuels

For traditional brickmakers in Sumatra, achieving profitability within the fired brick business often proves elusive. The laborious process of crafting a batch of 15,000 to 20,000 bricks often falls short of generating substantial earnings, with much of the potential profit utilised to repay loans for essential inputs like sand, clay, and wood—unless the brickmaker is fortunate enough to possess these crucial resources on their own land or if they access less expensive wood from illegal sources.

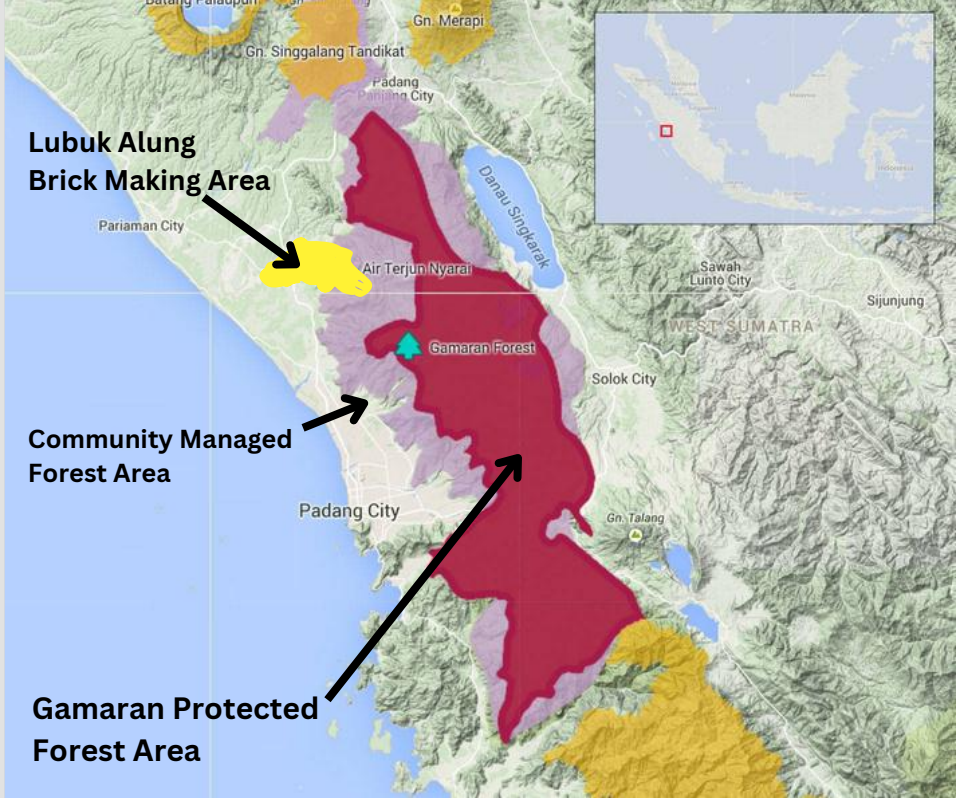
When we began researching the brick-making industry, we recognised its inherent complexity, necessitating a holistic approach beyond saving the forest. Many months of physically joining the labour force, exploring the intricacies of the craft, unloading and loading bricks and watching and measuring the glow and colours of the flames was expended by us to gain the critical acceptance of local brickmakers for a full understanding of the industry. We shared stories and traditional knowledge with ideas about how techniques might be improved. We then tested those ideas together and measured and documented any positive socio-economic and environmental benefits. We heard on many occasions that replacing wood posed a formidable challenge, impacting the income of illegal loggers, who were often intrinsicly linked through strong family ties to the brickmakers, blurring the lines between their respective businesses.

Having agreed on agricultural waste as alternative fuel sources, our attention turned to the wood suppliers and the world of illegal logging. The best quality trees were used to produce furniture, and the remainder was allocated to brickmaking. This lucrative arrangement significantly benefits the logging industry and fuels demand for an illegal workforce. We began to focus on alternative work in the forest, offering local families to move from logging to tourism-related projects. However, impact was realised when the local government, with the community, implemented an employment strategy, supporting guides and park rangers as well as new business ventures to develop a network of homestays. The approach provided incentives for local families and communities to protect and manage the forest. While the buzz of chainsaws has reduced it has not fully dissipated. The transition has been gradual, but the shift from logging to tourism has proven successful. Although not all brickmakers have made the switch to alternative fuels yet, they have acquired valuable skills and knowledge during the process, such as monitoring kiln heat better and the science behind their work to produce a stronger product. The new knowledge has led to a 30%-40% reduction in fuel, while some adopted alternative methods and witnessed overall improvements in outcomes, to benefit them and the environment.



"The use of wood in traditional brick kilns leads to degradation and deforestation, for every truck load of bricks produced a truck load of wood is burnt in exchange."

"While tourism has reduced much of the large scale logging, and many brickmakers have adopted more efficient practices, demand for bricks continues to rise rapidly"



Not All Bricks Are Made Equally or Ethically"

Success in an area rich in local resources and opportunities, such as the tropical Island of Indonesia, is one thing. Applying change to brickmaking practices in countries with high poverty and illiteracy rates and scarce income opportunities and where war is ever present and no options for tourism is a serious challenge. Brickmaking in other parts of the world face different challenges; how to ethically make bricks is a far deeper question than the ones surrounding environmental issues. It is a question that development professionals, particularly the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and UNDP have been grappling with for decades.

When we first began to delve into brickmaking in South Asia, the challenges were overwhelming, particularly the staggering number of children relentlessly working in oppressive conditions, living and working in the hot and dusty confines of a brick factory. From India to Pakistan to Afghanistan millions of people, a large proportion being children, are slaving in brick factories. In Afghanistan, many families enter brickmaking and drift into the debt trap when they are displaced by conflict.

Most brick factory workers toil under inhumane conditions. A large percentage being bonded labour or indentured slaves. This is often referred to as the 'Peshgi' system. Labourers in this intricate social system find themselves bound to factory owners, entangled in a web of financial dependency. The burden of debt usually means all family members are forced to work, including children as young as four years of age. The factory bosses extend monetary advances to workers, ensnaring them in an obligation to toil until the entirety of the debt is repaid with interest. This debt can go beyond a lifetime and carry over to the children and their children after them. When we approach the owners, they explain simply that they do not wish to see children working, but who works is not their concern, as long as bricks are made and the worker's debt is paid.

Illiteracy among the workforce is always an issue. The inability to read or calculate their debt and repayments shrouds the true extent of the worker's indebtedness. While exploiting this knowledge gap, factory owners wield power, imposing many fines on vulnerable families, perpetuating a cycle of subjugation and injustice.

"they don't care who works as long as bricks are made and the debt is repaid."

A Slave to the Clay

"Making a Home in Tanzania"

The adobe brick. Through community-driven brick-making efforts, Congolese and Burundian refugees embarked on a journey of construction and self-sufficiency. In Tanzania, humanitarian organisations worked closely with refugee communities to create and refine a shelter design through community engagement. Ultimately, adobe brick was agreed as the preferred and culturally suitable option. This technique also proved to be the most environmentally friendly option, using local resources and reducing the impact on surrounding forests.

