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Foreword



The study of intangible heritage brings people together and forms the basis for communication, understanding, successful cultural exchange, the development of amicable relationships, the exchange of information and cooperation and collaboration among heterogeneous professional, academic and community groups. The recognition of the value of intangible heritage also contributes to an understanding of the importance of national cultures as a whole. As the subject becomes more widely recognised, we find that museums have a new understanding of the importance of intangible heritage and of investigating data related to the field. In addition, many museum curators are now actively seeking to create exhibitions and educational programmes that deal with aspects of intangible heritage. This clearly shows that conferences, research and the collection and preservation of data about intangible heritage are important tools in the study of ethnography, national culture and morality.

As the result of efforts made by many international museums and experts, the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, which is the first journal ever to be entirely devoted to intangible heritage, was published in 2006. Volumes 2 and 3 were published in 2007 and 2008 respectively, and volume 4 is published this year. There is also an official website and the *Journal* is available on-line, so that it is readily accessible and free to everyone. The goal of this project, undertaken by the National Folk Museum of Korea, is to encourage active discussion about, and research into, the area of intangible heritage, and to make our Journal an important resource for the many scholars in this field. Furthermore, we very much hope that the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* will, in future, cover an even wider range of topics related to the study of intangible heritage. Today, the study of intangible heritage is a major area of development within the museum field. In addition, because most nations are now concerned with the investigation, research, preservation, transmission, performance, marketing, information and exchange of information about their own intangible heritage, the subject has become an important topic of discussion world-wide. I consider that the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, published by ICOM and the National Folk Museum of Korea, is currently at the heart of this debate.

Finally, I wish to express our most grateful thanks to our dear friend, Professor Patrick Boylan, who was the previous Editor-in-Chief, and to our present Editor-in-Chief, Professor Amareswar Galla, who has shown great passion for this subject through his brilliant academic achievements. I congratulate the staff on the publication Volume 4 of the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, and would like to express my appreciation of all those who have participated in this project, including the members of the Editorial Advisory Committee, the members of the Editorial Board and the members of the Journal Secretariat.

Shin Kwang Seop, Ph. D.
Chairperson, Editorial Advisory Committee
Director, the National Folk Museum of Korea

Editorial



The discussions and debates in addressing the imbalances of heritage management have been critical in advocating the safeguarding of intangible heritage. The adoption of the *Shanghai Charter* of ICOM in 2002 and the outcomes of the Triennial General Conference of ICOM 2004 in Seoul have been turning points for everyone dealing with all forms of heritage (www.icom.museum). The UNESCO 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* has been a catalyst in galvanising State Parties across the world and promoting an understanding of what intangible heritage is and the challenges of safeguarding it www.unesco.org/culture/ich).

ICOM *Strategic Plan* emphasises the holistic concerns of twenty first century museums and advocates that we take an integrated approach to preserving and safeguarding heritage resources beyond the binary oppositions of natural and cultural, tangible and intangible, and movable and immovable. The realisation of this paradigm shift is gradual and associated transformations are evident in the scoping of different approaches to rethinking heritage. Embedding multiple voices, cross cultural perspectives, a range of interpretations and management practices in promoting inclusive museology calls for a collaborative and strategic approach. (www.onmuseums.com).

During the ceremony for the proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, 18th May 2001, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, the Director of General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) referred to the sites that have been inscribed on the World Heritage List as

...broadly representative of the "North". That imbalance in fact reflected a weakness in our system, which, being exclusively concerned with protecting the tangible heritage, overlooked the intangible heritage and thus left out a great many cultural features that are nevertheless fundamental in the map of cultural diversity, often belonging to cultures of the 'South".

The 2003 Convention, often considered as complementary to the 1972 *World Heritage Convention*, has brought about significant changes in the way we deal with heritage resources.. It is significant to note the inscription of Chief Roi Mata's Domain in Vanuatu on the World Heritage List in 2008, as an outstanding example of a landscape representative of Pacific chiefly systems. Although there are now several World Heritage inscriptions that are cultural landscapes or mixed sites, Vanuatu provides a significant departure in safeguarding intangible heritage through the *World Heritage Convention* and providing an integrated approach to both the tangible and intangible. (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1280).

I strongly recommend that the readers of this *Journal* familiarise themselves with the *Operational Directives* for the 2003 UNESCO *Convention* adopted by the State Parties in 2008. They provide a valuable avenue for the participation of primary stakeholders and their representative bodies in safeguarding intangible heritage. *These Operational Directives*, yet to be tested in practice, need to be understood within the intercultural dialogue of the past decade facilitated by the 2001 UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* and the 2005 UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. We are witnessing a profound transformation of the overall suite of UNESCO's Conventions, Charters and Recommendations, both hard law and soft law. The UN *Declaration on the Rights of World's Indigenous*

Peoples, September 2007, provides another critical step in rethinking our perceptions and perspectives of the location of intangible heritage in sustainable development.

It is within this context that the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, as the only global forum of its kind for scholarship, provides a critical space for meaningful engagement based on applied research. Volume 4 of the *Journal* demonstrates the importance of interrogating what is intangible heritage at the local, national, regional and global levels. We envisage that future issues will continue to bring to the readers case studies and fresh approaches from different parts of the world. All possible efforts have been made to facilitate contributions by authors from languages other than English in this volume.

The knowledge community created by the *Journal* is becoming even more important as we face new forms of globalising impacts. There is clear sense of urgency and the need for a sincere and open research engagement to interrogate intangible heritage and scope ways and means of safeguarding it. This is critical, as intangible heritage is an integral part of the cultural diversity of humanity. One of the key concerns is the impact of climate change and the threats to many intangible heritage systems whose contextual localities will be affected due to rising sea levels or changing landscapes.

Finally, I express my sincere appreciation of the leadership, vision and infrastructure support from Dr. Shin Kwang Seop, Director, the National Folk Museum and Chairperson of the Editorial Advisory Committee. We met to discuss the future directions ahead of the last Editorial Board meeting and Dr. Kwang Seop expressed a firm desire for the *Journal* to become one of the cutting edge think-tanks for research on intangible heritage.

I take this opportunity to thank Madame Alissandra Cummins, President of ICOM and Professor Chong-pil Choe, Chairperson, ICOM Korea, the Editorial Board and the International Advisory Committee for their active professional engagement and passionate and informed intellectual inputs in the development of the *Journal*. To my predecessor, Professor Patrick Boylan, I pay tribute for leading the establishment of the *Journal* with quality assurance and inclusive participation of scholars from across the world. The Secretariat of the *Journal* at the National Folk Museum has demonstrated outstanding commitment for providing a supporting environment.

Amareswar Galla, Ph. D.
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Professor of Museum Studies, the Universty of Queensland



Main Papers

Finding the 'First Voice' in rural England: the challenges of safeguarding intangible heritage in a national museum

Rhianedd Smith



Finding the 'First Voice' in rural England: the challenges of safeguarding intangible heritage in a national museum

Rhianedd Smith
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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to explore the challenges of defining intangible heritage and 'community' in England. It uses as its case study the Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading: an urban museum *with* a rural theme. The paper examines current theoretical discourse around the concept of the 'first voice' and debate about the role of museums in the preservation of intangible heritage. It then examines the relevance of these concepts to the identification of 'rural' intangible heritage stake holders in England. In this way, it shows the potential for concepts of intangible heritage to influence national museums. However, by applying theory and practice which is designed to support work with well-defined 'originating communities' to a national museum, it also highlights the challenges of initiating community engagement in a multicultural society.

Introduction

To an international audience, the Museum of English Rural Life may seem an unlikely subject for a paper on intangible heritage. The museum itself hosts an internationally renowned collection of objects and archives relating to rural England 1850-1950. The collections were amassed from the 1950s onwards as part of a move to preserve rural heritage during the rapid industrialisation of the post war period. The collections are the tangible remains of what is generally perceived to be a 'lost world'. The communities, craftspeople and places which gave these objects significance have changed irrevocably over the last 60 years. However, does this mean that notions of community, 'first voice' or intangible heritage are of no relevance in this context?

This paper is an attempt to examine the work undertaken by the Museum to preserve the intangible aspects of rural society in England. In order to achieve this it will review current international discourse on the subject of intangible heritage. By applying concepts of 'first voice' to an English case study I hope to illustrate some of the practical and theoretical issues that this

approach poses. An examination of some of our recent and future projects will use this discourse to place our work in a broader strategic context. However, an examination of these case studies also highlights some of the challenges faced when adapting a model of the 'first voice' based primarily upon engagement with specific ethnic communities

Intangible heritage, the 'first voice' and the community: a framework for engagement?

Intangible heritage

The UNESCO 2003 *Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2003) identifies the following as types of intangible heritage which may be at risk: oral traditions and expressions including language; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. Their strategies for the implementation of the convention include each state party creating inventories of intangible heritage within their territory (article 12); developing various institutions, organisations and partnerships related to the promotion and safeguarding of intangible heritage (article 13); educating and raising awareness amongst the public (article 14); and encouraging the participation of communities, groups and individuals in strategies towards the preservation of intangible heritage (article 15).

The convention situates state agencies as the tools for implementation. In previous editions of this journal both Boylan (2006) and Kurin (2007) have noted the problems that this raises and have discussed the role that museums might play in the implementation of the *Convention's* recommendations. Kurin (2007) suggests a dissonance between safeguarding intangible heritage and



Figure 1
Barge Painter' 'People of the Thames' Exhibition. © Jill Orpen



Figure 2
Blacksmith' MERL Spectacular 2008. © Fil Gierlinski

traditional museological concepts of guardianship. Such frameworks are usually restricted to the physical manifestations of culture, or as Kurin (1994b) puts it, *museums tend to like their culture dead and stuffed*. Boylan's (2006) view is more optimistic but agrees that museums need to engage with new ways of working if they are to embrace this role as guardians of all aspects of cultural heritage. However, as Alivizatou (2008) discussed in a recent article, notions of intangible heritage are not completely at odds with current museological theory. Emerging praxis over the last 20 years show that museum professionals are becoming increasingly sensitive to the need to embrace the intangible and in doing so engage with originating communities.

Several scholars question the dichotomisation of tangible and intangible heritage. In his address to the ICOM conference in Seoul, Pinna (2004) echoed these sentiments, noting that material culture is inextricably linked with living culture. The strength of reaction by indigenous communities to objects in collections illustrates that museum artefacts are not completely divorced from the social and cultural frameworks in which they originally had meaning. Equally, intangible heritage has a traditional place in museological research. For example, when researching social history objects such as those in the Museum of English Rural Life, we understand the physical object alongside the oral and archival evidence relating to it (Brigden 1992). The richness of the interpretation relies on this combination of tangible and intangible evidence.

In addition to this, certain intangible aspects of cultural heritage rely on material culture in order to create significance. For example, museum objects may be used to reinvigorate certain traditions or may offer models for certain techniques or practices when links with tradition have been weakened. Concepts of the post-modern museum (Hooper-Greenhill 2000) reflect this shift in thinking about collections. Museum professionals are increasingly regarding themselves not as guardians of relics but as active participants in an on-going cultural dialogue. Outstanding work has been undertaken in ecomuseums and community focussed museums over the past 20 years to include communities in the preservation of their own tangible and intangible heritage (Simpson 2001, Galla 2008). This theory and practice has also influenced larger national museums which are increasingly attempting to engage with the various communities whom they serve. However, work in non-community managed museums has illustrated the problems of defining the 'first voice' in multicultural societies, and highlighted the need to create a sustainable strategy for preserving tangible and intangible heritage.

This is clear in Garces Cang's (2007) article on engagement with intangible heritage and first peoples in Japan. He notes that following the UNESCO *Convention* (UNESCO 2003) questions remain relating to the definition of intangible heritage and the identification of its custodians. He points to the model developed at the

Asia Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU 2006) meeting in Tokyo as a method of differentiating between communities, groups and individuals. Communities are defined as networks with a shared cultural heritage rooted in the practice and transmission of intangible heritage, whereas groups may have shared characteristics but cut across community boundaries, and individuals may serve as the carriers of specific skills or knowledge relating to intangible heritage. He notes that in Japan preservation of intangible heritage is usually mediated via well-established preservationist groups: a view which has strong correlations with the English context.

What is the 'first voice' and how can museums engage with 'it'?

Kurin (2007) has argued that the UNESCO *Convention* does not deal in depth with the practical and theoretical implications of preserving intangible heritage whilst also respecting the complex and ever-changing nature of cultural formations. In relation to this Galla (2008) recently outlined how the concept of the 'first voice' may be used to inform policy related to intangible heritage. In his paper he used the concept of the 'first people' and the 'first voice' to discuss ways in which originating communities may be given control over the preservation of their own tangible and intangible heritage (as outlined in article 15 of the 2003 UNESCO *Convention*). He argues that recent approaches to heritage conservation have often tacked intangible heritage on to traditional methodologies related to tangible heritage. Galla also notes that strategies for preservation are usually outlined by the 'establishment'.

By using case studies, Galla outlines some challenging strategies for embedding the 'first voice' in the process of preservation and on-going cultural activity surrounding museums and other heritage sites. He posits three models for participation of 'first peoples', ranging from consultation, through strategic partnerships, to community cultural action. In the first model museums extract information or advice from the community, in the second the museum outlines the agenda and engages the community as a partner, in the third the community outlines the agenda. Galla notes that most museums are still at the first stage. This provides a useful framework for assessing the current work at the Museum of English Rural Life. However, the case studies used here and elsewhere in the literature on this topic tend to be limited to smaller community-based museums or larger museums of world cultures where it could be argued that the source communities may be relatively easily defined.

However, Galla also outlines the need to be aware of power imbalances and cross-cutting identities within 'first nations'. This issue has previously been raised in Moira Simpson's (2001) and Michael Ames' (1999) work on community voices in museums. The UNESCO *Convention* itself notes that communities have an open character, can be dominant or non-dominant, and are not necessarily linked to specific territories. The *Convention* also acknowledges that one person can belong to several communities.

How then do we identify the carriers and custodians of intangible cultural heritage? Most of the well known case studies relating to the 'first voice' relate to individuals



Figure 3
'Hurdle Makers' © Museum of English Rural Life



Figure 4
Spinners and Weavers' MERL Spectacular 2008. © Fil Gierlinski

who clearly define themselves as having a shared religion, culture, geography, language and history. While theory relating to identity politics can highlight marginalisation within these groups, for example women or young people (Galla 2008), these networks could still be defined as 'a community'. As Alivizatou (2008) outlines, post-modernist theory in anthropology and archaeology has sought to deconstruct this idea of 'cultures'. Hence, the current trend in museums for engaging only with pre-existing, well-established and ethnically-defined communities may ignore the voices of large numbers of marginalised individuals.

It is not hard to determine why this strategy has had so much popularity. Large national or regional museums often have collections, which originated from or have meaning to millions of individuals whose allegiances are not clear-cut. If representatives of 'a community' or 'a group' approach a museum, it makes life much easier. But is this really giving a voice to all the custodians of intangible heritage? It is admirable to provide a space for 'acceptable' counter-narratives, but this approach may favour mobilised, politically active groups. I will attempt to address this dilemma by examining some of the communities, groups and individuals who may speak on the subject of rural England. By discussing the challenges of defining the 'first voice' in a multicultural society and exploring the practical and theoretical issues related to this type of activity, I hope to highlight some of the gaps in the theory and practice of intangible heritage.

Defining English rural life - finding an 'originating community'

The concept of a 'first voice', as outlined by Galla, is useful in trying to identify the stakeholders in the Museum of English Rural Life. Academic writing relating to our subject area talks of the 'death of rural England' (e.g. Howkins 2003) and defines many of the specific cultural networks and ways of working the land which are captured in the museums collections as 'lost'. So what is English rural culture today?

It might be argued that the name of the Museum of English Rural Life describes our originating community quite succinctly. However, when asked to define their nationality, only one of my students (who were born and raised in England) described themselves as 'English'. The rest defined themselves as 'British'. This marks a stark contrast with my home country of Wales where people would usually define their nationality as 'Welsh'. Engagement with a sense of English (as opposed to British) identity is complex. Some far-right groups now use discourse related to multiculturalism to define indigenous English people as a 'threatened ethnic minority'. In this climate the talk of 'true Englishness' takes on an uncomfortable new meaning.

So who is truly English? In his work on the subject of *The English National Character* Mandler (2006) notes that concepts of the national character are constantly in flux. He echoes Benedict Anderson's (1991) work on *imagined communities* in pointing to the fact that national identity is *slippery* and *flexible* (Mandler 2006: 2). This is

necessary as the grouping needs to include a range of people who you will never meet but must nonetheless identify with. He notes that discourse on this subject is fought over by various political factions and interest groups. Cohen (1982) in his work on social structures and 'belonging' in Britain argued that over-arching concepts of identity often mask the heterogeneity of local experience. Hence, while the terminology of ethnic identity or biological precedence might be used in this debate, a clear definition of 'Englishness' is inherently elusive.

Even if some easy definition could be found for Englishness, this would not include all those who live in the countryside. While rural England is considerably less ethnically diverse than many urban centres, it is not full of white, middle class, indigenous males (Agyeman and Spooner 1997). How would other voices be encompassed within the common definition of an 'originating community' or 'first voice'? An accurate depiction of rural England today would need to include the voices of traveller and Gypsy groups whose cultural practices often clash with the 'Gorgio' (non-Gypsy) community, and a rapidly growing immigrant agricultural labour force. Giving prominence to a so-called 'first nation' would be impractical and actually serve to further marginalise already socially excluded voices.

There is a further tension between the concept of an indigenous English identity and the concept of the UK as a multicultural society. Museum programming should address the needs of the entire populace and target social exclusion. This means that rural museums do not just serve those who currently live and work in the countryside but also communities who are affected by rural issues. As a rural museum in an urban site we find ourselves in an even more challenging situation. Systems of dominance, inequality and social exclusion exist in relation to urban-rural experience in the UK. These are determined by complex matrixes of education, class and specific geographic location. If we cannot even draw comparisons between a farmer in the north of England and one in the south, then how do we begin to engage with the multiple groups who have a stake in our collections?

Is there a 'first voice' for the English countryside?

