

1. Introduction

Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today and what we pass on to future generations.

World Heritage Information Kit, Paris: UNESCO.

Heritage according to UNESCO 'is our legacy from the past.' It is also defined as irreplaceable 'points of reference' and, 'our identity'. While this statement is certainly true for certain peoples of Africa, it is not necessarily an accurate definition of heritage for all. This study argues that African scholars need to critically discuss the concept of heritage and reflect on the processes involved in its identification before accepting UNESCO's statement that heritage is a critical reference point for a cultural group or a fundamental aspect of one's identity. The study also offers some important critiques of heritage preservation, as advised by UNESCO. I argue that the mega-diversity of Africa and its neighbouring islands produce specific regional, historical and political factors, which influence the conceptualisation, nature and experience of heritage. It is therefore problematic for African leaders and leaders in the islands of Mauritius, Zanzibar and Seychelles wholeheartedly and uncritically to accept the discourses, means and approaches to heritage promoted by UNESCO and other significant heritage organisations.

UNESCO

UNESCO states that its initial interest in the preservation of heritage came after the destruction of archaeological sites and the theft of culturally precious objects during World War Two (see www.unesco.org). Since then, the organisation has resolved to become involved in protecting cultural artefacts and sites and in negotiating the effects of globalisation on indigenous practices and products. The organisation's normative/standard-setting instrument for the management of heritage and the creation of a World Heritage List (WHL), place UNESCO at the forefront of efforts to identify and preserve heritage. Further efforts by the

organisation to enact protective legislation, impose penalties and to conduct awareness campaigns regarding heritage preservation (Edson 2004), also portrays the organisation as an entity in 'charge' of these matters. To a certain extent, it also suggests that heritage is an entity that is identified, managed and theorised in the West. As the studies in this text show, worldwide UNESCO attempts to control the process of heritage identification and management but finds it difficult to achieve this goal. At best, it remains a standard-setting entity that struggles to understand and to deal with the subjective expressions of heritage.

At the UNESCO General Conference in Paris in October 2003, the 120 members voted unanimously for a new international convention that would distinguish between tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). This dichotomisation was meant to indicate awareness of and means to approach ICH management. In 2004, there were already several worried comments (See various articles in *Museum International*, 2004.) about how difficult it would be to capture, safeguard and preserve intangible heritage.

In 'Indian Ocean Africa' (Alpers 2002), heritage is diversely conceptualised, experienced and made significant in daily living. This should compel scholars of heritage studies in the region to question received wisdom about heritage and its management. What discourses and practical frameworks are we using in identifying and dealing with heritage? Is the recent interest in heritage largely due to the international efforts of heritage regimes such as UNESCO, who have devoted an entire decade (2000-2010) to international discussions, projects and plans for the safeguarding and careful management of heritage? Or, is there an independent, politically motivated interest in questioning and identifying heritage in the new millennium?

This study was initially inspired by my earlier research on hybrid identities and the cultural and political marginalisation of hybrids (Creoles) in Mauritius. I began to ask why there was currently such a deep interest in heritage and heritage management. Given my work on Creoles, I also began to reflect upon whether alternative systems of thought (not necessarily culturally bounded), modes of living, symbolic expressions exist in hybridised contexts which disrupt currently dominant (and often negative) discourses about the African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean. I wondered how the African Diaspora societies under question, maintained alternative modes of being or fashioned new, hybrid cultures in their efforts to negotiate the burden of colonisation.

The findings presented here show that in the Indian Ocean region, there are potent, alternative knowledge foundations and experiences which continue to diversify social existence and livelihoods. These studies are vital not only for

deeper insight into political structure and power relations but also necessary for the identification of alternative visions for sustainable development in Africa. Keeping these concerns in mind, this project focuses on challenges to identifying and managing cultural heritage in the Indian Ocean islands of the Seychelles, Mauritius and Zanzibar.

In the introduction, I identify key issues influencing heritage and its management in Africa. What have African heritage managers and institutions been concerned with thus far? What are their priorities and why? These first questions lead me to reflect on contemporary conceptualisations of heritage. Is there a singular definition for heritage? How has heritage been theorised in the West, where a dominant discourse about heritage has recently emerged?

This discussion is followed by an introduction to the Indian Ocean region. Here I argue that Zanzibar, Mauritius and Seychelles are multicultural and hybridised nations whose identities and heritage are influenced by a long history of trade, cultural exchange and domination. The islands are also part of region that has historical experience of non-western forms of globalisation. Specifically, they have experienced Indian, Indonesian and Middle Eastern cultural impacts. What forms of heritage, experiences of heritage and subsequently, forms of heritage management will such contexts yield? I end the section by stating that these islands are embedded in a modern, globalised economy – briefly explaining how these new dynamics may influence considerations of heritage.