With determination and hard work, this new approach to constructing homes was embraced, which above all else, highlighted the community's power to mobilise and solve their own problems. In a 12-month period, a total of over 11 million adobe bricks were produced, laying the foundation for over 18,000 transitional shelters and providing families with the space they needed for a more dignified and secure existence. The success of the adobe brick project in Tanzania's refugee camps extended far beyond the physical structures. Bricks tell many stories - if only the walls could speak.

"We make bricks, and they make us"

In this intricate tale of a humble brick, its journey takes on the essence of duality - an embodiment of protection and progress for one, yet an agent of enslavement and environmental peril for another. It stands as a testament to the paradoxes that shape our world - how some crafts can hold the power to uplift or oppress, to create or devastate.

As we unravel the multifaceted tapestry of humanity's relationship with these unassuming building blocks, we are beckoned to contemplate the profound impact of our choices and actions on both the individuals and the Earth we share. For within the unassuming form of brick lies the potential to forge a future of promise and prosperity, one that we must craft with utmost care and compassion.

"The Fading Cultures Artisanal Transect"

Illuminating Legacies, Promoting Artistry

'The Artisanal Transect is a journey through the heritage and diversity of Pakistan from the Mountainous Northern reaches where the Himalayas, Hindu Kush and the Karakoram converge to the vibrant diversity of the bustling Port of Karachi on the Arabian Sea.

Documenting the cultural crafts, where timeless artistry is woven through the hands of master artisans.'

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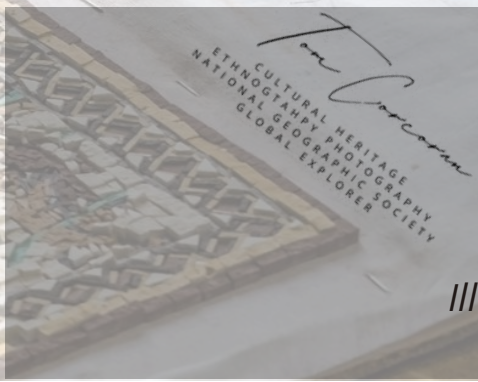
"The Artisanal Transect" explorers the essence of humanity's remarkable journey through timeless tradition"



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Fading Cultures Protect:
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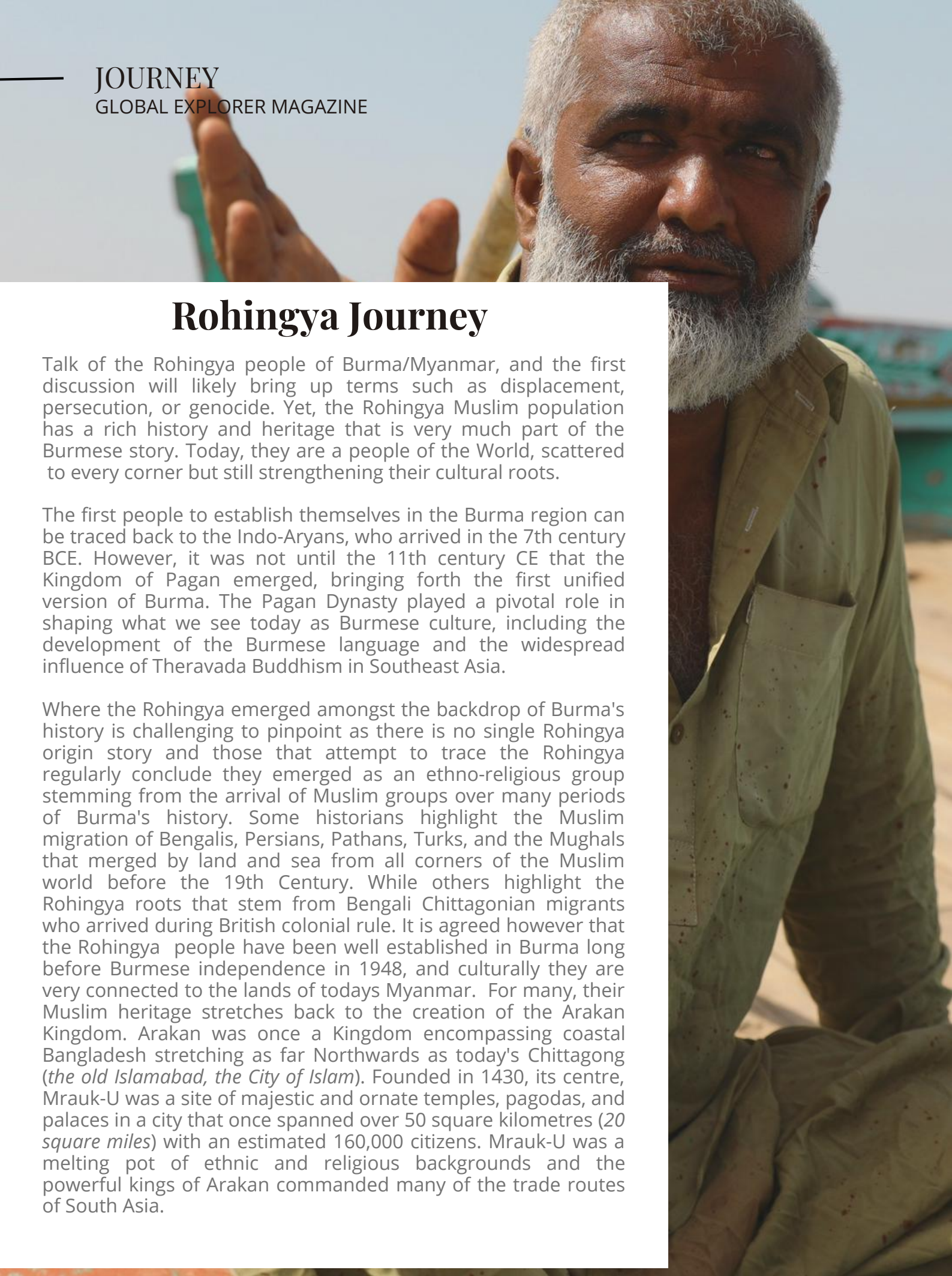


Rohingya Journey

Talk of the Rohingya people of Burma/Myanmar, and the first discussion will likely bring up terms such as displacement, persecution, or genocide. Yet, the Rohingya Muslim population has a rich history and heritage that is very much part of the Burmese story. Today, they are a people of the World, scattered to every corner but still strengthening their cultural roots.

The first people to establish themselves in the Burma region can be traced back to the Indo-Aryans, who arrived in the 7th century BCE. However, it was not until the 11th century CE that the Kingdom of Pagan emerged, bringing forth the first unified version of Burma. The Pagan Dynasty played a pivotal role in shaping what we see today as Burmese culture, including the development of the Burmese language and the widespread influence of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

Where the Rohingya emerged amongst the backdrop of Burma's history is challenging to pinpoint as there is no single Rohingya origin story and those that attempt to trace the Rohingya regularly conclude they emerged as an ethno-religious group stemming from the arrival of Muslim groups over many periods of Burma's history. Some historians highlight the Muslim migration of Bengalis, Persians, Pathans, Turks, and the Mughals that merged by land and sea from all corners of the Muslim world before the 19th Century. While others highlight the Rohingya roots that stem from Bengali Chittagonian migrants who arrived during British colonial rule. It is agreed however that the Rohingya people have been well established in Burma long before Burmese independence in 1948, and culturally they are very connected to the lands of todays Myanmar. For many, their Muslim heritage stretches back to the creation of the Arakan Kingdom. Arakan was once a Kingdom encompassing coastal Bangladesh stretching as far Northwards as today's Chittagong (*the old Islamabad, the City of Islam*). Founded in 1430, its centre, Mrauk-U was a site of majestic and ornate temples, pagodas, and palaces in a city that once spanned over 50 square kilometres (*20 square miles*) with an estimated 160,000 citizens. Mrauk-U was a melting pot of ethnic and religious backgrounds and the powerful kings of Arakan commanded many of the trade routes of South Asia.