A recent debate in the *Journal of Rural Studies* challenged representations of rural Britain. In it, Philo noted that:

> *... there remains a danger of portraying British rural people ... as all being 'Mr Averages', as being men in employment, earning enough to live, white and probably English, straight and somehow without sexuality, able in body and sound in mind, and devoid of any other quirks of (say) religious belief or political affiliation* (1992: 200).

Following this debate Milbourne's (1997) *Revealing Rural 'Others'* and Cloke and Little's (1997) *Contested Countryside Cultures* both sought to 'give voice' to marginalised communities. These texts noted how concepts of marginalisation may be used to understand the power relationships and identity politics at play within rural locations.

This move to include 'other' voices is further



Figure 5
'Wheelwrights' © Museum of English Rural Life

complicated by Michael Woods (2005) assertion that rural politics are no longer the politics of those who live in rural areas but the politics of various groups relating to the rural. He notes that the past 10-15 years have seen a surge in political activism in the UK with regards to matters of rurality. During the 1990s the organic movement and various animal rights groups staged a number of public campaigns which captured headlines and the popular imagination. This period, and the early 2000s, also saw various unpopular laws and financial measures taken by the government and the EU, and a series of disasters which threatened the livelihood of a number of farmers. House prices were driven up by urban migration to the countryside and the rural demography changed radically as young rural dwellers moved to the cities.

The countryside has become an 'issue' which has captured the imaginations of the political right, left and various unaffiliated interest groups. In an attempt to address the perceived intrusions of 'liberal townies' and an allegedly 'anti-rural' Labour government, pro-countryside groups were established in the late 90s. The views of some of these groups are epitomised in the bumper sticker *you keep your bullshit in Westminster and we'll keep ours in the countryside!* There are a number of individuals and groups who wish to find a 'middle ground' to discuss rural issues in a non-sensationalised way. However, the media representation of rural issues and popular opinion has characterised this debate as a tug of war between liberal urbanites and upper class country dwellers.

The polarisation of public opinion on issues such as fox hunting has made it increasingly difficult to tackle certain rural issues. Hence, despite being situated in the same country as our 'originating community' it is almost impossible to identify with whom we should be collaborating. In the UNESCO *Guidelines on Intangible Heritage* it is noted that communities should not be defined by ethnicity or relationship to a single place. However, much of the work in this area has been undertaken with specific groups who have a shared religion, land and cultural framework. Within England there are cross-cutting ties of religion, political affiliation, regional identity, language, class, gender, sexuality and age. So if we cannot define who or what is English and rural then how do we preserve the intangible heritage of rural England, and furthermore, how do we involve custodians of the 'first voice' in this process?

Intangible heritage and the Museum of English Rural Life

The Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) was established in 1951 with the aim of preserving and celebrating English rural traditions at a time of rapid and irreversible change. It was one of a number of museums established during this period as a reaction to the rapid level of change taking place in agricultural practice and rural culture. While the English countryside had been undergoing significant transformations during the industrial and agricultural revolution, the technological and cultural processes taking place in the 1950s far outstripped previous developments in their scale and intensity.

Early museum staff hunted out artefacts which were rotting in barns and paid scrap metal prices to secure disused machinery. Academic researchers based within the museum also took great pains to capture the traditional knowledge and skills which were threatened by an industrialised and increasingly globalised market. For example, sound equipment and photography were used to record the skills and knowledge of George Lailey, the last traditional pole lathe turner in England. In this way, MERL took a conservationist approach to preserving the intangible and tangible manifestations of a 'disappearing' countryside.

It is important at this point to draw attention the fact that MERL is, and always has been, a university museum. Its roots lie in academic discourse around rurality, and archival evidence indicates that the museum was initially envisaged as a research centre rather than as an organisation for the general public. Like many university museums, it has experienced a shift in priorities during recent years (UMG 2004) and now seeks to combine its research activities with its role as an educational organisation. In Kurin's (2007) article questioning the mechanisms by which intangible heritage may be preserved he addressed both museums and universities separately. I would question whether university museums offer a unique space in which research into intangible heritage can be developed with community groups.

Traditionally, the museum's approach to intangible heritage has been a type of preservation which might fit into Galla's consultation model of participation. However, driven by current museological theory and practice and a desire to make our collections relevant to a modern audience, we have started to question this hierarchy of meaning production. Hence we are now looking for new

ways in which 'other' voices and stories might be given a more central role in the museum. Thus, while the museum has never been community run it is increasingly committed to engaging with various community groups.

Collecting and promoting intangible heritage

An example of this shift in thinking can be seen in the project *Rural Crafts: Take 10* (MERL 2008). This project sought to collect intangible heritage related to traditional crafts. This was achieved through commissioning a series of films documenting the knowledge and skills of rural craftspeople and the final products were collected for the museum and displayed alongside the films. However, this moved beyond simply documenting traditional skills. This research project also sought to chronicle the experience of being amongst a small group of tradition bearers and examined the impending threats to these crafts. In doing so it highlighted that many modern rural craftspeople are not the descendants of an unbroken line of tradition bearers. The decision to maintain traditional crafts in modern Britain is part of a lifestyle choice and the crafts have often been actively revived or preserved. In Britain, tradition-bearers may live in rural settings but increasingly they were not born into that life.

This questions a concept of 'first voice' based on geographical origin or biology and points to the challenges of engaging with communities within which identity is something which is both inherited and actively constructed. It also shows the importance of inventory approaches to preserving intangible heritage. The process of identifying specific craftspeople utilised an earlier survey carried out on behalf of a government agency and several charitable organisations (Collins 2004). The survey had been undertaken by a former member of the museum staff and it sought not only to record numbers of craftspeople but to understand why and how these crafts were being maintained. It also outlined a SWOT analysis of rural crafts in England and provided a valuable starting point for the museum's research. In this way, our position as a university museum made us particularly well placed to undertake this work.

However, as Kurin (2007) makes clear, intangible heritage is not the song on the tape but the actual singing of the song. In relation to this the Museum is also serving as a space in which aspects of intangible heritage may be performed. Hence, a yearly event hosts traditional craftspeople and dance groups who perform for the local urban community. In 2009 we are building on this by holding a series of folk music concerts in the museum using traditional songs and instruments related to the collections. There are some issues with authenticity here as these traditions are largely preserved as a lifestyle choice and have their roots in late 19th and early 20th century folk revivalist movements. Like many other aspects of intangible heritage they are at risk and are a part of the cultural heritage of the UK, so in that respect they are worthy of protection and promotion. Nonetheless, this echoes Garces Cang's (2007) point that national museums often have to rely on existing preservationist movements when engaging with intangible heritage.

Collaborative interpretation

Both these types of activity would fit into the UNESCO definition of intangible heritage. The model of participation would fit somewhere between Galla's first and second model of 'first voice' participation where the impetus for this work lies with the museum but the community is an active participant in this process. However, another way in which we have sought to engage with the community voices is through our exhibition programme. In this we move slightly beyond traditional definitions of intangible heritage to include the beliefs, knowledge, memories and stories of various marginalised rural peoples.

For example, a recent project sought to record oral histories and take portraits of some, now elderly, local members of the Women's Land Army. The WLA was established during World War 1 to address labour shortages in agriculture and was revived during World War 2 with women being brought in to replace male agricultural labourers who were going off to fight. While it was called an 'army' the women were often given little training or support, and following the war were not given relocation funds or pensions (unlike other male and female members of the armed forces). While their efforts fed Britain during the war their endeavours have largely been overlooked leading to them being known as the 'forgotten army'.

The oral histories recorded details of the lives of these

women which provided a richer understanding of their wartime experiences and subsequent life histories. The importance of this was seen in a recent cataloguing programme. Students researched items of WLA uniform in the object collection in the light of the oral histories of their former owners. They commented that the oral histories gave a new meaning to the tangible heritage contained within the object store and found it helped them to empathise with the women involved. However, on a more fundamental level this project also gave a voice to a group who had received little formal recognition for their role in the war effort and addressed the marginalised issue of women's' roles in agricultural production.

While this project was underway another exhibition was being developed related to the national women's organisation, the Women's Institute. Famed in Britain for making cakes and jam and singing the anthem *Jerusalem* in church halls, they are sometimes stereotyped as bearers of traditional gender roles and deemed as a slightly unfashionable community group to engage with. However, this group also stages high profile campaigns related to rural, and women's, issues. They have previously sought to subvert their image by designing bras, and even publishing a calendar showing some of their members naked, to raise money for various cancer charities. In recent years they have worked on projects related to violence against women in rural areas and even the sex slave trade. The group is all female and largely above retirement age – both marginalised categories within rural politics. This exhibition sought to get behind the stereotype and give a voice to this group in a touring exhibition.

What stands out about this exhibition for us is that it involved collaboration with the Women's Library and other regional museums, and most importantly that it was designed by members of the group being represented. Members of the group were given training in exhibition design with the object choice and interpretation of their own design. The exhibition was held in three different museums with elements of the exhibition altered to take into account the local experiences and issues which the group deemed worthy of discussion. This process was not without its problems and did raise questions about the practicalities and ethical issues of engaging with groups in this way. These participants were well educated and were all part of a self-selecting social group - would we be able to recreate this with a more diverse and/or more marginalised community group?

The final project I wish to discuss sought to capture the experiences of young people living in the countryside. The Young Farmers Association asked its members to submit photographs of their lives which were then used to create a touring exhibition. Some were idealistic, others told of the stark realities that face the modern farmer. Photography served as a powerful method for capturing and raising awareness of the lifestyles and beliefs of a group whose voice is rarely heard in museums. We are hoping to engage with young voices again in an upcoming exhibition on the evacuation of urban children to rural settings during the Second World War.

While these projects do raise interesting points about methods of capturing intangible heritage they also raise serious questions about our ability to engage with these communities. While these groups are marginalised by broader narratives relating to 20th century history, they are not what one might traditionally categorise as socially excluded. They also raise questions as to what we might mean by intangible heritage when we are working with groups and individuals rather than communities. These are tradition bearers but they do not always define themselves solely through performance, traditional crafts or festivals. While we are keen to offer a space for the performance and preservation of these more public manifestations of 'culture', we also wish to give a voice to groups who may wish to preserve and promote their ideas, beliefs or knowledge about rural England through our museum.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would argue that while it is impossible to identify a single 'first voice' in rural England this does not absolve museum professionals from the duty of engaging with communities and intangible heritage. The MERL projects have sought to give a space for hidden voices in ways that comply with, and stretch, the UNESCO *Convention*'s definition of intangible heritage. As a museum we are still very much at the stage defined by Galla where we listen to community voices but where few communities have any real say in our wider policy. However, given the problems illustrated above in defining our communities, how could we ensure that these various groups are active participants in our work to preserve intangible heritage? As Kurin (2008) makes

clear, while the 2003 *Convention* gives ample scope for what should be done it does not really address how it should be done.

Given the heterogeneity of rural England, should we have one over-arching group or several smaller advisory groups related to specific issues? Taking into consideration the fact that there are deep divisions between various groups and communities, would work with one group limit our ability to engage with another? Should we contact existing groups and representatives or develop a system for engaging with marginalised voices? How would we find these voices and how can we create frameworks to ensure that they are heard amongst established voices? While I have questioned a model of participation based on self-defined established groups, in some contexts this may be a strategy born out of necessity. In a large museum within a multicultural society, we may realise that though cultural categories are constantly shifting, a fixed and preservationist attitude towards intangible heritage is often all that is feasible.

Hence, we have a long way to go before we are able to create a sustainable strategy for engaging with communities and intangible heritage. Current theory and practice and international regulation pushes museums towards a more active role in the preservation of intangible heritage. However, as Kurin (2007) indicates, the 2003 *Convention* needs to evolve if it is to offer a useful framework for action. I would question whether the UNESCO definitions of intangible heritage cover the whole breadth of intangible ideas, beliefs and experiences which can be preserved and invigorated by museum practice. While this conclusion is slightly unsatisfying, I do not believe that this attempt to use international discourse on intangible heritage and 'the first voice' to understand our work has failed. This is a complex and ongoing debate where a valuable first step is to ask some challenging questions.

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Conceptualising intangible heritage in the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam: the *Layla and Majnun* story as a case study

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Conceptualising intangible heritage in the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam: the *Layla and Majnun* story as a case study

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ABSTRACT

The Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, was founded as a colonial museum in the 19th century in which experts ('outsiders') presented their view of other cultures. In the 20th century the Netherlands became a multicultural society. As a result, the museum had to redefine its function in society. In an attempt to rethink the relation between the content of its exhibitions and its audience, the Tropenmuseum refurbished all the museum galleries between 1990 and 2008. During the refurbishment the museum started to experiment with intangible heritage for which the story of *Layla and Majnun* was chosen as a case study. The museum collected four separate contemporary cultural expressions of the story, accompanied by audiovisual recordings of performances. The experiment was so successful that it functioned as a catalyst for the final refurbished gallery, entitled *Travelling Tales*, which is entirely devoted to intangible heritage. Based on research into the *Layla and Majnun* collection, I argue that the voices and views of the artists mirror the manifold perspectives that people have to various forms of intangible and tangible culture. The presentation of this multitude of views in the exhibition reflects the complexity of identification processes and therefore goes beyond notions of 'self' and 'other'. In this respect, the Tropenmuseum functions as a forum where various opinions meet and as a space for intercultural encounters.

Introduction

The Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, was founded in the 19th century as a colonial museum. Like other colonial museums it functioned as a showcase for the colonies. The museum always seems to have put its material collection on display but with little or no information about the original context within which the objects functioned. Next to products from the colonies, it presented the ways of life of colonised peoples - who were later renamed 'non-Western' peoples. The practice of collection and display was thus a one-way traffic. Scholars, as outsiders, presented their view of other cultures, and, needless to say, indigenous discourse was completely absent from the displays. The ethnographic objects in the museum functioned simply as static evidence of exotic lives.[1] They referred to cultural communities and to collectables without any apparent historical or artistic merit. The resulting displays highlighted the differences between people by means of a peculiar mix of physical and cultural signs of difference in a purely colonial context.[2]

Nowadays, more people than ever before can experience the exotic for themselves due to growing personal wealth and cheap airline tickets. Also, in the so-called 'multicultural' society that has emerged in the Netherlands, we feel that the world has shrunk. As a result of these developments, the Tropenmuseum is no longer so important as a presenter of other cultures and it has to acknowledge that the concept of 'the other' does not exist outside the Western world. Like other ethnographic museums across Europe, it has had to rethink and redefine its function in society, and therefore to reconsider the relationship between the content of its exhibitions and its audience.[3]

Although the Tropenmuseum desperately tries to distance itself from its essentialist past, it cannot escape its historic burden.[4] Essentialism still exists in the present-day structure of the Tropenmuseum, since the museum is divided into distinct regions, each with its own curator, exhibition space, and collection. However, in its recent acquisition policy the museum claims to be aware *... that the idea of 'regions' is essentialist and outdated* and that it has been *sharply criticised for the political ramifications of stereotyping, imposed constructions of identity and a disregard for issues around migration and cultural interactions*.[5]

Refurbishing the Tropenmuseum

The Tropenmuseum took up the challenge of rethinking and redefining itself with a grand refurbishment of all the museum galleries that started in the 1990s and was completed in 2008. At the symposium *Tropenmuseum for a change!* Susan Legêne, former head of the curatorial department and responsible for the ideas behind the museum's new image, gave an overview of the history of the museum, and of the refurbishment, which functioned both as a product and process because it took so long (some fifteen years).[6]

The most critical aspect of the renewal was, in Legêne's view, the establishment of *new connections with source communities and the various target groups* to create new relationships *between the institute, the building, the collections, Dutch society and the communities from which the collections came and come*. Also, the relationship between the objects on display and the people had to be both transparent and direct.[7]

In order to be able to work on these new relationships and interpretations the museum had to challenge its past collection and exhibition practices. It had to investigate critically how people had benefited, suffered or been affected in other ways by the former displays. In other

words, the museum had to challenge its earlier notions of ethnographic authenticity and tradition, and of representation and self-representation.[8]

Consequently, the collection policy also needed to be re-examined. From now on the collection

> *... was no longer [to be] viewed simply as a depository or a storehouse of material cultures, but as a source of information about historical interactions, processes of representation, collectors and the formation of ideas.*

New acquisitions had to *relate to the existing collections*, but at the same time they had *to have potential and experimental meaning for new acquisition policies*. The guiding principle was that the collection, both objects and images, had to be relevant to the stories the museum wanted to present.[9]

Over the past five years the museum has thus aimed *to strengthen the existing collection profile with contemporary objects* which focus on various themes: popular art and popular culture, culture and migration, religious and folk cultures, colonial history, shared cultural heritage and intangible heritage.[10] Concerning the theme of intangible heritage, the Tropenmuseum researched the meaning of this concept for both its collection and exhibition policies.

Experimenting with intangible heritage: *Layla and Majnun*, a case study

In 2005 the Tropenmuseum chose the famous, but tragic, love story of *Layla and Majnun* as an intangible heritage theme with which to experiment. The general outline of the story is this: Layla and Qays met as children and fell in love with each other. Qays got so obsessed with his love for Layla that people came to call him 'Majnun', or 'the Madman'. When Majnun's father asked Layla's father for her hand in marriage to his son, Layla's father refused. Desperate, Majnun took refuge in the desert, and while there, he recited poems about his love for Layla. The desert animals became his friends. Meanwhile, Layla was married off to someone else and died of a broken heart, and when Majnun heard the news of the death of his beloved he died too.

Research into the story's fame, and the availability of modern or contemporary versions of it in various countries, resulted in the museum acquiring two traditional examples from Iran and Turkey, and two contemporary autonomous artworks from Iran and Azerbaijan in 2005 and 2006 (with the financial support of the Mondriaan Foundation).

Layla and Majnun narration and narrative painting

The museum commissioned a narration by the traditional storyteller, 'Morshed' [teacher] Vallioallah Torabi, to be accompanied by a narrative painting by Ahmad Khalili, both from Iran. Torabi told the story of *Layla and Majnun* in the presence of the coffeehouse painter Khalili in November 2005, and Khalili made sketches during the narration. In addition, Khalili used the version of the story told by the Persian poet Nizami (in 1188) as a source of inspiration. Khalili finished his narrative painting in February 2006. Then, a second telling of the *Layla and Majnun* story by Morshed Torabi was organised to accompany the finished painting. This performance was audio-visually recorded on a regular evening in the Azeri coffeehouse in Tehran, on March 5th, 2006. Both the recording and the narrative painting are now in the museum's collection.