These considerations lead to my hypothesis. The colonisation of Mauritius and Seychelles (which were both *terra nullius* at the time of slavery and colonisation), has in the first instance produced societies deeply affected by violence and subordination. This legacy is evident in both societies, as they struggle to assert their independence from former colonial powers and demand their right to determine which heritage matters to them. Secondly, the islands are profoundly hybridised spaces, where a long history of colonisation and settlement has produced creolised cultures. As I argue in the presentation of the hypothesis, the latter was a historically important means for social and physical survival. It is this creolisation that continues to influence heritage in Zanzibar, Mauritius and Seychelles – thus far, very few cultural managers are taking creolisation seriously in their approaches to heritage management. The fact of creolisation and the lack of ‘hard’ cultural boundaries mean that a sufficiently flexible and imaginative approach to the management of heritage is required in the region.

The overview of the Indian Ocean region is followed by the presentation of ethnography on Mauritius, Zanzibar and Seychelles. Documenting my anthropological fieldwork in these island societies, I discuss the historical and present influences of various social forces on intangible heritage. I also indicate the

ways in which these forces have produced unique epistemologies, modes of culture communication and politics. Reflecting on the broader politics of heritage, I discuss the historical prioritising of tangible heritage (such as historical monuments, archaeological sites and cultural artefacts) and the fundamental implications of this for intangible heritage in the societies researched. I reflect on the part played by heritage protection regimes in the foundation of local approaches to heritage management, showing the tension between the need for local institutions to retain their freedom and the pressure put upon them to conform to external standard setting requirements. In this section, I also explore some of the logistical constraints to identifying and preserving intangible heritage in the region and the implications of particular political views on heritage management.

Research Methods

The research on challenges to the management of ICH in the Indian Ocean region is ongoing. Questions and issues that have arisen thus far necessitated a consideration of various research methods and methodologies. The primary research methods used in fieldwork for this project were participant observation and detailed semi-structured interviews, methods particular to anthropology. I also relied on existing documentation, archival research and gathered oral histories – particularly in the case of Seychelles data. The snowball sampling technique was employed in the selection of interviewees. As the chapters show, using the ethnographic approach has facilitated a deep and emic understanding of social dynamics in these island societies. It is acknowledged however, that further research in the islands will be necessary for a more substantive understanding of heritage to emerge.

To this end, it is imperative for readers of this text to understand that further ethnographic data on the subject of heritage management in Zanzibar, Seychelles and Mauritius is forthcoming. In the interim, what is presented here raises broad questions about the implications of a differing 'management' ethos in heritage circles. Specifically, for some agencies involved in heritage management (such as UNESCO for instance), particular approaches and priorities are evident in the form of assistance that they provide. Training, organisational support, capacity building and the provision of information and the values underpinning these activities may not match the needs and values of countries receiving assistance. As I show in the chapter on Seychelles, top-down and prescriptive thinking and practice (or a preference for these approaches), does not advance

the goal of sustainable development. More important, these practices do not question existing and dominant approaches to heritage management. The data presented here also show that the requirements of heritage 'regimes' may convince cultural managers to see participatory, democratic, 'bottom-up' approaches to heritage as impractical and may also encourage such managers to be inflexible in their approach to heritage management.

In the literature on heritage, a clear distinction is made between tangible and intangible cultural heritage (henceforth referred to as ICH). According to Bouchenaki (2003), tangible heritage includes monuments and archaeological sites, while intangible heritage covers a wide range of non-physical elements of culture. These may be music, tales, rituals, systems of folk knowledge, and epics. There is consensus among heritage scholars that these two broad spheres of heritage (tangible and intangible) are not mutually exclusive. In the following I have focused on intangible heritage as articulated via ethnomusicology, occupation diversity and symbolic interpretation. The data show that these are linked to and embedded in (and therefore not separate from), existing tangible heritages – mountains, buildings/towns and physical landscape.

Further research on intangible heritage in the Indian Ocean societies of Mauritius, Seychelles and Zanzibar is currently underway and will focus on emic expressions of heritage and on intermediaries in the heritage identification and inscription process. The latter include tourism officials, guides and receivers of tourists. Further interviews are also underway with culture 'managers' (at UNESCO offices in Mauritius, Seychelles and Tanzania) and stakeholders in these islands (such as The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Stone Town Authority, ZIFF organisers in Zanzibar and National Heritage Foundation (NHF), Creole Culture Watch, and Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture (NMCAC) in Mauritius). The research is also taking into account the importance of historical and current regional cooperation (through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Indian Ocean Rims Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), the East African Community (EAC) and (COMESA) the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) for addressing common challenges such as ICH management. A more holistic picture of how Mauritius, Zanzibar and Seychelles are connected in their entry into heritage-building politics is emerging.

Challenges to Research

There have been several important challenges to research. The fact of national elections in Tanzania in 2005 meant that there was increased social and political

tension in Zanzibar. Another major factor influencing research in Seychelles and Mauritius in 2005 was the outbreak of Chikungunya, a particularly debilitating (although not necessarily fatal), mosquito-borne viral disease that is affecting Mauritius and Seychelles, having reached epidemic proportions in Reunion Island.

Time and gender issues have also presented obstacles to the research process. Working full-time, managing a family while conducting this project has meant that I have not been able to devote as much time to critical reflection and actual fieldwork as I would have liked to. Further challenges to research (conceptual, political and relational) are outlined in the ethnographic discussion following Chapters Two and Three.