"Nur Hussain Arakani, is the head of the Burmese Muslim Welfare Organisation. He ceaselessly advocates for the rights and recognition of his Rohingya community in Pakistan, embodying a beacon of hope for the marginalized."

The colonial era also facilitated a significant influx of Bengali-speaking laborers. While predominantly Muslim, there were Hindus as well who pursued work in Arakan's plantations. This not only provided the region with a robust workforce but also contributed to the enrichment of the local Muslim population. Against the backdrop of British colonial rule, the Rohingya identity surfaced in 1799 through Francis Buchanan's seminal exploration of the languages of the Burma Empire. This discovery highlighted the existence of the "Rooinga" (Rohingya) as an ethnocultural entity, marking one of the earliest references to the Rohingya in early British surveys. Though appearing as a simple notation, it holds a pivotal place in the intricate chain of the Rohingya narrative.

However, it's important to recognise that not all Muslims in Burma/Myanmar align themselves with the ethnic Rohingya. Similarly, not all Rohingya necessarily identify as Muslim. In the contemporary landscape of Burma/Myanmar, the notion of belonging is closely tied to the concept of autochthony—the belief that one group predates another as "natives." This mode of thinking has significantly hindered the Rohingya's ability to obtain documentation, settle, and integrate, regardless of the number of generations born in the country.

Language tells many historic stories and the Rohingya have their own language story to tell. While it shares an origin with Chittagonian, Rohingya has developed over time to consist of many specific words and intonations that are more unique to Burmese and less to Bangla or Chittagonian. Territories like Arakan / Rikine are known to have a highly complex sociolinguistic heritage and we see that the Rohingya language is related South Asian languages of Sanskrit and Pali roots. As the Rohingya people are largely Muslim, their language has also consists of Arabic and Urdu influences. It is also substantially influenced by the Rakhine language, and has adopted technical and academic words from standard Myanmar. The Rohingya language also has a variety of dialects within from the northern (Maungdaw and Buthidaung), the Sittwe and Mrauk-U dialects show a greater influence of the Rakhine language.

During its colonial period, English was the only foreign language taught as a compulsory subject in all schools and higher education institutions. Burma / Myanmar is recognised linguistically, culturally, and biologically as one of the world's high diversity-hot-spots and the exact number of languages and dialects spoken across Myanmar is unknown and figures used today are primarily still based on a crude pre-independence classification system with 135 ethnicities and 111 languages.

The Perils and Politics of Religious Heritage

Sacred heritage is a vast and complex topic that spans the entire history of humanity, and thus, it occupies a significant portion of heritage, conflict, and displacement stories. Religious heritage most easily straddles the blurry line of the tangible and the intangible, the seen and the mystical unseen. It engages us in questions of consciousness, the spirit, ways of understanding time, identity, ethics, and conflict. While suffering decades of violence and oppression, the Rohingya people of Arakan (Rakhine) are perhaps more spiritually like their Buddhist neighbours than we might think. Muslim people of Burma traditionally practice a Sufi-inflected variation of Sunni Islam. Like all the major religions, Islam has various teachings, from the schools of theology and jurisprudence to the Sufi orders of Tasawwuf. Sufism is the esoteric branch of Islam and often said to be the ancient wisdom of love that predates all religions. It is said to be the breath of human consciousness, and like Buddhism, it has a state referred to as "Fana", which is ridding oneself of the ego and "Baka", the state of abiding with God (Nirvana). Baka is the end of the journey of seeking. Sufis also gained significant respect among other Muslims for their reaction against the worldliness that developed within Islam through the early Caliphate. Much of the Sufi heritage is intangible and highly dependent on transmission across generations over time. The intentional practice of rejecting materialism within Sufism has left many Sufi-practising ethnic groups as highly vulnerable minorities, open to attack by more powerful majority religions and ethnic groups. To understand religious violence, we do not need to look far beyond the religious imagination itself, as the origins of religion and human violence are intimately connected - religion is often a heritage pawn caught in the political web of power brokers.

When we look at the roots of Buddhist heritage today we see that the drive to develop their statues and sites for worship emerged out of the threat from new religions in the 6th century. The emergence of carved figures and the cultural influence of "*Greater Gandhara*" once extended across the Indus River to Taxila and onward as far west as the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan and northwards, covering the Hindu Kush and the Karakorum Mountains of the Western Himalaya. This old centre of Buddhism was later engulfed by Islam but in many parts of the world Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and other religions manage to coexist. The encounters between Islam and Buddhism are as old as Islam itself, and one does not have to look much further than the Silk Road to see this exchange of religious ideas and artefacts from Persia across the Asian continent. Most documented engagements between the two have been essentially political and economically motivated rather than a doctrinal exchange.

Religion in South Asia has numerous other cultural legacies that effect the lives, power and social mobility, of people over time. Caste, Baradari, Zaat or Qaum systems in Pakistan have been in existence for centuries. While it is mostly associated today with Hinduism, these hierarchical ways of structuring society originated in Buddhist times developed by the highest Caste the Brahman who were the priests and thinkers of their time. In various forms the contents of Castes in Asian society transformed across the region. But we can see Caste as a mode of power and a weapon which in turn becomes a critical element of collective social identity that comes through violence. The Rohingya have largely been kept on the bottom or the periphery of society in Buddhist Myanmar.

"Heritage of Women & Girls"

As a rule, those that leave the largest rubbish heap behind become the most noted for their civilisation. Yet, civilisations seldom begin with stone blocks and bricks. The actual foundations of most great civilisations are rooted in traditional knowledge, innovations, crafts, textiles and motifs of their people, particularly women. In archaeology, this is referred to as '*differential preservation*', where some elements of a site remain, such as the bricks and stones laid by men, while other items decay, leaving no trace but a gap in the cultural story. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is not just the story, it is the colour and the vibrance of the society. We know that much of women's contribution to cultural heritage goes largely unrecognised. Relatively little of the Rohingya women's cultural heritage has been documented inside Burma. Despite this, Rohingya women and girls outside of Burma have been exploring their Rohingya roots. For example, those now settled in Ireland are exploring through poetry, music, dance, films, crafts, and displaying traditional henna while also producing a traditional Rohingya Recipe Cookbook. The Rohingya of Ireland also freely display a flag - something they have never had the opportunity to do in their homeland.

THANAKA

The most visual element of the Rohingya women's heritage is arguably the Thanaka, a milky plant-based yellow paste that girls use lavishly on their faces. Thanka is commonly used throughout Southeast Asia but has become a symbol of identification for the Rohingya women, particularly outside of Myanmar. In Bangladesh Rohingya Thanaka has featured in various photographic exposes and exhibitions by travelling journalists and Rohingya photographers. Thanaka also holds practical application inluding insect repellent, sunscreen, beauty and acne treatment. According to some young Rohingya, Thanaka is produced from the *Limonia acidissima* tree, commonly named the wood apple or elephant apple. The trees are abundant in Myanmar and other parts of Asia. Rohingya girls would commonly collect the plant in childhood, but pieces could also be easily purchased in the markets throughout Burma. The bark or roots of the tree are ground to a paste before use. Thanaka is mentioned in Burmese literature in the 14th century. The actual "*kyauk pyin*" the flat stone for making Thanaka, has been uncovered in archaeological sites dating back 1,000 years. Thanaka is now under listing as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of humanity.