Torabi is an Iranian dramatic storyteller who has told his stories in coffeehouses and theatres for almost fifty years. He knows all the ancient Iranian national and religious stories and classical folk stories. In accordance with the Iranian storytelling tradition, Torabi relies on his memory for his version of *Layla and Majnun* and as far as I can tell he does not make any use of Nizami's literary work. Khalili's narrative painting supports Torabi's narration. An analysis of this narration shows that Torabi creates his own version of the story although he maintains the general story outline.

Torabi makes use of all the methods used in the Iranian storytelling tradition - such as acting, dialogue, singing, dramatic gestures and so forth - performing before an audience. The storyteller relates the story, performing all the character roles, and using appropriate dramatic techniques.[11]

However, Torabi narrates the history of *Layla and Majnun* indirectly, which makes it difficult to understand if you do not know the general outline of the story. Scene one of Khalili's painting shows Layla and Majnun meeting at school. Torabi describes this scene by reciting ...*they took me to the school of love/where I was taught the lesson of pain and grief*... He explains the beginning of

Majnun's love for Layla thus:

An arrow shot from those charming eyes
That hit him straight in the heart.
He said: Ah! I am struck by the arrow of love.
After one glance I died woefully.
Who is she, who deprived me of my tranquillity,
Sitting in the moonlight?...I am her longing lover,
Beautiful, I am infatuated by your love.

Torabi also draws parallels with another famous Persian love story, *Farhad and Shirin*. He tells parts of that story at the beginning and at the end of his narration, framing his story of *Layla and Majnun* and drawing parallels between the two. Throughout his narration he invokes other Iranian stories, such as *Manije and Bijan*. He says:

The love that Farhad cherished for Shirin.
The love that Layla cherished for Majnun.
The love of the Christian girl for a prince.
The love of Manije, the daughter of Afrasiab, for Bijan.
That was real love, not just any love.

By invoking these other Persian stories Torabi locates his version of *Layla and Majnun* firmly in the Iranian poetic and narrative tradition. Torabi takes the liberty of a professional narrator to add details to the general outline of the story according to his own taste. In an interview he stated that a storyteller is allowed to complete literary works by embellishing the story within the tradition of storytelling. This is demonstrated in his elaboration of scene seven, where Layla is shown writing scraps of notes to Majnun in accordance with the Nizami version of the story. Torabi invents an episode that does not occur in Nizami's poem and relates how Layla got ill and how people brought offerings to help her recover. Majnun also comes to bring her an offering in his bowl, but she refuses it. To Majnun this is a good sign:

I am aware of Layla's tenderness
Her breaking my bowl reassures me
If she had wanted anyone else
Why would she break my bowl?

Torabi's narration shows that storytelling is an active process. He blends elements from Iranian narrative tradition with elements he personally chooses. He memorises and embellishes the story and presents his narration dramatically, as is the way of Iranian storytellers. The elements Torabi personally chooses to add come from other Iranian love stories; it is an active process of selection, interpretation and elaboration within the framework of the Iranian storytelling tradition.

The story in the narrative painting that Ahmad Khalili (born1943) made, runs from left to right up to the fourth scene. The fifth episode is depicted in the middle of the painting since it portrays the holy Ka'ba in Mecca. From scene six (the one below the scene in the upper right hand corner) the scenes spiral clockwise like the squares on a board for playing the game of 'Goose'.

Khalili relied heavily on the Persian story by Nizami. He painted all the episodes that the famous poet related, except for the descriptions of nature and of conversations Layla and Majnun have with, for example, the stars.[12] Khalili also depicted most of the details Nizami mentioned in his poem. In scene eight, for example, Layla retreated with her girlfriends into the garden. She is



Figure 1
Ahmad Khalili, *Layli and Majnun*,
2006. Oil on canvas. Inv.no. 6256-1. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum

portrayed underneath a cypress there, a detail that comes from Nizami's poem.

There are only three instances where Khalili created elements that cannot be found in either Torabi's narration or Nizami's poem. In scenes three and nine Khalili painted Layla eavesdropping from behind a curtain on the marriage proposals of Majnun's father and Ibn Salam. His third addition comes in scene eighteen which shows the episode where Majnun visits Layla's grave; Khalili has also portrayed the tombs of Majnun's parents, whereas Nizami only mentions Layla's grave.

Khalili's narrative painting shows that its creation was an active process. He follows the coffeehouse painting tradition closely and adds elements he has personally selected. The elements he chooses to include come mainly from earlier coffeehouse paintings and from the Persian poem by Nizami, only a few minor details arise from his own imagination. This indicates that Khalili hardly makes any use of his artistic licence, but emphatically chooses to work within the coffeehouse tradition and to rely heavily on those earlier cultural manifestations he selected as his examples.

Layla and Majnun in the Karagöz shadow theatre

As another example of a traditional form of the story, the museum obtained a Karagöz version, and the accompanying puppets of Layla and Majnun, from Turkey. Both the story and the puppets were created by Metin Özlen (born 1940) in the late 1970s. The museum audio-visually recorded a *Layla and Majnun* Karagöz show by Özlen on December 10th, 2005 in the studios of the Marmara University in Istanbul, but unfortunately there was no audience present at the performance. This recording and the set of puppets are now part of the museum's collection.

Özlen is a retired Turkish professional puppet player and puppet maker in the tradition of Karagöz. He comes from a family of Karagöz players. Özlen created his Karagöz version of *Layla and Majnun* in the late 1970s and based it on his childhood memories of the tale and on the Turkish version of the story written by the poet Fuzuli in the sixteenth century.

Özlen's version is structured as a Karagöz performance. It thus consists of a prologue, an introduction, a dialogue, a plot, and an epilogue. It also meets other Karagöz requirements: Karagöz and Hacivat are the leading characters, the story is situated in their neighbourhood, the scene is laid in Ottoman times - and the story has a happy ending. Furthermore, Özlen uses well-known Turkish songs and music to support and emphasise the Turkish character of the show.

The content of the Karagöz version differs considerably from Fuzuli's poem. Although Özlen has followed Fuzuli's general outline, he has omitted all the more dramatic and delicate scenes. Instead, much time is spent on dialogues between Karagöz and Hacivat who reflect humorously on the story of *Layla and Majnun* and as a result the story is reduced to a minimum. For instance, Özlen does not mention Layla's marriage to someone else or the dedicated Zayd, although he is an



Figure 2 and 3
Metin Özlen, *Karagöz and Hacivat*, late 1970s. Dye on leather.
Inv.no. 6243-12, 6243-11. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum



Figure 4 and 5
Metin Özlen, *Qays and Layla*, late 1970s. Dye on leather. Inv.no. 6243-15, 6243-14. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum

important character in Fuzuli's poem. The most notable difference with Fuzuli is in the happy ending of the story. In the Karagöz version *Layla and Majnun* eventually married, whereas in Fuzuli's poem - and in all other versions known to me – they both died.

The structure of the Karagöz version of *Layla and Majnun* closely resembles the story of *Tahir and Zühre*. *Tahir and Zühre* is a Turkish folk story about the tragic love between the sultan's daughter, Zühre, and the vizier's son, Tahir. They committed suicide together when they were prevented from being together. This story had earlier been incorporated into the repertoire of the Karagöz theatre where it was also given a happy ending.[13]

In my view, the principal reason for the major alterations in the outline of the story is to maintain the character, structure and requirements of a Karagöz play, which aims to entertain and arouse laughter and astonishment. As a result, the compulsory happy ending changes the story drastically. To achieve this Özlen introduced 'Witch Granny', who told Layla's father that Layla would die if she was not allowed to marry Majnun. So Layla's father set Majnun three tasks and if Majnun succeeded in fulfilling them he would be permitted to marry Layla. Karagöz and Hacivat helped Majnun so he succeeded and was allowed to marry his beloved.

Özlen not only used the story of *Tahir and Zühre* as a basis for the outline of his story, but he also borrowed some characters from it for his Karagöz version of *Layla and Majnun*. For example, besides Zühre, other female characters in the story are her mother and the 'Black Female Slave'. Özlen incorporated both these characters into his version of *Layla and Majnun* although they only play minor roles. Another character that is also part of Özlen's *Layla and Majnun* is 'Semenbasi'. In *Tahir and Zühre* he is Albanian and chief of the keepers of the hounds, but in *Layla and Majnun* he is keeper of the camels.[14]

In accordance with tradition, Özlen usually makes his puppets by carefully copying older ones. For his *Layla and Majnun* version he used puppets from his predecessors and puppets from other museums as sources of inspiration. He tried to copy the original puppets as carefully as possible but has sometimes added minor details - for example, the puppet of the 'demon Zebani' is an exact copy of a puppet, possibly originating from the seventeenth century, which is in the collection of the L.A. Mayer Memorial Foundation in the United States.[15] Özlen even copied the name of the puppet from the caption with which it is displayed, which reads *demon from hell, Zebani*. The only difference between the two puppets is that Özlen has decorated his version.

Özlen also created puppets that are a mixture of his own interpretation and earlier examples. For the puppet 'Witch Granny', for example, Özlen used another puppet from the collection of the L.A. Mayer Memorial Foundation.[16] He copied a hunchbacked old woman puppet, but added four snakes to the image. Özlen probably derived the idea for the snakes from older puppets of old women carrying snakes on their head or on their walking sticks and applied them to his version of 'Witch Granny'.

Some of his puppets clearly have Ottoman elements -

for example, 'Majnun's father's tent' very much resembles tents depicted in Turkish miniatures and 'Majnun the madman' wears the Ottoman turban as does 'Majnun with a dagger'. Other puppets have Arabic characteristics, for example, 'Layla's house', the 'Camel caravan', 'Qays', 'Layla's father', 'Majnun's father', 'Layla's mother' and 'Layla's maid'. These are possibly references to the Arabic origins of the story.

This shows that both Özlen's Karagöz show and his puppets are actively created. In his performance Özlen mixes the requirements of the traditional Karagöz shadow theatre with deliberately selected elements from other sources. He shapes his version of the *Layla and Majnun* story within the rules of the Karagöz tradition and structures it as a Karagöz play, sticking to the aim of the Karagöz theatre which is to entertain and amuse. He specifically selected a folk story that had earlier been incorporated into the canon of Karagöz stories - the story of *Tahir and Zühre* - as the model for his version of *Layla and Majnun*. Özlen also chose to follow the general outline of Fuzuli's poem.

The design of the set of puppets shows that Özlen carefully selected earlier examples from the Karagöz tradition. In general, he copied his examples in a very detailed way, embellishing them according to his own taste. In some cases he mixed elements from various earlier puppets into a personal creation. This demonstrates that the creation of both the Karagöz show of *Layla and Majnun*, and the accompanying puppets, is an active process of selection, interpretation and elaboration executed within the framework of the Karagöz tradition.

Layla and Majnun in contemporary autonomous art

The museum commissioned Orkhan Huseynov (born 1978), from Azerbaijan, to make a painting about Layla and Majnun. Huseynov makes illustrative paintings and drawings to which he applies the old traditions of miniature painting and folk art that can be found in his environment in Baku, Azerbaijan, and elaborates them. In his work he expresses his interpretation of stories he knows.

Huseynov is familiar with both Nizami's and Fuzuli's poems, but relied on his memory for his painting *Layli Majnun*. In addition, Huseynov used the poem *An occurrence with Majnun* by the nineteenth century poet, Seid Azim Shirvani, as a source of inspiration. In this poem a traveller comes across a very sad Majnun, who carries a dog in his arms and treats it lovingly as if it is his most precious friend. The dog lives in Layla's house. Majnun was so desperate to get in touch with anything of Layla's that he was even ready to serve the dog that lived with her.

In the painting, Majnun is the largest figure. He is depicted with long hair and a beard, in tune with his ascetic lifestyle in the desert, wearing only a loincloth to cover his emaciated body. Majnun is portrayed headless, since he has 'lost his head' because of his love for Layla. He is on his hands and knees, copying the behaviour of the desert animals with which he lives. This position also expresses his wish to be like Layla's dog in the poem, and the collar around Majnun's neck is also a reference to this. Because she is always on his mind, Layla is depicted in the background.

At Majnun's right hand side we see a deer and to the deer's left stand a wild cat and a cheetah. There are two



Figure 6
Metin Özlen, *Zebani*, late 1970s. Dye on leather.
Inv.no. 6243-8. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum



Figure 7
Metin Özlen, 'Witch Granny', late 1970s. Dye on leather.
Inv.no. 6243-23. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum



Figure 8
Metin Özlen, *Majnun the madman,* late 1970s. Dye on leather.
Inv.no. 6243-16. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum.



Figure 9
Metin Özlen, 'Layla's father', late 1970s. Dye on leather.
Inv.no. 6243-18. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum

birds on Majnun's back, two other birds seem to have just flown off and there are two turtles at his feet. Huseynov believed these species lived in the desert or other dry places.

The scene with an emaciated Majnun surrounded by animals depicts a well-known episode that has a lot of precedents in miniature painting. The painting is also related to the miniature painting tradition stylistically; it does not have a clear background, there is no sense of time and place, there are hardly any shadows and like many miniatures it lacks a horizon, perspective and focal points. Moreover, the animals that appear in the painting are very often found in miniatures illustrating the story of *Layla and Majnun*.

Another commission was given to the Persian artist Farshid Mesghali (born 1940) to make an art installation based on *Layla and Majnun*. Mesghali had earlier made an art installation of *Farhad and Shirin*, another Persian love story,[17] and he has also always been extremely interested in the Persian art of miniature painting. Gradually his interest in Persian miniature painting has developed until they have become his favourite source of inspiration – his models are classic 14th and 15th century miniatures from Herat, Shiraz, Tabriz and Bihzad.[18]

In his installation, Mesghali combined two episodes that have many precedents in Persian miniature painting: *Majnun mourning on Layla's grave, and Majnun sitting in the desert among the animals*. As we have seen, Huseynov also used the latter theme in his work. Huseynov's art installation of *Layla and Majnun* consists of twelve coloured pieces. In the centre we see the dead Layla, floating above her tomb which is defined by four small trees. On the middle of three steps stands Majnun, who faces the tomb and covers his face with his hands. Five freestanding trees, a deer, a bird and a butterfly surround the lovers.

In an interview I had with him, Mesghali explained that Majnun could not bear to look at the tomb but felt the need to be present. It was a tragic situation, but, according to Mesghali, also the only time and place where the two lovers were united. The stairs represent the connection between life and death. The upper level is green, indicating life, the middle step is dark blue and the deceased Layla forms the last step; Majnun stands on the middle step between life and death. Mesghali did not want to display the tomb, but decided to show Layla floating in the air above it to give the installation a transcendental feeling.

Behind Majnun, life is depicted through symbols - the trees, the deer and the bird. The butterfly on Layla's tomb is connected with Layla and pays homage to Majnun's devotion to her. The tiger print on Majnun's legs is a reference to the loincloth that he wore in the desert. Mesghali suggested that Majnun might have had a loincloth made of animal skin since he lived among the animals.

Mesghali explained that he tried to create a contemporary interpretation of the miniatures in line with his working methods, by using colours specific to miniature painting but in modern materials and forms. Also, the setting and arrangement in space are contemporary. In my view, he has succeeded in achieving

his goal. Although the art installation is three dimensional, all the figures and their individual body parts in the installation are flat. It is almost as if they are cut out from a miniature and put in a three-dimensional space. Volume is suggested in the way in which the heads of Layla and Majnun are bent and in the way their arms are attached to their bodies. This also goes for the animals: the deer has a suggestion of body volume because his limbs and ears are attached to the side of his body. Mesghali has also created a sense of volume in the bird through the horizontal way the tail is attached and by attaching the wings sideways to its body. As is common in miniature painting, cypresses with long stems indicate a high horizon and define the scene of the installation.

In contrast to the previous examples, here the story of *Layla and Majnun* functions merely as a context for the autonomous artworks. The painting and installation do not tell the story in its entirety since they are only able to display one moment, one episode, of the story. Therefore, the story serves as a context for the artworks and only helps the audience to understand what they see.

This shows that both the painting and the installation, like the preceding examples, are the result of an active creative process. They differ from the other versions in one crucial way. Neither Huseynov, nor Mesghali, work within the framework of a tradition. They use the miniature painting tradition as a source of inspiration for their personal visual language, but they do not apply the rules of that tradition to their work. Huseynov was also inspired by Shirvani's poem. The general outline of the story of *Layla and Majnun* functions simply as a context for both their artworks. Here, *the tangible can only be understood through the intangible*.[19] Both artists blend their interpretation of elements from the tradition of miniature painting with elements that come from their imagination. This shows that the artworks of both Huseynov and Mesghali are a fusion of specifically and carefully selected elements to which they personally can relate, and they translate this mixture into artworks using their own, personally-created visual languages.

What becomes clear from these cases is that the creation of artworks, whether they are intangible narrations or performances, or tangible objects, is an active process executed by the artist. The artworks are the result of the artists' interplay with many factors. It is the result of careful and deliberate selection, elaboration and embellishment. In the cases of the narration, the narrative painting, the Karagöz performance and the puppets, the artists executed their processes within traditional frameworks.

By selecting earlier cultural traditions, being inspired by them and identifying with them, the artists have developed and shaped each of the traditions in which they work. They created relationships with earlier models by interpreting and using them. Tradition in turn may be considered as a way of looking back into history, a retro-active search for precedents, a construct, a selection and an image of the past.