TEXTILES

Similar to various ethnic groups worldwide, textiles hold a significant role in defining the identity and cultural expression of Rohingya women and girls. Traditional attire among the Rohingya encompasses a diverse range of styles, influenced by age and marital status. Prior to marriage, girls don a "zagara," a lengthy dress, a short sari referred to as "tebin kezzy," or a skirt known as "kessi basu." Post-marriage, their wardrobe transitions to the "emeshty" or "tity," comprising a coordinated printed skirt paired with a one-piece dress.

Displacement has notably shaped the fashion of Rohingya women and girls. While contemporary adaptations exist in Rohingya women's attire, some of these innovations stem from their resource access during displacement. Additionally, Rohingya girls endeavor to uphold a distinctive traditional dress amidst their Bangladeshi counterparts.

The challenges of life in camps and informal settlements have significantly curtailed their freedom. Notably, the traditional custom of purdah—separating women from men or strangers—has grown more complex due to crowded living conditions. This is particularly pronounced for Rohingya women dwelling in rudimentary shelters where privacy is almost nonexistent.

HENNA

The enduring tradition of using henna remains vibrant within Rohingya communities in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland, even though it is also a prevalent practice among Muslims in those regions. Derived from crushed and ground leaves, the henna paste, known as "Mehendi" in Arabic, serves a multifaceted role. Beyond its artistic applications, henna stands as a vital traditional remedy for Rohingya people, employed to address issues ranging from cuts and abrasions to fungal infections.

Henna primarily graces women's hands on the pre-wedding day, known as 'the Mehndi.' The resulting artwork often boasts intricate designs, with women attesting that mastery of these designs is a shared skill among the community. Learning to create these intricate patterns commences during girlhood. Observing young girls practicing henna in open spaces is a common sight, as they explore the art form at any given time. Women frequently adorn their hands with henna, often submerging them in the paste to create decorative designs.

Interestingly, henna is not exclusive to women; Muslim men also embrace its use. They apply henna to their hair, transforming it into hues ranging from brilliant mustard orange to fiery red. This practice adds an extra dimension to the multifarious roles that henna plays within Rohingya culture and beyond.

'Rohingya youth at the Karachi Port waiting for the call up to work'

In the realm of the Rohingya people's narrative, beyond the grim shadows of displacement and persecution, lies a profound tapestry of history and heritage intricately woven into the fabric of what it means to be Belong. Despite the prevalent discourse of tragedy, the Rohingya's existence is a testament to resilience, cultural continuity, and spiritual depth that defies the limitations of borders and adversity.

Embedded in Burma's history, the Rohingya emerge from a mosaic of origins, tracing back to diverse ethno-religious migrations over centuries. This complexity echoes the intricate layers of their identity, firmly rooted in the lands they have long called home, some longer than others. Amid the grand narrative of Burmese history, the Rohingya's presence is an integral thread, enriched by their contributions to trade, culture, fishing and faith. Their story, however, is not a monolithic one. The Rohingya mosaic encompasses diverse affiliations and beliefs, revealing the nuances that often elude simplistic narratives.

The Rohingya, exhibit a rich spiritual tapestry nurtured by the Sufi-inflected essence of Islam. This faith journey connects them to a broader world. In their journey through displacement, the Rohingya have carried fragments of their heritage to distant corners of the world, imparting colour, poetry, dance, and cuisine to the melting pots of new lands. Amid this, their art-adorned hands and faces become symbols of their steadfast identity, resonating with ancient traditions yet adapting to the rhythms of modernity.

While the Rohingya's story echoes with suffering, it's crucial to recognise their profound connection to a heritage that transcends the constraints of written history. Their cultural expressions, intangible and vibrant, tell stories of strength, survival, and transformation. It's a heritage that demonstrating the power of resilience in the face of adversity, and a testament to the enduring human spirit that strives to thrive even amid the darkest chapters of history.

Rohingya communities contribute significantly to the economy of Pakistan not only through fishing but through a wide variety of labourous professions

Learn More:

Pakistan: Burmese Muslim Welfare Organisation @ https://www.facebook.com/p/Burmese-Muslim-Welfare-Organization-Pakistan-100083300419037/
Ireland: Rohingya Action Irelandhttps://rohingya.ie
Rohingya Poetry: http://www.theartgardenrohingya.com
IOM Bangladesh: https://rohingyaculturalmemorycentre.iom.int

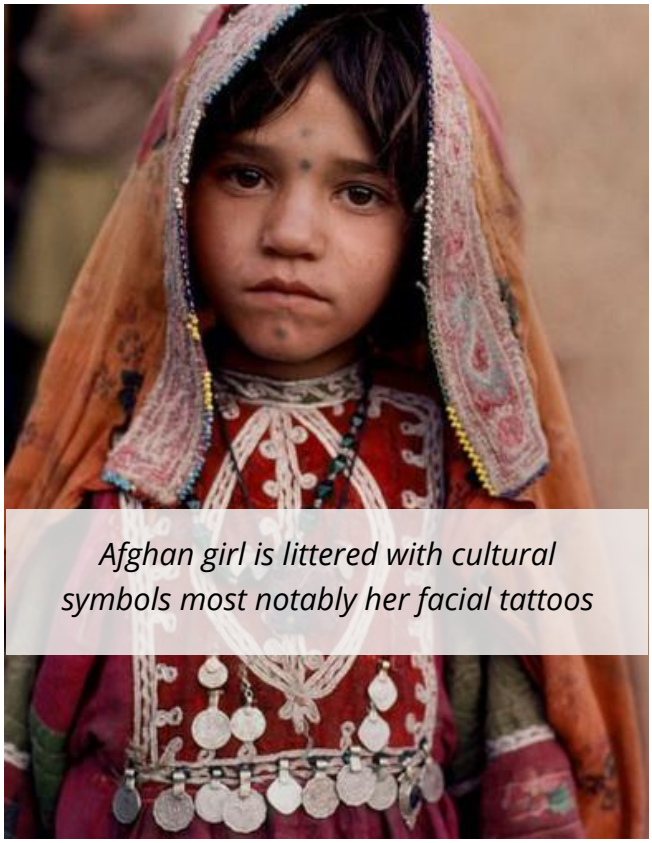
From Warriors to Modern Rebels

"Tattoos Throughout Time"

Many years ago, I encountered a fascinatingly adorned Englishman in a remote guest house nestled in the heart of the Sumatran forest. He was extensively tattooed from head to toe, but what caught my attention was the new, larger-than-life tattoo of his hero, Sir David Attenborough, etched onto his leg. A souvenir from his recent travels to Bangkok, he explained. As he proudly displayed the artwork, I could not help but notice the limited resemblance to the famous naturalist and broadcaster. In fact, had he not told me, I might not have guessed that it was Sir David at all. Nevertheless, I found myself admiring the man's unwavering dedication to his idol and also to the art of tattoos. Although he had little space left on his skin canvas, I recall the man was on his way to the Mentawai Islands to experience a traditional Shamanic tattoo as he documented his Asian travels. Yet, today he could have etched a tattoo in any international style without leaving home. A 2017 article from the *Independent* highlighted the UK as boasting more than 2,228 tattoo parlours compared to its 898 Starbucks.

Tattoos are a powerful form of self-expression that allows us to showcase our beliefs, connections, and ideologies in a way that no other art form can quite capture. The study of social semiotics has, in the past, been centred on the exotic, the criminal, or people on the margins, often viewed as the *"whip scars"* of life. But today, tattoos speak louder than ever about the world and our place in it. Today it is better acknowledged that marking the skin and displaying the spirit is a deeply human historical practice. Like my English friend in Sumatra, tattoos were a map of his beliefs, thoughts, experiences, loves and travels. Tattoos can also be memorials to parents, siblings, friends or children's birth. They can be therapeutic, healing the spirit, but also, throughout history, tattoos have been used for medical treatments. For example, Tattoos are common in Islam and often related to healing despite them being seen by many as Haram.

We see medical tattoos adorning the body dating back more than 5,300 years through the mummified remains found in 1991 of the "Iceman" found on the Ötztal Alps straddling the Italy-Austria border. The iceman has 57 tattoos, each etched delicately in short lines as they trace their way across his lower back and ankles, behind his right knee, with two rings encircling his left wrist.



Afghan girl is littered with cultural symbols most notably her facial tattoos

There is also a largely unexplored gendered world of the tattoo. Many cultures display masculine and feminine expressions, such as the Tharu women of Nepal, who extensively tattoo their bodies as a beautification process inspired by nature. For some, the tattoo is a right of passage, such as the Japanese Yakuza's full body tattoos that are seen as holistic artwork. But we must ask, what does the shift of tattoo culture in the West from the margins to the mainstream tell us? Some have pointed to a crisis in masculinity or perhaps an opportunity to exercise individuality in new and deeper ways.

"Traditions of Mentawai Shamanism"

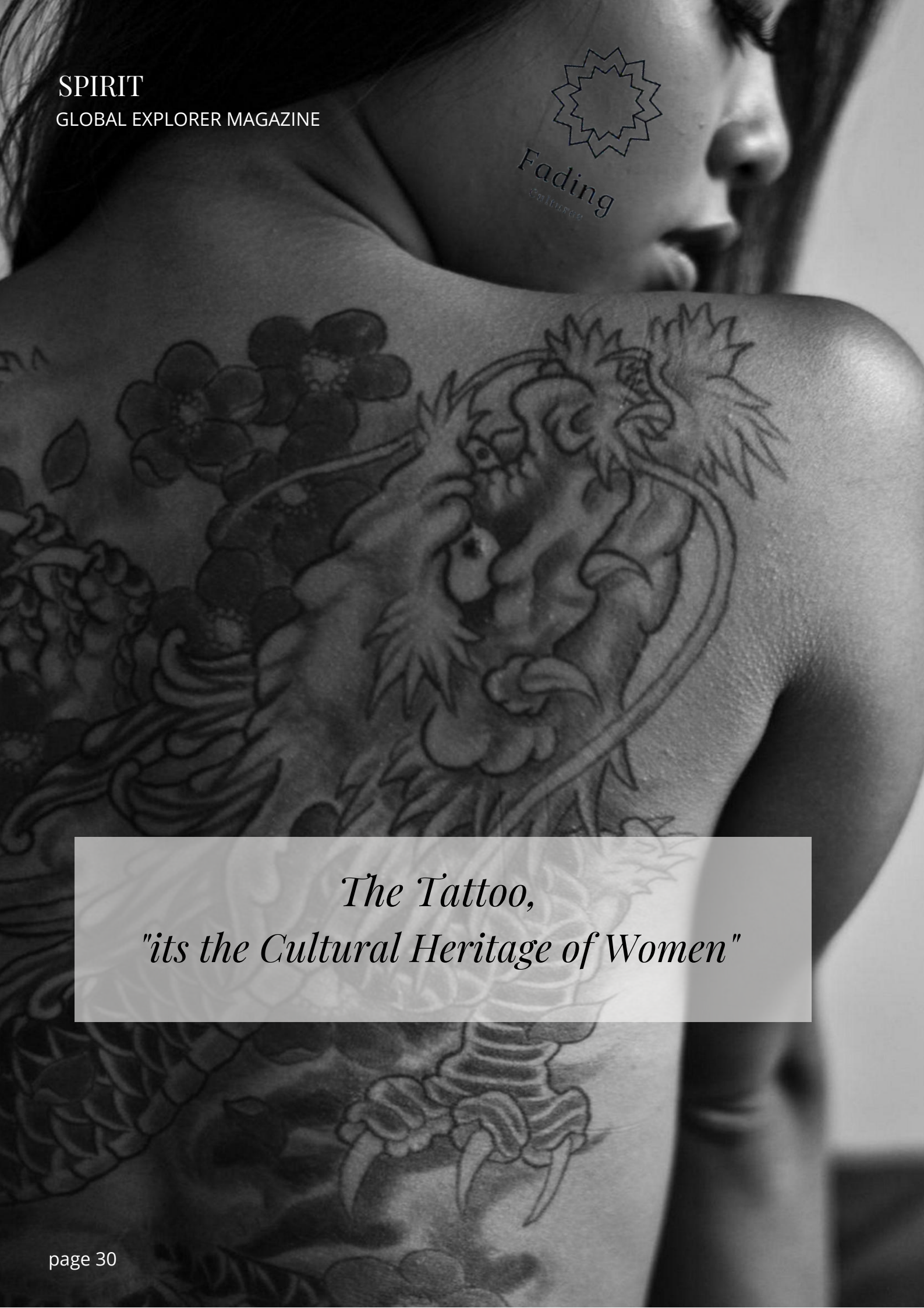
"Once considered pagan" and "savage."

The Mentawai Islands are a group of approximately seventy islands located around 150 kilometres off the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. The islands cover an area of 6,000 square kilometres and have a population of approximately 64,000 people, mostly of Mentawai descent. The Mentawai people have a distinct culture, language, and tattooing style, all of which differ significantly from the cultures of nearby Sumatra. One of the most distinctive aspects of Mentawai culture is their traditional tattoos, known as *"sikerei."* Tattoos are an important aspect of Mentawai's spiritual and cultural life and are believed to provide protection from evil spirits and signify social status and identity. The tattoos are typically administered by the shaman, who uses a traditional method involving a small wooden tool with a needle attached. This method is known as tatau and is similar to the method used in other traditional tattoo cultures around the world, such as those of Polynesia and Micronesia.

The designs of Mentawai tattoos are highly symbolic and meaningful, with each design representing a specific aspect of Mentawai culture or spirituality. For example, tattoos on the chest may represent the owner's connection to the natural world, while tattoos on the back may represent their connection to the spirit world. The tattoos are typically applied to the upper arms, chest, and back and complement the body's contours.

Tattoos can be painful depending on the location on the body but the traditional Mentawai tattooing process is a much more painful one by design. The ink for traditional Mentawai tattoos is made from a mixture of ashes and sugar cane juice, which is applied to the skin using the tatau method. It typically involves several sessions over days or weeks of repetitive tapping onto the skin. The process is slow and precise, with the tattoo artist taking breaks to allow the ink to soak into the skin. Once the tattoo is complete, the area is covered with a traditional ointment made from tree sap and other natural ingredients, which helps protect the skin and aid in healing.