These processes of selecting, adapting, creating and shaping their works of art, show that the term 'identity' does not suffice in these cases of intangible heritage. 'Identity' is too static and designates a condition rather



Figure 10
Orkhan Huseynov, *Layli Majnun*, 2005. Oil on canvas. Inv.no. 6244-1. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum



Figure 11
Farshid Mesghali, *Layli and Majnun,* 2005. Plaster, acryl, acrylic paint
Inv.no. 6257-1. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum

than a process; it is not appropriate to describe the process of creating an artwork. Following Frederick Cooper, the term 'identifying' is more applicable to the cases we have discussed since it suggests complex processes and activities. The artists are the agents who carry out the 'identifying'.[20]

Intangible heritage in an ethnographic museum

The intangible heritage implicit in the story of *Layla and Majnun*, and its collection functioned as a catalyst for the last gallery of the Tropenmuseum to be refurbished - *Travelling Tales*. This exhibition opened in September 2008, and is entirely devoted to intangible heritage. It aims to show as complete a picture of culture as possible by raising awareness among the audience of the connection between intangible heritage and the tangible collection. The exhibition is developed for the general museum visitor to the Tropenmuseum, but specifically addresses families with young children from age two to twelve. Stand-alone activities were developed especially for these age ranges in relation to the narrative traditions on display.

Travelling Tales presents people as vehicles of intangible heritage. The artists, storytellers, and others are all recognisably presented in the exhibition in installations, films and occasionally on stage in the museum. The audience can listen to, and watch, an adapted version of the story told by Torabi alongside the narrative painting by Khalili, it can listen to Özlen's *Layla and Majnun*, shown together with a selection of his puppets, or it can admire the artworks by Huseynov and Mesghali.

The voices and views of the artists mirror the manifold perspectives people have on various forms of intangible and tangible culture. Therefore, the display of the story of *Layla and Majnun* offers various modes of identification with one source of intangible heritage. It reflects the complexity of people's identification processes and therefore goes beyond notions of 'self' and 'other'. This way of presenting manifold perspectives is also applied to the other narrative traditions on display (stories of the spider,' Anansi', and the monkey-general 'Hanuman' from the *Ramayana*).

There are immigrant groups in Dutch society to whom the *Layla and Majnun* collection is particularly relevant, and it therefore enables the Tropenmuseum to engage with those groups. In one of the displays, *Unbounded NL*, this point is developed further. Here, migrants from all around the world present their contribution to Dutch culture; they dance, sing, play, tell and perform stories and enact traditions from their mother countries. To this end they use all kinds of cultural artefacts from the museum collection - puppets, instruments, storyteller sticks and so on. In this display intangible heritage is a way to express others' values and views on the museum collections.

Since *Travelling Tales* presents a multitude of voices, the display appeals to, and provides meaningful experiences for, multiple audiences. In this way intangible heritage has created an opportunity to balance the multiple views presented in the museum. Here, the museum acts as a mediator and functions as a space for

intercultural encounters. As a result, the display of intangible heritage in *Travelling Tales* can be seen as a forum where various opinions meet each other. It provides a space for the exchange and sharing of stories, experiences, and cultural information between visitors. In this way intangible heritage functions as a vehicle to promote respect for other cultures and to stimulate dialogue between them. It offers a new perspective on processes of identification and an opportunity for the Tropenmuseum to function as a place for discourse on common heritage and cultural exchange. Due to the broad target audience for the exhibition, this process can take place not only among peers, but also between different age groups and generations.

NOTES

1. Shatanawi, M., 2007. 'Tropical Malaise', *Bidoun*, Issue 10, pp. 42-44.
2. Legêne, S., key-note speech *Tropenmuseum for a change!* in the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, 11 December 2008.
3. Shatanawi, 'Tropical Malaise', pp. 42-44.
4. ibid
5. van Brakel, K. and Legêne, S. (eds.), 2008. 'Collecting at Cultural Crossroads. Collection policies and approaches (2008-2012) of the Tropenmuseum', *Bulletin 381 of the Royal Tropical Institute*, p.37.
6. For an elaboration of Susan Legêne's argument, I refer to the key-note speech she gave on 11th December 2008 at the symposium *Tropenmuseum for a change!* in the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.
7. ibid
8. ibid
9. ibid
10. van Brakel and Legêne, op cit., p.25.
11. Page, M.E.,1979. 'Professional Storytelling in Iran: Transmission and Practice', *Iranian Studies*, Volume XII, Nos. pp. 3-4, 197; F. Nazazadeh, 2002. 'Dramatic Story-telling (Naqqâli)', in *Iran Cultural Life*, 283.
12. Incidents in the narrative painting: 1. The first meeting between Layla and Majnun at school. 2. A singing Majnun passes Layla's tent. 3. Majnun's father asks for Layla's hand. 4. Majnun tears his robe out of the pain of love. 5. Majnun's father takes him to Mecca. 6. The meeting between a passer-by and Majnun. 7. Layla remembers Majnun's face and writes him a letter. 8. Layla goes with the girls to an orchard and sits under a tree. 9. Ibn Salam asks for Layla's hand. 10. Nawfal comforts Majnun and takes him to his tribe. 11. In exchange for his horse, Majnun frees the deer from the hunter. 12. Majnun, the hostage and the old woman. 13. Ibn Salam takes Layla to his home. 14. Supported by a stick, Majnun's father visits his son. 15. Majnun unburdens his soul to the animals. 16. Uncle Salim Ameri visits Majnun. 17. Salim Baqdadi visits Majnun. 18. Majnun visits the grave of his parents. 19. Layla and Majnun as king and queen in paradise.
13. Sabri Koz, M. (ed.), 2004. *Torn is the curtain, shattered is the screen, the stage all in ruins!* Yapi Kredi Karagöz collection exhibition catalogue, pp. 276-277.
14. ibid. pp. 276-277.
15. Zebani, plate 96 in Tietze, Andreas, 1977. *The Turkish Shadow Theater and the Puppet Collection of the L.A. Mayer Memorial Foundation.*
16. ibid, old woman, plate 91.
17. http://farshidmesghali.com/persian_garden.htm, consulted March 9, 2008.
18. Sims, E., Marshak, B.I and Grube, E.J., 2002. *Peerless Images. Persian Painting and its sources*, pp. 43-61.
19. Galla, A., 2008. 'The first voice in heritage conservation' in the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, Volume 3
20. This argument has been elaborated in Cooper, F., 2005. *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*, Chapter 3 'Identity', pp. 59-90.

Reading the intangible heritage in tangible *Akan* art

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Reading the intangible heritage in tangible *Akan* art

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ABSTRACT

The intangible aspects of *Akan* art give it content that has to be 'read' in order for it to fulfil its purpose and be enjoyed. Hence there is an inextricable link between the intangible and tangible parts of an artwork, with the tangible explaining the subject matter. It is the interpretation, and the meanings given to *Akan* art that makes it function effectively as an integral part of *Akan* culture. In some situations, art functions as a form of coded language representing the *Akan* world view, values, proverbs and aesthetics, in other words, the intangible aspects of their culture. Their art is thus made up of two components, the invisible and visible parts. *Akan* artworks are not only works of aesthetic value, they provide cultural and historical evidence of the time and period in which they were made. They reveal the technology, materials, beliefs, cultural practices and the circumstances under which they were made as well as their relations with other cultures and peoples. They are a valid source of evidence for people studying the *Akan*. Their art has the status of legible documents, the tangible aspects of their intangible culture. This article seeks to establish the link between the unseen components of *Akan* art and its visible, physical components, and to show how these dual but complementary aspects can be understood and appreciated.

Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to explain how the *Akan* translate aspects of their intangible heritage into tangible, visible art forms to communicate and to document events and ideas. This paper sets out to address the fundamental belief the *Akan* have in the unseen and to explain how this notion, and other ideas, inform the content of their art. *Akan* art contains a wide range of themes that represent complex histories, philosophies, ideas and wise sayings. Selected examples of these topics and their visual representations form the central body of this paper. I then proceed to examine the link between the invisible and intangible parts of artwork, and the works themselves. This article therefore aims to establish the relationship between the intangible aspects of *Akan* heritage that underpin selected art works, and the works themselves, in order to illustrate the concept of duality in *Akan* art.

Akan intangible heritage is found in, and expressed through, family genealogies, histories, traditions, customs, ethics, values, philosophies and religions. These beliefs, values, and knowledge constitute a type of heritage that is expressed through stories and narratives, told to successive generations by knowledgeable elders, family heads and holders of political and social office. Other forms of intangible heritage are drum texts that are played by drummers, songs, which are sung by musicians, and poetry recited by poets. Intangible heritage is called *abakwas<u>e</u>m*, meaning 'important historical, ethical or cultural information'. *Abakwas<u>e</u>m* are considered to be true accounts of incidents, values, beliefs, philosophy and practices from the past. In *Asante* courts, they tried hard to sift truth from falsehood and ensure that the information they were given was accurate. Misinformation was unacceptable, as an Asante proverb says, *wutwa nkotompo a, wusuro Kumasi*, meaning, 'if you tell lies you will fear Kumasi' or 'liars fear Kumasi.'[1] This means it was risky to tell lies in Kumasi, the capital of the *Asante* state, in the *Asante* region of Ghana, where *Asantehene*, king of the *Asantes*, had his court. The court treated oral information as truth.

Aspects of the intangible *Akan* heritage are expressed in tangible art forms to make this intangible content visible and 'readable.' These intangible narratives accompanying artworks are considered to be an important part of the work, and are preserved as part of *Akan* history and culture, as authentic *abakwas<u>e</u>m*. Such artworks serve to represent historical facts and general knowledge, and can be used as evidence in legal cases. This intangible heritage forms the theoretical basis of life and is the source of knowledge for engaging in all sorts of socio-economic, political and religious activities.

This paper investigates how the *Akan* have used various materials to interpret their intangible heritage in order to preserve their beliefs, memory, knowledge and information, and to communicate. How is intangible heritage fused into art and what do the final products look like? Do they provide us with any further information about artistic styles, the socio-political environment or the economy, technology and culture of the time and period in which they were made? If they do, which of these art forms can we cite as examples to illustrate this?

Akan craftsmen and women, and their ideas about shapes, colours and symbols

The *Akan* constitute about 49.1% [2] of Ghana'spopulation. They comprise several sub-groups such as the *Agona, Akwamu, Akuapem, Akyem, Asante, Kwahu, Bono* and *Fante*, all of whom speak different dialects of the same *Akan* language, which belongs to the Central *Comoé*

language group.[3] Each *Akan* belongs to one of the eight matrilineal clans (*abusua*) because they believe each clan to have descended from a common ancestor or ancestress and to be bound together by a common tie. Hence they consider themselves as relatives, practice clan exogamy, and therefore cannot intermarry. The clans are the *Oyoko, Bretuo, Aduana, Asakyiri, Asenee, Agona, Asona* and *Ekoona*.[4] Each of these clans has a common totem or symbol (an animal which played some significant role in their mythology or history) and identifies with its qualities. Inheritance to political office and land is usually by matrilineal descent. The *Akan* also believe that every person inherits a *ntoro* from his or her father which helps to account for their inherited characteristics. The *Akan* divide themselves into twelve patrilineal groups based on their *ntoro*, namely *Bosommuru, Bosompra, Bosomtwe, Bosom-Dwerebe, Bosomakom, Bosomafi, Bosomafram, Bosom-Konsi, Bosomsika, Bosompo, Bosomayesu and Bosomkrete,* with each one having its own special characteristics.[5]

These intangible attributes that every *Akan* has are what gives him or her character and personality. This helps structure the general framework that guides social and moral behaviour, relationships, legal matters, political organisation and traditional activities, and sets the parameters by which the wellbeing of the *Akan* is sustained. According to Sutherland-Addy, intangible heritage gives significance to the activities of daily life and is expressed through aesthetic and symbolic art forms through which opinions and perspectives are mediated and expressed.[6] These have helped the *Akan* answer certain universal questions about particular types of resources, historical situations, technology and what needs to be done to develop skills and overcome challenges.

The people who possess the unusual skills and abilities needed to translate unseen things and ideas into visual forms are highly respected. These people are called *dwumfour* (craftsman or woman). He or she firstly translates an idea, belief, or something that cannot be seen into a visual form. Secondly, he or she creates that form – sometimes an article for use, sometimes an artwork - out of raw materials, intending it to be understood, and to give pleasure, to the user or viewer.

The *dwumfour* needs a wide range of knowledge and skill. They need to know how to choose raw materials for their durability and characteristics. They are expected to be familiar with different types of tools, manufacturing and creative techniques and processes and finishing materials and the effects they each produce. In addition, the *dwumfour* must know how to appease the gods and deities who are believed to inhabit these important raw materials in order to make the work successful and harmless to the user. The *dwumfour* are therefore at the heart of the process of translating and linking together the invisible, abstract, intangible ideas and verbal texts into art to establish a composite whole. As part of their training, they acquire a deep knowledge of the community's beliefs and heritage, taste and aesthetics in order to create appropriate art or craftworks that can be understood and appreciated by members of the community.

Craft has been described by Feagin and Maynard as works whose aim is to arouse emotion, while art is work which expresses emotion. *Akan* art fits into both categories as it both expresses, and arouses, emotion.[7] The terms 'artwork' and 'craftwork' are therefore used interchangeably in this paper.

Among the *adwumfour* (plural) who work to fuse *Akan* intangible heritage and art together are the *adinkra* and *kente* cloth makers who produce a variety of abstract *edwene* (designs) with names. The *dade dwumfour*, the metal casters, create a variety of figurines, flora and fauna, an assortment of jewellery and ceremonial and ritual swords. Another group of artists are the *dua dwumfour*, the wood carvers, whose array of umbrella tops, finials for the staffs spokespersons carry, stools and shrine figures - either painted or covered in gold leaf - depict *Akan* culture in its artistic form. The tailors who make the *asafo* flags and the builders who construct houses and shrines are all critical thinkers with the skills required to produce accurate representations of the intangible.

The works the *dwumfour* produces are symbolic statements of attributes based on beliefs, theories and values, which both the artist and public appreciate. For example, an idealised human figure is expressed by certain distinctive symbols, which Antubam has discussed extensively. The shape of the female body, including the thighs, must be oval with well-rounded protruding buttocks, which are seen as a symbol of feminine beauty. The neck must also have rings.[8] Special efforts are made to groom young girls to achieve this ideal, curvaceous shape by putting beads on their waists, knees, ankles, calves, elbows and wrists. This is the *Akan* idea of beauty and their concept of the ideal human figure.

In addition to curves, geometric shapes and colours are used, and to the *Akan* they all have distinct meanings. For example, the *Akan* consider the circle as a motif that symbolises the presence and power of God, and the male aspect of society.[9] It appears in the circular plan of some shrines and the chief's sword bearer wears a gold disc as a symbol of the power and sanctity of his office.

Similarly, the square or rectangle stands for the sanctity of the male aspect of God and man. It also symbolises territorial power and the dominance of the male ruler. The large triangular locket on a chain, called an *edawobo* (literally meaning 'it is on your chest') is considered to be a female symbol and is often made or plated in gold and worn by *Akan* chiefs. It is also found adorning chiefs' headgear, elbow bands, sandals and stools, establishing the relationship between male and female, and the beauty which comes from combining them.

The crescent moon symbolises the female aspect of society and its influence over life as a whole. Its meanings include beauty, female tenderness and gracefulness.[10] It is also seen in appliqué cloths and on the upper part of stools as a symbol of maternal protection and feminine charm. When combined with a star, the crescent represents female faithfulness in love.

Colours also have meanings which are based on deep, abstract, spiritual values and beliefs. Gold, a scarce, precious metal, stands for the test of time, and represents warmth, royalty, immortality and influence on society. All shades of gold are used to symbolise prosperity, royalty, glory and maturity. White comes from ivory, eggshells and *hyirew*, white clay. It symbolises purity, virtue, virginity, joy, victory and all the virtuous, spiritual qualities of God and the deified ancestral spirits. Green depicts newness, fertility, vitality and new growth. Black is related to soot and charcoal, and thought of in terms of vice, deep feelings of melancholy, death, tragedy, misfortune and such vicious spiritual entities as the devil.[11] Red represents melancholy and misfortune and is used to symbolise the death of a close relative, an act of war, anger, danger, seriousness or calamity.

Akan culture and history, until the first decades of the fifteenth century or probably later, had no written form, but the people had their own means of recording and documenting important events and ideas in intangible ways and tangible symbolic art forms. As a result, *Akan* artworks are not just tangible and visual, but are also important works inseparably bound together by intangible information about their culture, which, upon investigation, reveal the history, social, religious and political life and experiences of the *Akan*. Therefore these works essentially consist of dual parts which add together to make a single intangible and tangible thing put together as a piece of art. These works are important because they are in continuous use in private and public ceremonies and activities. Because they are constantly being used, they continue to acquire more intangible qualities over time. A considerable number of *Akan* artworks therefore have historic, proverbial or symbolic meanings acquired because they reflect the occasions on which they have been used, or the activities for which they have been employed. They are intended to be preserved so that they can continue to communicate these ideas and accounts in ways that cannot be disputed.

Proverbs and wise sayings are part of the *Akan* language and are therefore intangible, but they are expressed in some specific artworks because they simplify abstract ideas into clear, visible, tangible, symbolic forms thereby making them 'readable.' Many *Akans* use proverbs in various situations to warn, advise, admonish, praise or rebuke, and political leaders often order regalia which has proverbial or symbolic parts thus making them important visual forms of communication in governance. Today, *Akan* art embodies a lot of proverbs in the form of symbols which stand for something other than what is immediately visible. In fact, symbols are a way of representing ideas through objects whose meanings are commonly understood and accepted. Attempting to give meaning to things found in the environment, through the study of their characteristics and behaviour, has led to the selection and use of common symbols to communicate certain ideas. Each one of these natural items has a set of ideas, values and attributes associated with it. For example, the lion is known for its strength, the elephant for its size, the antelope for its intelligence, the crocodile for its versatility, the palm tree for its multiple uses, the cock for its pride and its role in announcing daybreak - and so on.

One method of interpreting symbols, according to Saphir's analysis,[12] is to consider them as being a sort of condensed language which he defines as a 'highly saturated' form of expression. Thus symbols, according to him, have polarised meanings, with the possibility of each one having many interpretations.[13] To understand symbols one needs to go to a range of sources - specialists and laymen, people from the communities

that created them, documented sources and information about the contexts in which they were made.[14]

This is elaborated by Sylvan who describes this as 'iconology', the study of the symbolic meaning of objects in an artwork, and of how they are related to the political, religious, philosophical and social periods in which that work was created, and to the tendencies of the person who made it or the time and place under investigation.[15] *Akan* artworks bear the hallmarks of their historical and cultural milieu and reflect the social and political conditions of the time when they were produced, but they also always have an underlying intangible aspect that the viewer is expected to understand.