For the Mentawai people and their traditional tattoos and scarification practices are an essential and unique aspect of Indonesian culture. While these practices have declined in recent years efforts are being made to document, preserve and promote these traditions as an important part of Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage.



The Tattoo, "its the Cultural Heritage of Women"

Historically Speaking

Throughout history, women have adorned their bodies with tattoos, creating a fascinating tapestry of art and symbolism. From the early cultures of ancient civilizations to the present day, tattoos have played a significant role in women's lives. There is a rich history of tattoos adorning women, but rarely recognised is their origins, cultural significance, and transformation into popular fashion statements in today's globalised societies.

Evidence of women with tattoos dates back as early as 4000-3500 B.C. Figurines from this period depict female figures adorned with tattoos on their bodies and limbs, offering a glimpse into the ancient practices of body art. Moving forward in time, to around 1200 B.C., occasional tomb scenes portrayed women with tattoos on their thighs, highlighting the consistency of this art form throughout the ages and across cultures. Remarkably, small bronze implements, identified as tattooing tools, were discovered at the town site of Gurob in northern Egypt, dating back to approximately 1450 B.C.

Female mummies found in various cultures and periods provide valuable insights into the significance of tattoos for women. In Egypt, female mummies with tattoos dating back to around 2000 B.C. have been unearthed. Initially dismissed by male archaeologists as women of "dubious status," these mummies challenge traditional assumptions and shed light on women's diverse roles in society. Some of these tattooed women were buried in areas associated with royal and elite burials, challenging preconceived notions about their social status.

In fact, funerary inscriptions revealed that at least one woman, Amunet, held the esteemed position of a high-status priestess, underscoring the importance of tattoos among the elite.

The reasons behind ancient women's tattoos have been the subject of speculation and interpretation. In many cultures, including ancient Egypt, tattoos were likely viewed as protection, particularly during pregnancy and childbirth. It may have been believed that tattoos possessed mystical properties that safeguarded women against diseases, pregnancy related complications and ensured a safe delivery. While the exact symbolism and rituals associated with these protective tattoos remain shrouded in mystery, their prevalence across cultures suggests a shared belief in their power to safeguard women's health and well-being.

The perception and acceptance of tattoos have evolved. What we once regarded as an ancient tradition was also, in its day, a popular, widespread practice just like today. Tattoos have become a means of self-expression, and women proudly adorn their bodies with intricate designs, quotes, and symbols that reflect their individuality but also they have become a practical way of applying permanent makeup to the eyebrows or lips. The shift from cultural significance to personal expression to practical application highlights the dynamic nature and ability of tattoos to adapt to changing social contexts.

As we embrace the diversity and empowerment of women's choices, the art of tattooing continues to evolve, transcending cultural boundaries and connecting women across time and space.

Ancient Origins: Tattoos have a rich and ancient history, with evidence dating back thousands of years. From ancient Egypt to Polynesia, indigenous tribes to Asian cultures, tattooing has been practised across diverse civilizations.

Symbolism and Ritual: Tattoos often hold deep symbolic meanings within various cultures. They represent spiritual beliefs, social status, personal achievements, tribal affiliations, and cultural identities.

Protection and Healing: Many cultures believe that tattoos hold protective properties. They were believed to ward off evil spirits, provide physical protection, and aid in healing, particularly during significant events like childbirth or battle.

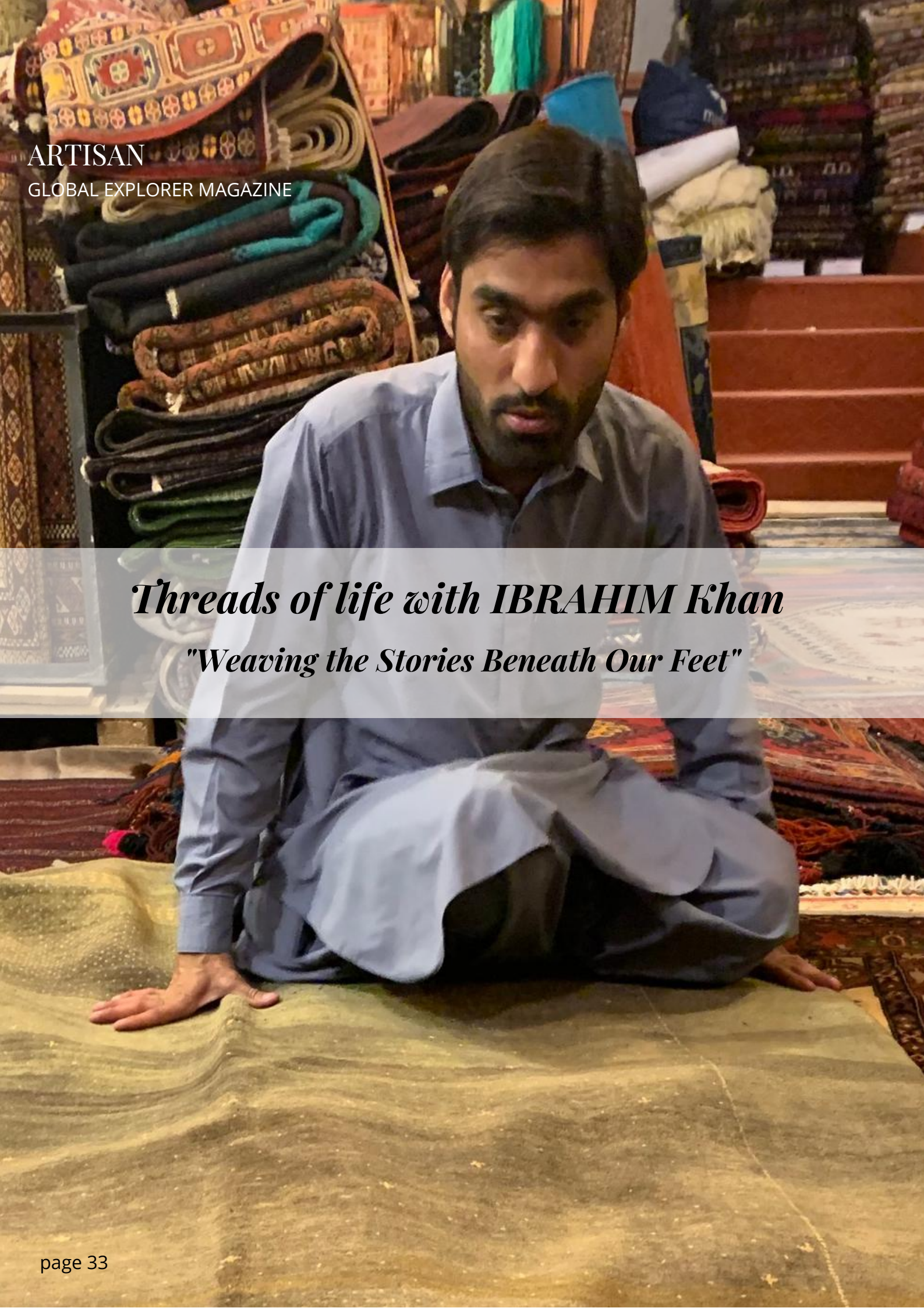
Ritualistic Practices: Tattooing was often performed as part of elaborate rituals and ceremonies. These rituals involved spiritual elements, communal participation, and skilled tattoo artists who were revered for their craft.