The *Akan* view of the world, intangible culture and its manifestations in art

In this section, I discuss briefly some essential aspects of *Akan* intangible heritage, especially their belief system, its importance and how it surfaces in art. I argue that belief, though not tangible or scientifically proven, can still be overwhelming in its effect. Centuries of *Akan* belief and practice cannot be dismissed; for them, belief in the intangible is just as real as belief in the visible. Hence, belief is an essential aspect of their life and is expressed in art and other forms in everyday life. The *Akan* believe there is a supernatural force behind nature whose power needs to be solicited, thus they have evolved a system of religious practices which mean that craftspeople have to ask the gods' permission before using natural resources. This places religion at the core of traditional *Akan* art and makes it the basis for moral guidance, health, government, philosophy, agriculture, rites of passage, adornment and aesthetic values. It involves having a strong belief in the reality of the intangible component of all visible things, including human beings. Opoku, sums this up as ... *the unseen is as much a part of the reality as that which is seen*. He sees this as being related to Achebe's notion of duality. In other words, there is a complementary relationship between the tangible and the intangible, with the spiritual being more powerful than the material.[16]

At the core of *Akan* belief is the 'Supreme Being' called *Onyame*, God, who is placed outside the pantheon and is eternal. He is creator of the universe and is given attributes such as the 'Giver of Life'. He is also seen as the 'Grand Ancestor', 'Giver of Sun or Light', 'Rain' and the 'Sustainer of all things'. *Onyame* is the great deity who is self-begotten, infinite and self-born and at the same time both male and female. His unique position in *Akan* philosophy is evident by the names attributed to Him, which are not shared by any other divinity.[17]

It is generally believed that *Onyame* delegates some of His powers to lesser spirit beings who are actively involved in the daily activities of this world. *Abosom*, as they are called, are graded into different categories in a descending scale from *o̲manbosom* (state god), those owned by *bor̲on* (districts), to others venerated by lineages and individuals in their own homes, sometimes known as 'private' gods. *Abosom* are usually envisaged as personified spirits or as taking on other forms, such as animals endowed with spiritual powers to bless or kill. It is the artists' responsibility to translate these beliefs into concrete artworks or into an abode to house the deity. The artist may see a form through a spiritual encounter and translate it into an exact shape of its attributes. Some sculptures of deities - or their representations - are based on descriptions narrated to the artist by an adherent or priest. The type of locus representing the deity may be a building, a mound, a figure, a pot of water or anything else the priest or the artist may decide upon.

Some *Akan* sculptures are associated with religion. This genre includes those which adorn shrines, ancestral and charm figures, stools used in initiation rites, abodes for spirits and a variety of ritual paraphernalia. Some of these artworks are believed to possess the spiritual essence necessary to sustain life or support a particular activity. They are 'fed' and venerated during life's daily activities, through rites and rituals, so that through sculptures the *Akan* have access to spirit beings and the powers whose assistance they seek.

The *Akan* belief system means they make efforts to live in harmony with their environment, and as a community they establish and maintain very good, close links with the intangible aspects of the world in which they live. Therefore, when there are changes in the climate, or the season produces plenty of rain, a bountiful harvest or a good catch, or when someone is able to move successfully from one stage in life to the next, it is marked with a celebration which involves the community, the gods, deities and the ancestors. Central to all these activities are rites, rituals, and ceremonies which are themselves artworks of a sort, all acting as mediums through which contact with the spirit beings can be established and maintained. Artworks become physical embodiments of *Akan* beliefs as well as visual

expressions of their aesthetic tastes and preferences.

Several religious rites and social celebrations use art to mark these occasions. To ensure a successful occasion or season, adequate preparations must be made for the celebration. Some of the rites for these physical, social and seasonal changes are performed at the birth of a child, as children are seen as important members of the family. On the eighth day after birth, the child is brought out into the open for a naming ceremony that takes place very early in the morning. The *Akan* believe that after eight days it will be clear whether or not the child will survive. It also allows time for the child to settle into his or her new environment and get acclimatised. The child is given a name, usually by the father, while an adult family member explains to the new-born the virtues and morals associated with the name they have been given and gives them advice about the importance of truth and honesty. In order to represent what childbirth means, the clothes, beads and other jewellery are all white, the colour that symbolises happiness and success in childbirth. A combination of white and other colours may also be worn but they must all symbolise a happy occasion.

The transition from childhood to adolescence is not considered a physiological phenomenon alone; it is characterised by puberty rites, performed only for girls. It involves a religious and cultural ceremony known as *bragr̲o̲*. In this ceremony, a deity will be consulted to ascertain the appropriateness of the rites to be undertaken. In brief, the ceremony involves an early morning cold bath and a jubilant response with songs from family members and well-wishers after the bath. The initiate lowers her bottom three times to touch a white stool which rests on a mat, her helpers dress her from head to knee leaving only her face uncovered and a brass bowl is placed nearby in which to collect gifts of money. There is also a dance performance and other activities for the initiates either individually or collectively. Several forms of both tangible and intangible heritage are expressed here with artworks acting as a link between the two as well as helping to focus attention on the essence of the celebration.[18] It is through these works, which become vehicles for the visual expression of *Akan* beliefs and values, and which brings joy and significance, that the ceremony becomes effective and complete. These ceremonies are not valid if there are no tangible materials to demonstrate the importance of the occasion. The crowning moment of these rites comes with the use of clothes and jewellery to depict the new status of the initiate.

The next important stage in life that is celebrated after *bragr̲o̲* is marriage. This is a social arrangement between a man and a woman with the consent, and in the presence, of both families, thus creating an alliance between the two families. *Akan* marriage is a union that places a set of rights, responsibilities and obligations on both the man and the woman. Marriage ceremonies are regulated by custom mainly in the form of payments or exchange of valuables as a means of sealing the relationship and establishing a 'legal marriage.' The most important of these exchanges is the presentation of gifts, bride-wealth, by the man and his kin to the woman's family. This places an obligation on both the donors and the recipients and their families to ensure the success of the marriage. Bride-wealth takes the form of money, drinks, clothing, cooking utensils, beads, jewellery, items of value and souvenirs, or anything else that may be determined by the woman's family. These articles of value, largely of an artistic nature, are permanent reminders of the event and therefore move from being marriage gifts and works of art to becoming documents and evidence of the event and of the ceremony at which they were presented. They become the tangible evidence that the ceremony took place. In the event of a divorce it is these items that are returned to annul the marriage.

Death is the final rite of passage. It is considered to be transient, the dead continue to be members of their families and their relationship with the living remains unbroken. This means the living have an obligation to venerate their ancestors from time to time, especially during festivals, and the ancestors have the reciprocal responsibility of protecting their families and overseeing their conduct. Ancestors are believed to play an important role in *Akan* life and a number of deeds are attributed to them. In order to merit recognition of ancestorship, a person must have upheld the social ethics and values, and should have fulfilled the expectations of his society during his or her lifetime. As a result of these achievements in life, his relationship with the living continues and is maintained by the chief who derives his authority from the ancestors.

As explained earlier, the traditional colour for funerals is black for the ordinary mourners, but close relatives may wear *k̲o̲ben*, bright red, and distant relatives may clothe themselves in *kuntunkunu*, which is umber. Families may choose to commemorate the death of an

aged member by wearing white or a combination of black and white to celebrate the long successful life of the deceased. *Nyanya* leaves made into wreaths and hung around the mourners' necks show the political status of the dead person, and his or her relationship to the wearers and therefore how deeply they will be grieving. Wearing the right colour to show how close you were to the deceased, and how deeply you are mourning, is also very important. The colour of clothes and all the articles used for the burial and funeral ceremonies are dictated by traditional codes. They are important in identifying the different groups of mourners, their roles and the customs to be performed. Colours therefore speak at funerals.

The cornerstone of *Akan* polity is the relationship between the dead and the living, established and maintained through stools. Because the owner used it frequently, a stool is believed to be close to the user, and therefore will provide a good channel to reach the spirit of a dead person. A typical stool is carved in three parts, namely the base, middle and the crescent shaped seat. The middle part often contains a proverb or saying. A 'blackened stool' is created through a ritual of pouring a libation on to the last stool on which a chief sat before dying, and then smearing it with blood, fat, alcohol, salt and soot. As this is being done, prayers are offered and the spirits – including that of the deceased - are invoked so the stool can be inhabited by the spirits of the ancestors when their presence is sought. This gives the stool a dual, practical and spiritual, purpose. Therefore, black stools are venerated as sacred objects and 'fed'. The blackened stools are auspicious and are dedicated to the spirits of the dead and are purposely treated to appear black. The black colour for these stools also creates a reverential atmosphere in the stool rooms. There are other stools, which represent past chiefs like the one shown in Figure 1. This artwork in the form of a stool represents the spirit of the dead and is a physical reminder of the past chief and of his deeds, and is venerated at festivals and other appointed times.

Festivals establish and renew relations between the living and the 'living dead' - ancestors, gods and deities - through various spiritual and physical activities and objects. Typically, all these activities have dual aspects, the seen and the unseen. *Akan* festivals are complex celebrations in which the ancestors and gods are invited, 'fed' and venerated. Other celebrations include the planting of new food crops, the beginning of the new fishing or farming season, the chief accounting for the year's stewardship, family reunions and the mourning of those who have died during the year. An important feature of all these ceremonies is how they culminate in the display of several artworks, many of which represent past users and are therefore reminders of them. These artworks are also the channel for propitiations and requests to the ancestors and the gods. Art stands at the centre, negotiating between the spirit beings and humankind.

The meanings of *adinkra* symbols

In the next few paragraphs, I shall explore the way this duality of spiritual and material, tangible and intangible, unseen and seen is depicted in abstract *adinkra* symbols,



Figure 1
Akuapem Omanhene Stool representing past *Okuapehenfo*, Akropong, 2001



Figure 2
An *adinkra* symbol saying *Nyame, biribi wo suru na ma me nsanka,* meaning, "God, there is something in heaven, let me receive it."

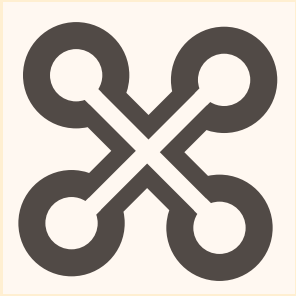


Figure 3
An adinkra symbol saying *Onyame nwu na me awu*, meaning, "God does not die therefore I shall not die."

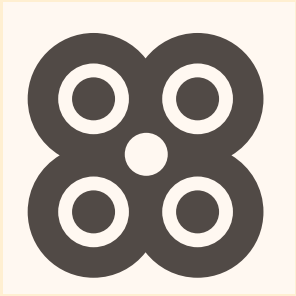


Figure 4
Mate masie, signifying wisdom, knowledge and prudence.



Figure 5
*Dwennimmen.*This is a symbol of humility and strength, wisdom and learning.

to balance a work as well as validating it within the community. The *Akan* believe all things come from *Onyame* and they expect to receive things from Him. They say *Nyame, biribi wo suru na ma me nsa nka*, meaning, 'God, there is something in heaven, let me receive it.' This proverb is not only a verbal expression based on a belief, but has also been transformed into a tangible art work (see Figure 2) as one of the several *adinkra* symbols.

Adinkra symbols come in a variety of geometric designs which represent various proverbs. The original designs were etched or carved out from fragments of calabash into various forms[19] using three piece of sticks stuck into the calabash with the edges tied together at the end. This is held and dipped into black dye derived from the *badie* tree.[20] The bark of this tree is cut up and boiled in a pot with several lumps of slag (*etia*). This dark liquid is called *adinkra duru* (*adinkra* medicine). *Adinkra* designs again touch upon a wide range of religious and moral themes as well as proverbs, and are made as geometric, stylised representations of inanimate and animate objects, abstract symbols of proverbs and actual representational designs such as the heart, all of which have interesting meanings. [21]

God is linked to the sky and is believed to manifest Himself in various ways expressed in proverbs such as *Asaase trew na Onyame ne payin*, meaning, 'the earth is wide but *Onyame* is foremost.' The Akan experience and belief in God is expressed in other concrete, tangible forms. A tree (*Alstonia boonei*) is known as *Nyame dua*, 'God's tree', and is seen as a symbol of man's dependence on Him, and is used extensively in carving.

The eternity of God and the spirit of humankind is embodied in the Akan maxim *Onyame nwu na mawu*, meaning, 'God does not die, therefore I shall also not die.' The visual link between this expression and art is shown in the *adinkra* symbol in Figure 3. There are several other examples of the way in which the intangible permeates and addresses almost every type of issue and theme. In Figure 4, the design is *matemasie*, a symbol signifying wisdom, knowledge and prudence. The design of *dwennimmen*, the ram's horn (Figure 5) means humility, strength, wisdom and learning as being the essential qualities needed to excel in any endeavour. These designs are stamped on plain cotton fabrics called *adinkra* cloth, and are used for a variety of social functions including naming ceremonies and funerals.

It is generally accepted among the *Akan* that death is an inevitable part of human existence and this idea has its *adinkra* symbol - *obi nforo owu antwere nsan*, meaning, 'a person does not climb the ladder of death and return' Death is unavoidable in life and this symbol of a ladder reminds all humankind of the fact of death, and consequently of the need to live an upright life. The *Akan* believe that death does not end life because a person's soul does not die, but passes on from this world to that of the ancestors. Because this symbol is so often used, worn and seen, it reminds observers of the reality of death.

These *adinkra* designs have gained nationwide acknowledgement because of their symbolic nature. In this instance, the verbal and non-verbal, visible and invisible merge into a single symbol often used in

Ghanaian life. Hence, many have become national symbols and are used on academic and religious gowns and cassocks, in architecture and in interior decoration, in churches, as emblems and logos of both private and state organisations, as jewellery designs, in modern printed fabrics, and, until recently, on the old national currency notes (the *cedi*).

Reading the intangible in *Akan* art

Thus far, I have attempted to give the context of the *Akan* world view and to show how the intangible aspects of their culture have been transformed into works of art. My intention now is to interpret a number of *Akan* artworks to illustrate my contention that almost every *Akan* work has two aspects - the physical work and a deeper meaning that has to be understood or explained. For example, in architecture there is the building itself and then the cultural factors that determine how different parts of the building are used. How different spaces are used is culturally very important, and any change is usually significant. *Akan* buildings are square or rectangular, and they either stand alone or are grouped round a courtyard. The courtyards in the middle of domestic units are used for various household activities. Domestic dwellings and palaces vary greatly with social, political, cultural differences in the way they are built. Different households have different sorts of buildings, for example, a farming family will have barns for the storage of agricultural produce; houses for people who have political positions will have a *dampan*, or open sitting space, where guests can be received and cases discussed. Sometimes a section of the residential unit will be reserved for the planting of spices and medicinal plants for household use. A study of the design of *Akan* architecture shows the link between practical needs and the relationship to intangible cultural values.

European buildings - forts, castles, trading posts, residences for European officials, churches, Christian institutions, houses built of stone – have all influenced *Akan* architecture. The Europeans hired and trained local artisans, introduced a money economy and enabled local merchants to become rich and this, too, has affected the way the *Akan* build, though the *Akan* architectural heritage is still evident. There has been a change from traditional mud and thatch buildings through stone and wooden ones with several storeys, to contemporary European-influenced styles.

The Fante *asafo* (a traditional military and socio-political organisation) *posuban* (military shrines) and *frankaa* (flags) present us with further evidence of the importance of intangible culture. They contain a considerable number of symbols, which have to be interpreted to be understood.[22] The *posuban*, an example of which is seen in Figure 7, are not merely shrines, the local and foreign symbols on them bear witness to their adherents' experiences and struggles in defence of their art and culture.

The *asafo* copied the manufacture and use of flags from the Europeans who lived on the Gold Coast. The *Fante*, in providing services for the European traders, adopted flags and used them in various ways - in war and conflicts, in formation marching and as a focus for salutation. The flags represent the values of the *asafo*, serve as a form of identity and pay tribute to previous leaders who created and used them. As a result, they act

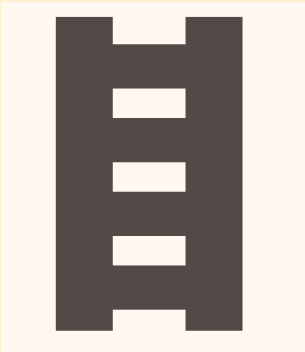




Figure 6
An *Adinkra* symbol saying *Obi nforo owo antwere nsan*, meaning, "no one climbs the ladder of death and returns."

Figure 7
Gomoa Dago No. 2 Dentsefo Posuban.





Figure 8
Osua otow ma ne nsa bo su, meaning "the monkey jumps only as far as it can," 1999.

Figure 9
Abofraba tsew muko a oka n'enyiwa, meaning "when a child picks peppers it gets into its eyes," 1999.

as religious icons and as abodes for the ancestors when invoked and act as historical documents that contain messages to be read.

Fante asafo flags and *posuban* are iconographic and contain a wide range of symbols and messages. These intangible aspects provide interesting information that complements and completes the actual flags. Without a clear intangible content these flags have no meaning or value. These intangible ideas are translated into zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms based on *Fante* culture. In creating them, *asafo* companies aptly express their thoughts through combining, mixing or contrasting symbols that are linked to *Fante* proverbs. The intangible messages and their meanings help enhance the aesthetic appreciation of *asafo* and *Akan* art in general.

The flag in Figure 8, is not just a picture of two trees with a monkey between them, its meaning is to be found in a *Fante* proverb which advises members of the community to be cautious and try to avoid trouble - *osua otow ma ne nsa bo su*, meaning, 'the monkey jumps only as far as it can' – rather like the English proverb 'look before you leap'. In pictorial form this appears as a monkey falling as it tries to jump from one tree to the other. Although monkeys can perform skilful acrobatics and manoeuvres in the trees, they have to realise that there could be dire consequences if they make a misjudgement.