Taboos and Stigma: While tattoos hold cultural significance in many societies, tattoos also faced periods of stigma and taboo. Some cultures associated tattoos with criminality, rebellion, or social deviance, leading to their suppression or prohibition.

Cultural Exchange: Tattooing practices often transcended geographical boundaries and influenced neighbouring cultures through migration, trade, and exploration. This resulted in the exchange of tattooing techniques, motifs, and cultural symbolism.

Revival and Resurgence: Tattooing has experienced cycles of revival and decline throughout history. After periods of suppression, tattoos resurged in popularity during the Renaissance, the Age of Exploration, and the counterculture movements of the 20th century.

Technological Advances: Tattooing techniques have also evolved over time. From traditional hand-tapping methods to modern electric tattoo machines, the tools and processes used have undergone constant innovation, resulting in greater precision and efficiency.



Threads of life with IBRAHIM Khan

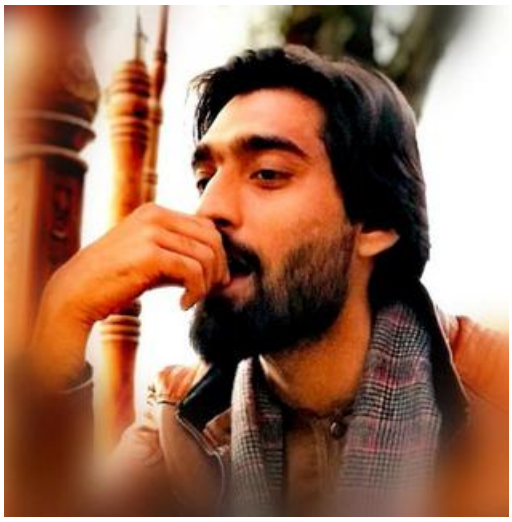
"Weaving the Stories Beneath Our Feet"

"A Family Heritage"

Woven in time

In South Asia's tribal areas, from Iran, Afghanistan to Pakistan, where tribes have woven intricate carpets for centuries, the Khan family has established themselves as stalwarts in the carpet trading industry. With a legacy spanning generations, Ibrahim Khan now carries the torch, facing the challenges of a changing world. This is the story of their enduring heritage, their efforts to overcome adversity, and their commitment to support women struggling simply to survive in Afghanistan.

For the Khan family, the carpet business is more than just a livelihood. It is an inseparable part of their identity. Ibrahim's grandfather, who began his journey at the tender age of 16, dedicated a remarkable 88 years to the craft until his passing at 104.



Hailing from the tribal areas of Chaman Gullistan, their roots intertwine with the rich tapestry of Afghan and Pakistani carpet traditions. Originating from the border lands allowed them access to trade routes that are challenging to outsiders.

The political landscape and border restrictions have posed significant challenges for the Khan family's carpet trade. With tightened regulations and the need for visas, crossing the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan has become a complex endeavor.

However, the shared Pashtun language has been a bridge, enabling communication and fostering a sense of unity across the borderlands. While the price of carpets has remained relatively stable, the fluctuating currency rates have impacted profitability, making it increasingly difficult to sustain the business beyond Pakistan's shores. Despite the difficulties, Ibrahim Khan remains determined to preserve the family's legacy. At any given time, their extensive collection holds a staggering 40,000 to 50,000 carpets comprising Iranian, Afghan, and Pakistani varieties, including cushions, toshak's to kilim's. The treasure trove includes carpets that have endured the test of time, some dating back as far as 200 years.

When sourcing a rug or kilim, Ibrahim advises buyers to pay attention to the quality of the wool. The wool varies in type and quality, but what matters most is how many times it has been boiled—a process that enhances durability. He promotes natural dye colours rather than synthetic dyes, as he explains that these natural dyes add great value and are also preferred by collectors. Design and colour combinations are crucial factors to consider, as fashion trends influence the emergence of new designs.

The Tradition of the Tribal Kilims

For Ibrahim, and his family a significant chunk of their endeavors revolves around the intricate trade of Kilims, masterpieces birthed from a thick and artful flat weave. The ancient art of 'flat-weaving' is a universal thread that binds diverse corners of our globe. From the Navajo tapestries adorning North American lands to the vibrant Sarapes gracing Mexican culture, and the robust cloaks of the high Andes to the Nordic looms, along with the intricate weavings of Poland and Hungary. Interestingly, many European weaves trace their lineage back to the looms of North Africa or the weaving hearts of Central and West Asia, carried afar by the nomadic folk who traded and shared their weaves.

The Kilim entwines the rich traditions of carpet-making with the pragmatic demands of portability, a crucial facet of life for roaming herders of the Nomadic cultures. The Kilim's flat-weave ethos, in all its splendor, stands as a testimony unparalleled in its utility. Throughout historic literature and artistic expression, the weave of the Kilim has linked their presence, over time. From the verses of the Ancient Greek Iliad to the Egyptian tomb murals, from the scriptural scrolls to the canvases painted by masters of oils, the Kilim's journey unfolds in a textured narrative.

Its story coincides with the domestication of animals - goats, horses, sheep. Wool and hair soaked with plant-based dyes, weaving intricate patterns and captivating motifs. Yet, Kilims remain an intangible cultural heritage, delicate threads of history that battle decay, vanishing like whispers over time's horizon, especially when touched by the hands of frequent use. These woven marvels possess an exquisite charm, a reminder that Nomadic souls once harnessed nature's bounties to craft their protective veils.

Ibrahim highlights his own family history with the women's domination in the art of weaving. Rather than continuously weaving, women allocated some time for weaving in their daily life amongst the chores and challenges of tribal life. There were also regular periods of the year where the loom was set aside for other priority tasks such as agriculture. In the winter months weaving often became a central activity. It was not until the 1950s and 60s as transport improved that the demand for exotic items such as Kilims increased. During this period the Kilim started to be a focus of Aid agencies for economic development within tribal communities particularly targeted for women's textile projects.

This period brought many changes as as outsider influenced the colors and weaves of the Kilim. Yet, still there are many traditional elements to the Kilim that remain unchanged. They hold many geometric patterns and motifs inspired by nature, ranging from birds, camels and flowers to stories of life, as well as weapons and tools and birthing symbols. Superstition and belief systems are also central to designs. This can be observed from the Shamanic and Animist weaves to the Islamic, Christian or Armenian Orthodox practices and symbols. Buddhism, Islam and Christianity are the three main religions associated with weavers and the patterns have been deeply engrained in the world of flat-weaving. The berbers for example, believe that the symbols used in textiles have mystical protective properties. These are dominated by the sun, moon and stars and ward off evil to bring good luck. Oral traditional people often document their heritage in their textiles. The family story, with the highs and lows of life living at the mercy of nature. Ibrahim explains how these stories can often be seen in the Baluch Kilims which depict a dark sombre appearance but that really only the weaver knows the true meanings within the intricate weave.

Every carpet is an intricately woven tapestry, a captivating chronicle that captures the essence of the families, tribes, and artisans who created them. Within their vibrant threads and intricate patterns, these masterpieces weave together tales of life, love, war, sporting triumphs, hunting expeditions, and the splendor of nature. Reflecting the spirit of the region, each carpet is meticulously crafted from the indigenous materials that abound in the area.