Another flag with a bushy tree explains a proverb about uncertainty and hidden danger - *dua wusuu wokoase mbarimba*, meaning, 'it is only the brave who venture to go underneath a bushy tree.' In this context a bushy tree is understood to mean danger. Figure 9 shows another example of a pictorial proverb. A boy is pointing to a tree and two others are looking on. Technically, the design is balanced and framed with triangular patterns. But more importantly, the flag expresses the importance of good behaviour and self-evaluation. The figures of the two children on the right attempting to pick peppers are meant to warn other *asafo* companies with the proverb *abofraba tsew muko a oka n'enyiwa*, meaning, 'if a child picks peppers it gets into its eyes'. The warning comes from the child on the left who is pointing to the plant. In other words, if you are a small or weak *asafo* company, you must behave as such, be like a child and avoid provoking stronger companies. A flag with a lion on it may not simply imply strength, but rather invoke another proverb - *awendade a wewu no osin osibo a nanyi kan*, meaning 'a dead lion is greater than a living leopard.' This means that a powerful *asafo* at its weakest is nevertheless stronger than a weak rival at the peak of its strength.

Another type of *Akan* artworks are *akyeampoma*, staffs which are symbols of office for the *okyeame*, or spokespersons. At all functions, a public speech is given by one of the *okyeame*, who has been appointed to speak on behalf of an elder or a chief, as seen in Figure 10. The *okyeame* is expected to embellish the chief's speech with appropriate linguistic flourishes, with *Akan* values and proverbs being cited at appropriate intervals. He also has to display the appropriate *akyeampoma*. *Akyeampoma* are made of wood, sometimes cast in gold, covered with gold leaf or painted. The finials of *akyeampoma* can take many and varied forms. The motifs or finials on the *akyeampoma* are non-verbal expressions linking verbal texts with motifs and symbols. They represent proverbs and sayings which have chains of metaphorical associations and can be applied to a range of subjects.

Akan akyempoma embody information about ethical and moral values and are used as an unspoken form of communication at public gatherings and in government.

The most commonly used staff is *asempa ye tia*, meaning, 'the truth is brief' implying that there is no need for long speeches. Another example of an *akyeampoma* image is the depiction of a small boy holding the tail of a lion, *Kobia nnim gyata*, meaning, 'a boy does not know a lion'. This suggests naivety, ignorance, innocence and uninformed behaviour when in danger. Other proverbial *akyeampoma* finials are, *wonsa demu a yen ndi ngya wo*, meaning, 'if your hands are in a meal you are not left out of it,' *akokobre nim se adi akye nso otiae afi onini ano*, meaning, 'the hen knows it is dawn but waits for the cock to crow.' This one suggests orderliness and respect forleadership. *Kyeremerekuku, me be wu ma esie ewu*, is another, and can be translated as 'when *Kyeremerekuku* dies the ant hill will collapse.' *Kyeremerekuku* is the queen termite, and her death is likened to the loss of an important person.[23] Two antelopes standing beside each other depict the proverb *hwe me aniso ma me nti na atwe nam mieno*, meaning, 'it is for the sake of blowing foreign matter from each others eyes that antelopes walk in pairs,' which means people should care for each other. Others proverbs stress the importance of consultation such as, *ti koro nko agyina*, in which two or three heads are carved or cast together, meaning, 'one person does not take a unilateral decision.' The symbols on these *akyeampoma* represent spoken *Akan* language made visible through art. Every spokesperson's *akyeampoma* carries a message. The designs and their meanings are inseparable.

These are just a few examples of the relationship between the intangible and tangible aspects of *Akan* heritage. Their knowledge of technology and history and the environment are all combined into other art forms. Further examples of the expression of intangible culture are seen in figurines cast in brass, commonly called gold weights, but in their symbolic context they are specifically called *mrammoo*, or 'proverb weights'. Cast brass figurines were made to record significant ideas and were sometimes kept along with jewellery, gold dust or nuggets. These figurines cover a wide range of themes including human figures in different postures, food crops, marine life, animals, musical instruments, military accoutrements and proverbs. When assembled chronologically - either by style or development - they represent the past, a history of art, events over time and act as a visible, tangible reminder of those things. As is typical of the *Akan*, proverbs are also used in metal artwork. In the Institute of African Studies collection of brass works, there is one depicting two mud fishes, apparently biting each others' tails thus forming a loop called *obi nka obi*, meaning 'no one bites a friend'. This is quite a common form and illustrates the importance of living in harmony (Figure 11). The *funtumirefunu denkyemmirefunu*, two crocodiles with one stomach, symbolises the division of power between various people[24] and is also as a symbol of unity in diversity. The



Figure 10
The *Okuapehene*'s spokesperson speaking, Akropong Akuapem, 2001







Figure 11
Obi nka obi, "no one bites the other" meaning, friends must live in peace, Institute of African Studies, Legon 2006.

Figure 12
Cast brass in a proverb '*funtumirefunu denkyemmirefunu*' is also a symbol of unity in diversity, Institute of African Studies, Legon 2006.

Figure 13
Forowa, brass sheet container with sankofa bird on one side and another bird on the other, Institute of African Studies, Legon 2006.

meaning given to the two crocodiles, which have the same stomach, is that they need not fight each other for food, as it will end up in the same place (Figure 12).

From these works we can learn about *Akan* values, but they also tell us about the history of importing brassware from the northern trade centres of Jenne and Timbuktu in Mali and from Europe, and about the *cire perdue*, or 'lost wax' technique used in their manufacture. The range of brass works includes *kuduo* (cast brass containers for the storage of gold, jewellery and precious items, which are also used in various rituals). These are of Islamic origin but tell us about the *Akan* ability to borrow from other cultures, innovate and make foreign forms their own. The *forowa* (containers made out of sheet brass to store body lotions such as shea butter, see Figure 13) point to the use of imported sheet metal and show how items made from it also reveal aspects of *Akan* culture. The example of an *Akan* proverb on this *forowa* shows a typical *Akan* composition of a bird with its head turned backwards, called *sankofa*, meaning, 'reaching back to ancient wisdom.' From this container we can also see the combination of geometric designs on the lid as well as on the container itself. These may show Islamic influence. These containers are a reflection of trade, Islamic religion and design, technology and *Akan* thought all linked and bound together. My informant, Agya Kweku Manu[25] of Kuroforo, told me of the importance of making these *forowa* and figurines. According to him, his ancestors made them in order to teach the younger generation the skill of casting to represent ideas so that the technology, and knowledge, would not be forgotten.

Items made of clay have been found in many archaeological sites and they also provide useful information about *Akan* culture. Pottery is one of the oldest crafts as it is fairly easy to make. Pots are used for cooking, food storage, as palm wine and water containers, cooking utensils, in the transportation of liquids for trade and to store rain water or water collected from rivers which is believed to help create a home for deities. Other types of pottery are used for ceremonial and religious activities. Pots have acquired a religious significance because they are made from the earth, which the *Akan* also refer to as *Asaase Yaa*, the venerated Earth goddess. Funerary terracotta urns are used in burial ceremonies, to remember the dead and mark grave sites. Some are in the form of pots called *abusua kuruwa*, they establish a link between the earth in which the dead are buried and the material which is used to create a memorial for the departed. *Akan* funerary terracotta urns have become treasured works, which help to identify burial sites and tell us about the ceremonies that separate the dead from the living. These clearly link the tangible clay works to the concept of death, preservation of memory and even sometimes to veneration and family rituals. Their stylistic approach to the busts and the variations in which they have been made is a departure from wooden sculpture, which emphasises different parts of the body.

Akan views on masculinity and feminity are seen in

the types of work each produces. Craftwork is gender-based with men often working on difficult materials such as wood and metal. Women usually work on the softer materials like clay, cotton and plant fibre. Women have traditionally worked with beads though today this is changing. Beads are, however, used by both sexes and worn around the neck, arm, wrist, knee, waist and ankle. Beads are used for social, medicinal, political and religious purposes. They can be used in rites of passage, they may have religious significance, they can be status symbols or enhance sexual roles. Beads are also fashion items and can be used in faith based healing rituals. Some beads are also given names such as, *ahene pa nkasa*, meaning 'good beads do not speak,' or *teteaso, abodom, bota, nwewa,* and *ahwene kokoo* (red beads). Again, beads are another art form with links to intangible heritage.

Musical instruments such as drums call the community together and are used to sound out histories, warnings and to praise chiefs and play tunes for royal, religious, secular and social dances and occasions. Drum language is non-verbal but it is understood by the *Akan.* The drum becomes the medium through which the intangible heritage of drum language is expressed and communicated. Horns also sound particular tunes as verbal messages. For example, *Okuapehene* has one which sounds *owuo yi oo, owuo,* meaning, 'this death oh death.' Its deep sound was played in the past when *Okuapehene* was about to pass a death sentence on a guilty person.[26] *Mamfe asese ben* sound texts include *Osafo Tenten Kantanka*, meaning, 'the great, tall warrior Kantanka.'[27] A horn made out of ivory and decorated with the jaws of a human victim was associated with the ancestral deity called Apafram of Breman-Asikuma, and its sound text is *Onipa a oye mahu no. Akwasi Apafram a ote mmoawe so. Akwasi gyegye ma wo ho. Akwasi ennye wo a,* which means 'he who offended me has been seen by me, Akwasi Apafram who sits on jaws. Akwasi accept it for yourself, Akwasi it was not you,' implying that he knows who has acted as traitor.[28] These musical instruments, which are also artworks in their own right, are actually used to communicate non-verbally.

One of the best-known pieces of *Akan* wood sculpture is the *Akuaba* (Akua's child) doll. Oral tradition has it that it originated from the legend of an infertile woman called Akua. She is said to have consulted a priest who commissioned a small wooden doll to be carved for her as a surrogate child. She was, however, mocked by fellow villagers who referred to the doll as *Akuaba*, 'Akua's baby', but she eventually conceived and gave birth to a child. Since then, this type of doll has represented the story of Akua's experience of infertility andchildbirth. Similar dolls have since been created and used to address infertility problems. *Akuaba* dolls are still made as talismans for the delivery of healthy children and their traditional form shows us the *Akan* concept of beauty. They are, however, also made as children's toys and for sale to tourists.

Conclusion

Akan art embodies invaluable cultural, philosophical, scientific and technological information. It reflects beliefs, proverbs, histories and various intangible ideas made



Figure 14
Akuaba (*Akua*'s child) dolls originally made by a priest to cure infertility

tangible, thus establishing an indivisible link between art and the intangible. The objects seen during ceremonies, in museums and in private collections are only the superficial evidence of centuries of deep-seated knowledge and experience. Just as the *Akan* philosophy of the unseen being as real as the seen, and Achebe's view of the notion of duality, and the general principle of pairs - left and right, negative and positive - a large number of *Akan* art objects consist of two sides, the tangible and the intangible. They are complementary, as the tangible helps explain the intangible and vice versa. It is only when we understand this duality of subject matter and subject in *Akan* art that we can arrive at a full and complete understanding of it. *Akan* art is largely symbolic and contains unseen meanings that can only to be read in conjunction with the physical object.

In this article, I have argued that *Akan* artworks are not mere objects, art for art's sake, but expressions of an intangible heritage which is inseparably bound to the tangible object. Artworks reinforce *Akan* religious and philosophical beliefs, making them complement one another and serve as historical documents and resource material for the study of the roles the tangible and the intangible play in *Akan* culture. To understand *Akan* art means a dual journey, first to enjoy the seen and second to interrogate the unseen to uncover its layers of meaning. These complementary roles make artworks serve as pictographs to be read, taking the viewer far beyond aesthetic values and concepts of beauty. *Akan* art represents the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the intangible, and is inextricably linked to the religious beliefs, cultural values and aesthetics that sustain the *Akan* community.

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Notes on *Akan* spelling and pronunciation

The letter ɛ is written as the reverse of the number 3 and pronounced like the 'e' in 'egg'. The letter ɔ is written as the reverse of the character 'c' and pronounced like the 'o' in 'orange'.

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21. Rattray (op cit.) recorded about fifty-three of them in 1926.
22. Labi, K. A., 1992.
23. Kofi Antubam has illustrated symbolic objects adorning state regalia, and described their use, the proverbs they represent and the traditional significance attached to them, op cit. pp.165-184.
24. ibid. p.106.
25. Interview with Agya Kweku Manu, a sub-chief in Kuroforo, a suburb of Kumasi, conducted on Wednesday 14th February 2007, at Kuroforo, where brass casting is a major occupation; it is still the largest single place for the production of brass works in the *Ashanti* region.
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Let the objects speak: online museums and indigenous cultural heritage

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Let the objects speak: online museums and indigenous cultural heritage

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ABSTRACT
This paper seeks to contribute to the critical debate about curatorial practices and how museums can be transformed into cultural centres that are 'decolonising' their objects whilst simultaneously providing social agency to marginalised groups such as indigenous peoples. An exploration of new media theory, installation art and online museums allows us to examine to what extent an online museum might provide scope to further the debate about how indigenous heritage can be displayed and curated. Through a case study of a hypothetical online museum of the *San's* culture, we theorise and explore in what shape and form an online museum might play a role in the communication, support, and safeguarding of the culture and heritage of the *San*. While online museums may, and have, taken various forms, we argue that a digitised reproduction of three dimensional objects within virtual rooms is not a valuable method for achieving inclusivity. Instead, inspired by new media art, we engage with a new way of classifying material which allows interactivity and communication between the visitor and curator (i.e. indigenous peoples) through the creation of both the database of, and the interface(s) to, the material archived in the online indigenous museum.

Introduction

The call for museums to become more inclusive is not a new one. Ever since the American civil rights movement in the 1960s voiced an open dissatisfaction towards museums for only serving a cultural elite, museums have been criticised for reflecting only 'white' values when displaying and interpreting 'non-western' art (Jones, 1993; Barringer and Flynn, 1998; Simpson, 2001). There is

a growing body of literature that argues that museums have a social role to fulfil within society (see e.g. Pearce, 1994; Jones, 1993; Barringer & Flynn, 1998; Simpson, 2001; Stanley, 2007). For example, a collection of scholarly essays in *Museums, Society and Inequality* (Sandell, 2002) explore to what extent museums can, and are, willing to fulfil their new role of social agency to influence and affect society in order to combat social inequality. The authors illustrate, through critically engaging with a diverse set of case studies and theoretical frameworks, how museums can (i) impact positively on the lives of disadvantaged and/or marginalised individuals; (ii) act as a catalyst for social regeneration;
(iii) become vehicles for empowerment and (iv) contribute towards a more equitable society. In particular, the debate about the responsibility of museums to respect indigenous peoples' rights (Kelly and Gordon, 2002; Butts, 2002) has caught our attention on the basis of our previous research experience with regard to the protection of the tangible and intangible heritage of the *San* in Southern Africa[1] (Martin and Vermeylen, 2005; Vermeylen, 2007; Vermeylen, 2008a; Vermeylen et al, 2008; Vermeylen, 2008b).

This paper contributes to the critical debate about curatorial practices and how museums can be transformed into cultural centres that are 'decolonising' their objects, whilst simultaneously providing social agency to marginalised groups such as indigenous peoples. In this sense, our paper builds further upon the body of literature that started roughly with Peter Vergo's (1989) new museology theory in the late 1980s which called for the transformation of the museum from a site of worship to a site that engages with multiple discourses and critical reflections. Acknowledging the recent literature on new and democratised museum practices in general and in particular the concept of indigenous museums (Stanley, 2007), our contribution extends somewhat beyond the conventional disciplinary borders of museum studies: we incorporate in our paper a combination of theoretical insights from new media theory (Manovich, 2001; 2003; Vesna, 2007) and practical insights gained from our own work with the *San* (Vermeylen, 2007; Vermeylen 2008a) and analysing artworks which question previous curatorial practices (*'Warte Mal! Prostitution After the Velvet Revolution'; 'Pasifika Styles'; 'Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women'; 'Public Secrets'; 'Need_X_Change'; 'Palabras'*)[2] This exploration of installation art, online museums and new media art allows us to examine to what extent an online museum might provide scope to further the debate about how indigenous heritage can be displayed and curated with a particular focus on how the voices of indigenous peoples' can be more prominently embedded in museum and cultural heritage practices.

The paper is structured as follows. We start with a review of the remit of the indigenous museum. We then 'zoom in' for a critical look at the role of objects in such museums. Subsequently we examine the premise of online museums and explore what role they can play in the communication, support and safeguarding of the voices, history and lived experiences of indigenous peoples.

New museum practices

Traditional methods of displaying indigenous heritage are now regarded with deep suspicion and resentment by indigenous peoples (Simpson, 2001). Within the context of museum practice, a number of related issues such as the appropriation, ownership and repatriation of culture together with the treatment of sensitive and sacred

materials and the stereotyping of the identity of indigenous peoples have been increasingly questioned over the last two decades (Carter, 1994; Simpson, 2001). In response to these criticisms, museum practitioners became increasingly aware that not only have they a duty of care to an object, responsibility also extends to other social functions of the museum and in particular lies in its relationship with people (Besterman, 2006). As a result, for the last two decades significant changes have taken place in the social interaction between museums and indigenous peoples as can be illustrated in the context of Canadian and Australian museum practices.

The catalyst that made Canadian museums look at themselves was an exhibition in Calgary, Alberta in 1988 – *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* (Gibbons, 1997). Despite the fact that six curators were involved in organising the exhibition, none of them was of native origin. The omission of the native voice in the exhibition generated a debate about ownership and voice. Eventually, in 1992, a document – *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships between Museums and First Peoples* - was published outlining how museums should engage more inclusively with their audiences and significant 'others'. One of the major guidelines in the report was the appointment of First Nations' members to museum boards and their closer involvement as either co-curators or curators when organising exhibitions.

The *Crocodile Hole* meeting in Kimberley where Aboriginal elders debated their cultural practices can be identified as the turning point in Australian museum practice leading to the publishing ofthe *Report of the State Task Force for Museums Policy* in 1992 and the development of the policy document *Previous Possessions, New Obligations: Policies for Museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* in 1993 (Galla, 1994; 2008). The debate about the closer involvement of indigenous peoples in museum practices has since further evolved, focusing on new challenges such as exploring indigenous peoples' histories, heritage and identity from an indigenous perspective. This to the extent that, for example, the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington now even acknowledges the importance of cultural over object preservation (Shelton, 2006), an issue that will be further discussed later in this paper.

Indeed, it is now almost common practice for museums to establish close relationships and collaboration projects with indigenous peoples. The diversity of case studies is just too vast to discuss in detail in this paper (Carter, 1994; Simpson, 2001; Butts, 2002; Kelly & Gordon, 2002; Stanley, 2007). It is important to highlight, though, that while many museums must be applauded, like Casey (2003) does, for their efforts to include indigenous peoples in their museum practices (as artists, curators or by returning sacred objects to the source communities) the need for facilitating agency and dialogue remains high as long as indigenous peoples' lives are *reduced to an abstract set of largely arbitrary material items displayed without much sense of meaning* (Stanley, 2007: 3). This feeling is shared by Aboriginal writers who describe museums as being institutions of scientific colonialism continuing to control the representation of aboriginal arts and culture (Simpson, 2001). One of the biggest challenges we are dealing with extends beyond the material expropriation and displaying of non-western objects. As already highlighted in 1992 in *Turning the Page,* but featuring even more prominently in the standards formulated by international intergovernmental organisations (e.g. the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,* 2007) and international non-governmental organisations (e.g. the International Council of Museums), respecting and recognising the 'the First Voice' (Galla, 2008) should become one of the leading ethical principles guiding museum practices. As Martinez (2006) argues, the expropriation of traditional cultural properties is just one symptom of the larger illness that has plagued the United States and that was silencing and distorting the history and voice of the Native American community.

This point was also raised earlier by Salvador (1994) when she examined the issue of representation and voice in the context of the exhibition *The Art of being Kuna: Expressive Culture of the San Blas Islands, Panama.* Salvador points out that there might be a conflict of interest between those involved in the exhibition (i.e. the *Kuna* people) and those in control of the process (i.e. the museum professionals such as the curators). While the *Kuna's* main concern about the exhibition was

> *... to provide a better understanding of their society and their accomplishment and, in part, to make cultural arguments as part of the rationale for the maintenance of their integrity, to support their rights, and to protect their autonomy.* (Salvador, 1994: 50)

For the staff of the museum, on the other hand, the goals were in part

> *... to explore the ways in which Kuna men and women express themselves through verbal and visual arts, and to foster an understanding of how the Kuna evaluate and critique the aesthetic value of their art, thereby challenging notions of the universality of western aesthetic principles.*(Salvador, 1994: 50)

As we agree with Salvador, no matter how good the intention to include indigenous peoples in the curatorial practices may be, the fact that indigenous peoples might have a (political) perspective about the exhibition that differs from the ideological foundation of the museum enterprise, is, indeed, a challenge that must not be overlooked in the discussion of the inclusive museum. This relates to, arguably, one of the most important challenges relating to the concept of an indigenous museum, viz. how to present the past and present without creating an essentialised 'other'.[3]

As Stanley (2007) summarises, the modernising agenda of the museum continues to be heavily embedded in the belief that traditional cultural beliefs, practices and material manifestations must be saved. In other words, exhibitions focusing on indigenous peoples fail to show them as dynamic, living cultures (Simpson, 2001). This raises the issue that museums recreate the past (Sepúlveda dos Santos, 2003) while indigenous peoples' interests can be best described *in terms of contemporaneity* (Stanley, 2007: 7). Indigenous peoples' interest in museums can best be understood in terms of using their (historical) collections and institutions to address contemporary issues. Or, indeed, as Sepúlveda dos Santos argues, in order for museums to be true places of memory it is important that the museum makes the link between the past and contemporary issues, or uses its objects in such a way that those objects emphasise the *persistence of lived experiences transmitted through generations* (2003: 29).

A good example of this practice is the work of the *Hopi-Tewa* artist, Dan Namingha. He is a painter and sculptor with a strong modern vision and turns originality into a re-visioning of tradition. Martínez (2006) compares Namingha's artistic work to the philosophy of the Maori intellectual, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who argues that projects relating to indigenous peoples can only be projects wherein the people and their culture can represent themselves. For Namingha, this approach translates into works of art that are characterised by a blend of ancient *Hopi* symbols and contemporary Western visual styling (Martinez, 2006). A similar approach is also followed by some *San* artists. For example, Coex'ae Qgam depicts in *Guitars and Shapes* items that derive from the 'modern' world. Other artists not only engage with modern objects in their paintings, they flirt with postmodern aspects such as juxtaposing or conflating old motifs with new ones. Another contemporary *San* artist, Xg'oa Mangana depicts in his painting the traditional spirit, //Gauwa, who points to watches and pants with his eyes resembling the details of the watches' dials. One of Xg'oa Mangana's favourite pictures is his self-portrait wherein he has painted himself as a blend of modernism and traditionalism representing both a farm worker – with the boots, socks and t-shirt – and a trance dancer – by standing in the posture of trance: erect with an intent gaze and entoptics (geometric designs) whirling about his head (Guenther, 2006). Ames (1994) argues that these *voices from the margin* must be understood in the context of a post-colonial morality, critical of mainstream Eurocentric narratives. If museums want to be more inclusive and live up to the expectation that they will facilitate dialogue, they will have to create a space for non-essentialised indigenous voices (Ames, 1994).

So while museums are increasingly becoming aware that they must facilitate social change, and often have achieved this through collaborative exhibitions built by indigenous peoples and museum practitioners working together, as Krmpotich and Anderson (2005) make us aware, this process also calls for a wider engagement in the context of the indigenous rights movement as epitomised in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. In other words, while western museums must be applauded for having moved away from a colonial museology to a cooperative and collaborative one (Kreps, 2006) supported, shaped and expressed through many published codes of ethics (for an overview see Besterman, 2006) that place the social purpose of museums at the centre of their mission, (Western) museology, nevertheless, is often still a practice that is focused on organising and reconfiguring objects so that they fit a Western construct of culture, history, art and heritage (Kreps, 2006). So while we must praise the fact that indigenous peoples' rights to control, manage and interpret their cultural heritage are increasingly being recognised in current museological practice, from a critical and discursive point of view,

questions must still be raised as to how far this engagement sits comfortably with the demands of indigenous peoples for the right of self-determination. In other words, questions must be raised as to what extent these new collaborative museum practices are framed according to dominant western narratives or to the cultural praxes of indigenous peoples.

Objects and dialogues

In our exploratory enquiry about new museum practices, our attention was drawn to a recent debate about ownership and personhood within the context of museology (Busse, 2008; Baker, 2008; Herle, 2008; Bell, 2008; Geismar, 2008). Busse (2008), in particular, makes the point that in order to reformulate curatorial practices it is important to redefine the concept and meaning of objects. While the above authors do not question the importance of objects, they all argue that the real importance does not lie in the objects themselves but in the way they embody the physical manifestation of social relationships. The whole idea that objects matter because they have agency and efficacy and as such become a kind of person, draws upon recent anthropological theorising by Gell (1998) and Strathern (1999). Furthermore, we have not only been inspired by Gell's and Strathern's approach that suggests that objects are 'social persons', we have also been influenced by Appadurai's (1986) and Kopytoff's (1986) defining of objects as 'biographical agents', valued because of the associations they have acquired throughout time.

Focusing on the social network that surrounds a particular object becomes particularly important within the context of returning cultural objects to their original source communities (Kelly and Gordon, 2002). Using the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* of 1990 (NAGPRA) as an illustration, we argue that the whole debate about returning indigenous peoples' cultural objects to their original source is an apt example of how museum practices are still embedded in a dominant western discourse that emphasises the historical, or mummified, aspects of the tangible and intangible culture of indigenous peoples. NAGPRA is promoting an image of *native Americans as mere passive recipients of their cultural identity, beholden to their ancestors and the museum community for the re-creation of their cultures* (Harding, 2005: 137) when it defines cultural patrimony as objects having ongoing historical, traditional or cultural importance, central to the Native American group or culture itself. According to Harding (2005) NAGPRA's dominating narrative focuses on the loss, alienation and cultural genocide of the objects as long as these are not returned to their originators.

The recovery or the return of the objects to their 'original' culture has been applauded as one of the most liberating and emancipatory events in recent years for indigenous peoples, particularly in the context of the protection of indigenous peoples' rights of cultural ownership. However, as we have argued elsewhere (Pilcher and Vermeylen, 2008), the process of recovery means more than just smothering the object in the past and authenticity; recovery can only happen when heritage or tradition is connected to the experience of everyday life as discovered through the voices of indigenous peoples themselves.

At this point we find it particularly useful to engage with art works that not only question, but also contribute to a better understanding of curating ethnographic objects. This approach chimes with the concept of 'figurative repatriation' as introduced by Kramer (2004). According to Kramer, 'artist warriors' can forcibly recover the meaning of indigenous objects on display in western cultural settings without having to rely on a western tainted discourse of moral or legal ownership.

The exhibition *Pasifika Styles* (2006), curated at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, is a good example of this concept. *Pasifika Styles* was an initiative of the museum curator, Amiria Salmond, in collaboration with the guest curator, Rosanna Raymond, a Samoan New Zealander who is an influential figure in Maori/Polynesian fashion, performance and installation art. Herle (2008) applauds the exhibition for its relational form of curatorship which provided the facility for indigenous peoples to reconnect to their ancestral treasures. In our opinion, this exhibition must specifically be praised for creating a platform – mostly through installation art projects – that emphasised the dynamic relationship between the past and the present. For example, Maori artist Lisa Reihana, tried with her installation *he tautoko* [4] to provoke a process of critical engagement of the viewers with the museum's collection by encouraging people to think for themselves about the possible meanings created by the new positioning of the museum's collection. She comments:

It's interesting territory for an artist to work in a museum; they have collections – rich and loaded material. It's not the blank canvas that a gallery usually presents…We call treasured artefacts 'ta¯onga'. Pasifika Styles allows me the opportunity to show people these aren't just objects, they embody life blood of our living culture. (Pasifika Styles label text, quoted in Herle, 2008: 164-165).

While the exhibition offers the opportunity for artists to reconnect with their ancestral treasures and acts as a platform for a contemporary political debate about the colonial history as embodied in the museum's collection, Herle (2008) points out that the exhibition also provides the means to air frustrations and raise questions about the museum's practices of collecting, classifying and containing objects[5]. Besides installations that incorporate historic pieces from the museum, the exhibition also includes installations which are strictly contemporary such as *Tales of the Maori Border* by the artists Natalie Robertson and Hemi Macgregor.

What these artworks have in common is that they are making a statement about who is in control. As Kramer (2004) points out, contemporary native artists are using their art to make claims about self-determination, but this requires an engagement with non-native people. In order to make successful claims of self-identity, control and self-determination rights, indigenous peoples' messages and indeed, voices, need to be *heard, seen and witnessed by non-native people* (Kramer, 2004: 164). Maybe more than any other form of repatriation, figurative repatriation requires dialogue and narratives. In the next part of this paper we will explore to what extent an online museum could progressively facilitate the process of providing dialogue and voice. As Solanilla (2008) argues, 'cybermuseology' may further transform the museum landscape and provide an opportunity to challenge some of the problems identified above (e.g. essentialising practices):

The communication and interaction possibilities offered by the Web to layer information and to allow exploration of multiple meanings are only starting to be exploited. In this context, cybermuseology is known as a practice that is knowledge-driven rather than object-driven, and its main goal is to disseminate knowledge using the interaction possibilities of 'Information Communication Technologies.' (Langlais, 2005: 73-74)

One promising development which merits further exploration is the idea of transforming the exhibiting of ethnographic objects accompanied by texts and graphics into an act of 'cyber' discourse that allows indigenous peoples to involve us in their own history through their own voices and gestures. This is particularly the case since indigenous peoples are using new technologies, such as the internet, as a new medium through which they can reclaim their histories, land rights, knowledge and cultural heritage (Zimmerman et al., 2000). As such, new technology has played a significant role in the contestation and formation of the current identity of indigenous peoples by creating new social and political spaces through visual and narrative cultural praxis (Ginsburg, 2000; 2006; Hopkins, 2006; Deger, 2006).

To summarise the above, we argue that indigenous peoples' relationships with objects are ultimately social ones, and therefore within the practice of museology the attention should shift from a focus on the objects to a focus on the changing social relationship they represent. This shift in thinking is to a certain extent embedded in the 2003 *Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Kreps, 2005). However, museums are still facing the practical challenges of how to move from being object centred institutions to being 'spaces' that, first and foremost, create platforms for dialogues between indigenous peoples and their audiences, dialogues (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Kurin, 2004; Galla, 2008) that allow an exploration of alternative museological practices as set out by indigenous peoples themselves within the spirit of their quest for greater rights of self-determination. It is in this context that we explore the value of an online museum as an agent of dialogue and collaboration between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Online museums

In 1997 Walsh addressed the question of how a museum's presence on the web might mitigate the effect of what he described as the 'unassailable voice' of the museum (Walsh, 1997: 77). We suggest that in the context of an indigenous online museum there needs to be an acknowledgement of the nature of its structure when responding to how it might recognise indigenous voices. Our argument in this respect begins by

recognising that online museums may take various forms. It is possible to find everything from what has been described as 'brochure-ware' sites, through to virtual tours that take place in a three dimensional replica of a physical gallery space and exhibitions which exist only online (Dietz, 1998: 3-10). However, we suggest that one can engage with this multiplicity through Manovich's argument that a new media project, such as an online museum, may be understood as consisting of a database and an interface to that database. It is through an interface that the contents of the underlying database are structured into a narrative (Manovich, 2003). Manovich suggests that database and narrative are 'natural enemies' (Manovich, 2003). As he explains where

> *... the database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events)...* (Manovich, 2003: 225).

However, as Christiane Paul observes, Manovich's account does not mean that a site cannot be understood in terms of both database and narrative (Paul, 2007). The visitor to an online museum may be understood to be *traversing a database, following links between its records as established by the database's creator* (Manovich, 2003: 227). Approached in terms of Manovich's argument, an online museum may be thought of as positioned somewhere on a spectrum. At one extreme, the website is experienced as collection of discrete items of information.[6] These discrete items might be digitised representations of physical objects, video clips or sound recordings. At the other end of the range, the online museum is experienced as a narrative.

The implications of understanding online museums in these terms are suggested by Manovich's observation that with the database where

> *... traditional cultures provided people with well defined narratives (myths, religion) and little 'stand alone' information, today we have too much information and too few narratives that tie it all together.* (Manovich, 2003: 217)[7].

It seems to us important to acknowledge that, while the creation of a database of material accessible online may work to weaken the institutional narratives within which collections have traditionally been situated, at the same time it may also encourage the perception of digitised holdings as isolated objects (McTavish, 2006). In other words, there may be a risk that any sense of the indigenous narratives that order culture, which may have been conveyed by the unassailable voice of the museum, will in turn also be lost. Understood in these terms, online museums may result in access to information about an indigenous culture but not an understanding of its knowledge. While material authored by museums may tend to bring with it an institutional perspective, on the other hand the use of databases that simply provide information without providing adequate context for the relevant material may result in a *homogeneity that is difficult to penetrate* by viewers (Trant, 2006: 2). Viewers presented only with information may be unable to discern its significance, or important distinctions that are there to be drawn between what may appear to be similar materials. Such issues may arise as concerns irrespective of whether what is presented takes the form of a digitised representation of an object or an oral history. While there will always be some sort of order to a traverse of a museum's collection, this may not be one with any coherent basis (Weinbren, 2007).

While information communication technologies do potentially provide opportunities in the conservation and dissemination of the 'life stories' which give an account of an indigenous culture as it is experienced (Solanilla, 2008: 105), we argue that in order for that to happen in the context of an online museum there needs to be collaboration in respect of not only the content, but also of the interface provided for viewers to engage with that content. Solanilla acknowledges the view held by some writers, including Langlais, that the inclusion of indigenous heritage in an online museum may become subject to ideological manipulation (Solanilla, 2008). This does not lead Langlais to dismiss cybermuseology altogether, but rather to argue that it is important for curators to understand that cybermuseology loses the essential interpersonal element that needs to be present if intangible heritage is understood as *the process of making sense that is generally transmitted orally and through face-to-face experience* (Langlais, 2005: 78). In this respect, cybermuseology does not enable a reality to be reproduced but instead results in the construction of a valuable, but completely new, experience of cultural knowledge (Langlais, 2005). Langlais understands the technology employed in cybermuseology as providing the

means by which construction of meaning may, at least to some extent, be dispersed away from institutional centres of control, such as museums. Interactivity, along with communication, is identified by Langlais as one of the new possibilities open to museums for the transfer of knowledge.

We would agree that interactivity gives museum visitors the opportunity to *create more 'freely' his or her representation of knowledge and heritage* (Langlais, 2005: 76). However, although the interactivity made possible by information communication technologies is much vaunted as a means to undercut the univocal museum, it is our argument that it may actually be counter productive in bringing indigenous voices into online museums. There has been much discussion in the context of online museums of the use of social tagging and 'folksonomy' (Solanilla, 2008; Trant, 2006). In these processes, keywords (called 'tags') are supplied and shared by visitors as a means of accessing museum content. These tags in turn give rise to a classification system (a 'folksonomy'). Trant observes that tagging partly appeals to museums because it may be understood as a means by which the viewer engages both with the museum and with the works in it (Trant, 2006). Yet at the same time she points out, in the context of discussing the process in an art museum, because tagging is initiated by visitors, and enables them to give significance to works, it poses an important challenge to the museum (Trant, 2006). In general terms then, tagging and 'folksonomy' are concrete realisations of interactivity which provide innovative ways of engaging with the issue of classifying the contents of museums. Such interactivity may effectively be employed to permit the retrieval of material by those who approach it from, and within, very different contexts (Solanilla, 2008). However, we caution that in the context of an online museum of an indigenous culture it seems to us that ordering museum content by means of undifferentiated interactivity by all visitors may detract from an indigenous community's involvement in the communication of its knowledge. The result may be an understanding of individual objects or stories structured according to viewers' terms of reference and isolated from indigenous narrative context. A possible corrective to this issue would be to limit the use of tagging and 'folksonomy' to those within an indigenous community.