The Art of Supporting the Creators of the Craft

Carpets and Kilim's possess timeless charm, easily discernible amidst a globalised market. To cater to customers' preferences, Ibrahim creates custom-made carpets and breathes new life into old pieces through artistic refurbishment. In recognition of the vital role played by women in the carpet industry, Ibrahim Khan initiated a project with Refugee Aid, a local Afghan run organisation based in Herat. This endeavour focuses on working directly with women in their homes, particularly those widowed or injured by conflict. Together they aim to provide women with skill development and economic opportunities, enabling them to sustain their families in a difficult environment. The profits from the sale of the carpets are reinvested into the project.

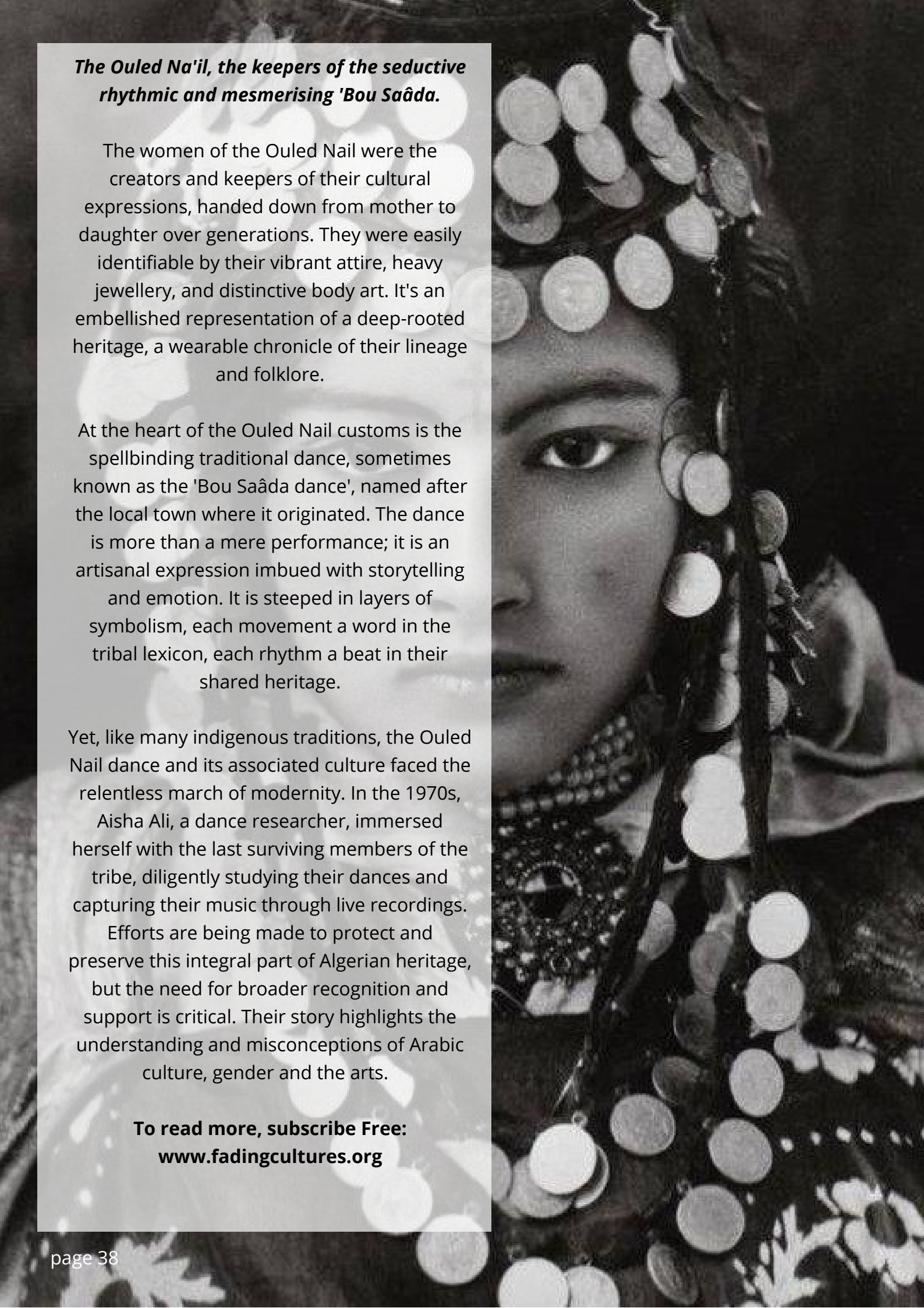
Looking to the future, Ibrahim Khan envisions his children carrying forward the family's carpet trading legacy. However, he also stresses the importance of education, and aspires for his son and daughter to pursue higher studies in business or art and design at university. With this dual approach, the Khan family intends to meld their carpet trading expertise with modern business practices, becoming international ambassadors of their craft.

"Profits are all reinvested into the project, reinforcing our mission of supporting and preserving traditional crafts people."

For Ibrahim, his family's role in the trade is one of designer, communicator and negotiator between tribes along precarious travel routes of South Asia. He emphasises his commitment to the weavers, as it is highly labour-intensive, and even small pieces take weeks or months to complete to a retail standard. Once created, he then has to transport them from remote and often inaccessible regions to urban centres for washing, trimming, and finishing. The supply chain complexities from across the regional borders further exacerbate these challenges for the families that produce these artistic pieces. He always aims to work directly with the weaver as the journey from the weaver's home in a remote mountain village to the end point can be perilous and expensive. One item may pass through many hands, which adds to the product's final cost, reducing the profits for the women who produce them.

Corruption and bureaucracy can also delay or disrupt this fragile supply chain. The years of his family's experience is important in the process. Ibrahim explain that many international NGOs have attempted to tackle poverty through the weaving industry with varying levels of success and sustainability.

Ibrahim also highlights the ethical challenges and pitfalls to engaging in the business. The pressure to produce carpets regularly takes poor children away from school and draws them into a life of carpet weaving. His family commitment to preserving traditions and supporting Afghan women in challenging times no doubt means the carpet industry will continue with the Khan's for generations to come.



The Ouled Na'il, the keepers of the seductive rhythmic and mesmerising 'Bou Saâda.

The women of the Ouled Nail were the creators and keepers of their cultural expressions, handed down from mother to daughter over generations. They were easily identifiable by their vibrant attire, heavy jewellery, and distinctive body art. It's an embellished representation of a deep-rooted heritage, a wearable chronicle of their lineage and folklore.

At the heart of the Ouled Nail customs is the spellbinding traditional dance, sometimes known as the 'Bou Saâda dance', named after the local town where it originated. The dance is more than a mere performance; it is an artisanal expression imbued with storytelling and emotion. It is steeped in layers of symbolism, each movement a word in the tribal lexicon, each rhythm a beat in their shared heritage.

Yet, like many indigenous traditions, the Ouled Nail dance and its associated culture faced the relentless march of modernity. In the 1970s, Aisha Ali, a dance researcher, immersed herself with the last surviving members of the tribe, diligently studying their dances and capturing their music through live recordings. Efforts are being made to protect and preserve this integral part of Algerian heritage, but the need for broader recognition and support is critical. Their story highlights the understanding and misconceptions of Arabic culture, gender and the arts.

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