The implications of the form of interactivity enabled by online museums, and the impact that may have on viewers' understanding of indigenous communities, may be investigated further by examining how they relate to the other possibility of information communication technologies identified by Langlais: communication. If interactivity should concern itself simply with encouraging communication (Goldblum *et al.*, 2007) then this is compatible with Langlais' conception of interactivity. However, if communication is to be understood more specifically as that which is concerned with keeping heritage alive (Langlais, 2005: 77), then it seems to us that in the context of an indigenous online museum it may not be appropriate to structure access to it through visitors' understanding of information about that culture. We will try and outline our concerns in this regard by referring to three interesting examples of projects that illustrate how individual items may be experienced differently by users because of the narrative structure of the interface to the website (Goldblum *et al.*, 2007).

Two of the projects were created under the auspices of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (*Life After the Holocaust and Ripples of Genocide: Journey Through Eastern Congo*). A further project, developed without being aligned with a museum or cultural institution, documented the legacy of the graduating class of Benjamin Franklin High School in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina (Goldblum *et al.*, 2007). All three projects provide access to information expressed through multimedia content that includes, amongst other things, audio, photographic and video material.

Goldblum *et al.* (2007) describe how, in *Life After the Holocaust*, the review of the individual audio files recording stories of survivors of the Holocaust revealed that the stories shared many common themes. These themes were used as the structure for the story told by the project overall. The themes employed were 'Arriving in New York'; 'Starting Over'; 'Living with the Past'; 'Telling their Children' and 'Faith, Guilt and Responsibility' (Goldblum *et al.*, 2007). In this work it seems to us, visitor access and interaction with the content reflects, and is essentially determined by, the survivors' accounts. In *Ripples of Genocide: Journey Through Eastern Congo*, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum decided to create a website about the journey of the actress and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Angelina Jolie, to Eastern Congo where she met refugees from the Rwandan genocide. In this project the 'story-telling device' that is used to link the individual items of

information is the travel journal. It might be suggested that structuring the interface to that site by means of a travel journal format imposes a Western, post-colonial meaning on the genocide in Rwanda. We consider that there is an argument for saying that, despite undoubted successes in other respects, this online site is inconsistent with trying to reposition indigenous peoples as authors and experts of their cultures (Krmpotich and Anderson, 2005).

However, acknowledging of the significance of both the content and interface of online museums, such sites do have the potential to provide an exemplary opportunity for First People to *assert their active and continued presence in the contemporary world* by means of collaboration with museums (Krmpotich and Anderson, 2005: 377). Indeed, it is our argument that collaborative online museums may be particularly effective at fulfilling a social role that extends beyond weakening the unassailable voice of the museum. Krmpotich and Anderson have observed that

> *... if recognised by museum-goers, collaboration within the museum can act as a metaphor for self-representation and self-determination in social, political, and economic spheres.* (Krmpotich and Anderson, 2005: 378)

The website of the South African National Gallery, under the umbrella of Iziko Museums of Cape Town, is part of the Gallery's role as a *hub of cultural activity, and a central place for gathering together South Africa's diverse heritage* (Iziko website). However, it could move beyond being part of an expression about South Africa to being a particularly effective opportunity for the expression of that nation and its peoples. We suggest that online museums bring not only the possibility of undermining the ahistorical and unassailable voice to be found in a range of cultural expressions, but also a particularly effective chance to make explicit an engagement with it by indigenous voice(s).

In this regard we are indebted to Leuthold's argument concerning the *new genre of indigenous documentary* (Leuthold, 2001: 63). He has suggested

> [We] *can understand indigenous media from a rhetorical framework in a broad sense of the term: as forms of communication intended to move the viewer to identification and, ultimately, agreement with the author or speaker.* (Leuthold, 2001: 56)

He describes how in such work

> *... native film- and video makers have sought to control the representation of their own communities rather than depend upon progressive non-natives to give them voice; through film and video, natives themselves are no longer voiceless.* (Leuthold, 2001: 59)

In doing so, indigenous communities fundamentally change the way in which they present to other people: [the] *right to represent oneself redefines the victim as a proactive political participant; now members of a community can best define and choose their own course of action* (Leuthold, 2001: 63). As Leuthold points out, the significance of such a process is that [in] *this sense, we can view the act of documenting rhetorically, as well as the subject matter of the documentaries themselves'* (Leuthold, 2001: 63). We argue that indigenous online museums may be approached in similar terms: they may be understood as sites which provide effective platforms for challenging dominant, historically objective, cultural representations of indigenous culture. In this way, visitors may be understood to be invited to perceive indigenous peoples as politically active with the authority to represent themselves.

The significance of the sort of collaboration to which we wish to draw attention may be exemplified by a comparison of the Blackfoot Gallery's *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* discussed by Krmpotich and Anderson (2005) with the artwork/exhibition, *Miscast* (1996), by Skotnes.[8] *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* is described as *one of the first permanent galleries in Canada to be built using a fully collaborative approach* (Krmpotich and Anderson, 2005: 379). Skotnes's work is an interesting challenge to the unassailable museological voice that was not collaborative. Included in this work was the display of thirteen casts of headless body parts of *San* people. Two factors motivated Skotnes to curate the exhibition. One was to contrast two different forms of visual representations of the *San* already to be found in the museum (i.e. the archive and the diorama). The second factor was to show what Skotnes calls the 'storeroom'. At the time that Skotnes was putting the exhibition together, there were hardly any exhibitions of the *San*'s art and ways of life. This was to the great surprise of Skotnes,

who discovered that storerooms of museums, galleries, universities, libraries and state archives were literally crammed with material about the *San*.

Although *Miscast* cannot be understood as a collaborative exhibition, we found it particularly interesting because Skotnes tried to challenge the ahistoricity of the museum-authored diorama. To Skotnes, the use of the casts of body parts represented the practice of beautifying and romanticising the image of the *San* while not noticing their suffering. According to Skotnes, judging from the visitor comments, the artwork provoked precisely an awareness of these sorts of emotions. She quotes a visitor as thanking her for:

> *... the opportunity to confront our image/conceptions of a people who rarely have a chance to represent themselves to a Western view. It challenges our knowledge – and the way that knowledge has been acquired about African peoples.* (quoted in Skotnes, 2002: 268)

This quote embodies what we envisage as possible in online museums, to the extent that at least in part, it becomes what Bal has called a *meta-exhibition – or an exhibition exploring the nature of exhibiting* (Bal: 2007: 72). In this way, we argue that representations of indigenous peoples could generate a reflexive response by viewers in which there is interactivity between the author and the audience that enables an appreciation of the practices employed in its production, irrespective of whether that is an exhibition, or a work such as a film. We suggest that, in the event this is authored solely by indigenous peoples, or done collaboratively, this process may also be understood as a rhetorical assertion of self-determination. As one of the team from the indigenous community involved with the Gallery commented *an exhibition 'totally designed by the Blackfoot people' is substantially different than having 'someone with a camera, asking questions, observing'* (Krmpotich and Anderson, 2005: 392).

The reason that we consider online museums to be potentially effective sites in this respect may be illustrated by using as examples the sort of engagement an online museum could make possible with pre-existing film material that reflects colonial perceptions of indigenous peoples. One such example might be the film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980).[9] In employing film to exemplify the possibilities of an online museum as a platform for indigenous peoples to experiment in exposing the meta-narrative(s) in the process of film making, we were inspired by Basu's (2008) work on reframing ethnographic film. He praises Sidén's video art installation, *Warte Mal!*[10] (1999), for its innovative way of using ethnographic film material to provoke certain feelings of involvement by those who engage with the installation. Basu (2008) mentions, in particular, two aspects as being provocative. First, the installation was set up in such a way as to evoke feelings of partial experience. Second, the installation also stimulated visitors to reflect upon their own roles vis-à-vis the people they watched on the images. Basu argues that precisely because of these two techniques, the visitors became aware *of the plurality of alternative readings/navigations that they might have made* (2008: 105).

The online museum offers a number of possibilities for revealing ways in which films may represent a dominant ideological voice. Digital technologies provide the opportunity to challenge what was, in the past, a fixed narrative pathway constructed for viewers through a film. As Weinbren (2007) has observed: *contemporary entertainment films are designed to appear seamless – as if the final film is a natural object, containing all that is necessary for it and nothing else* (Weinbren, 2007: 69). In fact, a film is generally constructed by gathering together a *database of audiovisual elements* and then constructing one story out of the gathered material (Weinbren, 2007: 69). This process may be employed to assert dominant political interests regarding indigenous cultures. Online museums could provide a means to expose such processes, which are normally obscured. New media art provides specific examples of the ways in which the digitisation of film provides opportunities to expose the narratives by which such political messages are carried, and so help to reveal positions that might otherwise remain unclear. An online museum could employ a database to enable an indigenous community to rearrange films to reveal underlying cultural positions (Paul, 2007). As Christiane Paul has described, it is possible to dissect films to place the narrative that was originally at the forefront of the work into the background (Paul, 2007: 101). The example of Jennifer and Kevin McCoy's project *How I learned* (2002) clarifies how this might be achieved. The work restructures a television series, *Kung Fu*, by employing categories such as 'how I learned about blocking punches,' 'how I learned about

exploiting workers,' or 'how I learned to love the land' (Paul, 2007: 103), to reveal in greater clarity than otherwise might be possible the cultural stereotypes used in the visual narratives of the programme (Paul, 2007).

However, the possibility of a collaborative online museum revealing such narratives rhetorically, depends not only on this process being understood to reflect the voice(s) of indigenous peoples but, importantly, that this is also understood by visitors to be the case. Otherwise it is difficult to see how it would be understood to be an invitation to identify, and agree with, the indigenous community's perspectives about the way in which they have been depicted. In this regard, we consider online museums also offer an effective means of communication. An approach such as the one exemplified in *How I learned* might be combined with other techniques such as those Paul identifies in the work of George Legrady. She describes how Legrady's works engages with the archive and database as sites that record culture (Paul, 2007). In particular, the work *Slippery Traces* involved viewers navigating through over two hundred and forty postcards. Although this paper is not the place for us to discuss individual works in detail, it is worthwhile mentioning Paul's description of the way in which viewers of the work were invited to

> *...first choose one of three quotes appearing on the screen, each of which embodies a different perspective – anthropological, colonialist, or media theory – and thus provides an interpretive angle for the experience of the projects.* (Paul, 2007: 104-5)

In the same way, visitors to an online museum could be provided with a choice of possible voices by which its collection might be experienced. These could include, for example, not only a choice between a colonial understanding and the viewpoint of just one indigenous community, but also, conceivably, the perspectives of a number of indigenous peoples. It seems to us that this suggests a range of possible interfaces with material contained in an online museum that could be used to encourage visitors to reflect on the implications of what, and how, representations of an indigenous community had been constructed, including that of the museum site itself.

Conclusion

From their inception in the 19th century, museums have been more than just places that store, preserve, classify and protect objects; museums have contributed to processes of social change, but have also manipulated an image of history. For a very long time, museums have dismembered and classified the past in such a way that they have turned history into a fetish embellished in a cult of authenticity. Under pressure from indigenous rights movements, museums are now seeking reconciliation with indigenous peoples through facilitating collaborative projects and setting up networks of dialogue, supported and encouraged by appropriate codes of ethics and local, national and international protocols. While we encourage people to celebrate the concept of an inclusive museum that works together with indigenous peoples in the recovery of objects and their meanings, we also caution that the rhetoric of collaboration is still framed in a western discourse that focuses primarily on the objectification – i.e. 'essentialising' - of tradition and heritage.

We have argued that focusing more on the social networks that surround a particular object opens up new avenues of enquiry as to how, and to what extent, museums can become more inclusive vis-à-vis indigenous peoples. This approach means moving beyond the current discourse that approaches the history of the (ethnographic) museum and its objects from only one dominant perspective. By tracing an object and its history through its lifecycle, new metaphors can be discovered, ones that show that indigenous peoples have not always been victims. Maybe more importantly, it also allows us to show a more complex narrative of the history of indigenous peoples; it gives new meaning to the principle of the right to self-determination within the context of museology. Instead of recognising indigenous peoples as mere custodians of their objects, the museum we envisage is a museum that allows indigenous peoples to define the parameters through which we explore both their tangible and intangible heritage.

We think that an online museum in particular, might be able to facilitate this transition. Instead of approaching history and culture from a one-sided perspective, we argue that an online museum shows promise in its potential to foster meta-narratives that can expose conflicts, contradictions and ambiguities, but above all acknowledges multiple shifting identities. In this sense, we see the online museum as a space where indigenous

cultures can collide and display their heterogeneity, where they can network and where they can hybridise. As part of their struggle to gain the right to self-determination, indigenous peoples want to draw attention to the constructed and plural nature of histories. In this sense, the online, indigenous museum becomes a museum that explores the nature of exhibiting and museum practices, drawing attention to the unintentional meanings, omissions and contradictions present in any display of heritage. In order for museums to become inclusive and indeed post-colonial, they must first and foremost create a platform that allows indigenous peoples to expose the anachronistic constructions of objectification and history making; we can envisage that the online museum might be able to host such a platform through a network of multiple narratives as defined by indigenous peoples themselves.

(The title of this paper has been inspired a quote from the artist Rosanne Raymond about museum artefacts: *if you let the objects dance they will* [quoted in Bell, 2008: 135])

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NOTES

1. The *San* are former hunter gatherers and the oldest surviving inhabitants of Southern Africa. The arrival of pastoralists and agriculturalists of the Bantu-language group (in the last 2,500-500 years) and white settlers (in the last 300 years) has resulted in the assimilation, subordination, or even persecution, of the *San* peoples. About 100,000 *San* survive today in the Kalahari basin, but while their physical survival may no longer be at risk, their cultural survival is highly precarious. While local and regional variation exists, the vast majority of the *San* have lost their land rights and with that, the opportunity and skills to hunt and gather food. They are almost invariably poor by local standards, and few can survive on subsistence farming as this requires access to land, a suitable soil and climate and some capital in the form of livestock or fences to protect their crops. Many depend for their livelihoods on seasonal farm work (often paid in kind) and the collection of bush food. In countries like Namibia and Botswana food aid from the government is important. Seen as an archetypical hunting and gathering society, the *San* are subject to numerous ethnographic studies, documentaries, films, postcards, etc. (Suzman, 2001).
2. We became aware of these projects from Sharon Daniel's work *The Database*: an *Aesthetics of Dignity*.
3. For example, *Hidden Peoples of the Amazon,* an exhibition presented in the Museum of Mankind (1985-1986) was criticised by Amazonian Indians and Survival International for portraying a romantic, exotic, and often nostalgic, image of small-scale societies which seemed to live in harmony with nature. A somewhat different example was the exhibition *Vestido Con El Sol: Traditional Textiles from Mexico – Guatemala – Panama* in the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in Chicago (1990), which displayed beautiful patterned textiles produced by indigenous peoples. However, in the accompanying catalogue, an essay by Maricela Garcia Vargas, described in detail the continuing repression and genocide of Mayan minority groups and suggested that *... to do an exhibit on textiles and not deal with the political reality of the killing of some of the indigenous groups that produce these beautiful works of art would be irresponsible on the museum's part.* (Vargas, 1990: 6 in Simpson, 2001: 37)
4. *He tautoko* featured a carved wooden *tekoteko,* an ancestral figure originally attached to a house gable. The carving was collected in the 1830s near the Bay of Islands, the tribal homeland of the artist's father. The region is known for being the first centre of colonial government and as such was also the location from where some of the first Maori objects left Aotearoa. The *tekoteko* is positioned in the top half of the case so that its iridescent shell eyes look down on the visitor. The figure is wearing white headphones, connected to a visitor's listening post, and placed with its back to a video screen showing digitally manipulated images from 19th century Maori collections in the museum and of the artist's journey between New Zealand and Cambridge. The movement on the screen, the stories and the songs animate the figure, highlighting its continued ancestral presence and ongoing connection to the past and contemporary events.
5. For example, Wayne Youle's installation *hahea* (2006) and Jason Hall's *The do-it-yourself repatriation kit* (2006). For more details of these installations, see Herle (2008: 169-171).
6. As Manovich acknowledges in the context of the world of new media, the word 'narrative' tends to be used *as an all inclusive term, to cover up the fact that we have not yet developed a language to describe these new strange objects* (Manovich, 2001: 228). See also Dietz, 1999.
7. In the context of theorising database practice in new media art, it has been observed that the terms 'data' and 'information' are often erroneously conflated (Stalbaum, 2004). While we acknowledge this in the present context, we use the terms 'information' and 'knowledge' in the sense employed by Langlois, who observed that information can be compared to raw data, whereas knowledge, according to Foray (*Ecritures dans les cinemas d'Afrique noire*) is a cognitive capacity to learn, *which enables us to extrapolate and learn new knowledge* (Langlois, 2005: 74).
8. *Miscast* was exhibited in 1996 at the South African National Gallery. With *Miscast,* the artist, Skotnes, wanted to contrast her installation with two other visual representations of the *San*. The first is the creation of an archive of the */Xam* (a sub group of the San) in the 1870s and 1880s. The archive was a collaborative project which gave the */Xam* the opportunity to express themselves. The second is the making of a diorama at the South African Museum in Cape Town

using casts made in the 1910s. The diorama was mainly a European construction of primitive hunter gatherers. Skotnes' *Miscast* was a response to the other visual representations, interpreting the varied processes that created them (Skotnes, 2002).

9. *The Gods Must be Crazy* was followed by a sequel *The Gods Must be Crazy II* (1989). In *Rereading the Gods Must be Crazy Films* Keyan Tomaselli provides, amongst other things, a background to the commodification of the *San* and the films of Jamie Uys, who directed and produced *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, and also a discussion of various narrative themes. Tomaselli comments that although the narrative techniques employed in the films became more sophisticated over time, despite claims to being apolitical, Uys's position matched that of the *dominant political interests* (Tomaselli, 2006: 194).
10. In 1999 the artist, Sidén, spent time investigating prostitution in Eastern Europe. She recorded a series of video interviews whilst staying for long periods in a motel in Dubi where rooms are rented to prostitutes by the hour. She documented her stay with videos, photographs, and a written diary. Using this material, Sidén has created an artwork, *Warte Mal!* which exposes the power relationships within the sex industry (Carolin and Haynes, 2007).

Len Dong - spirit journeys in contemporary urban Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Len dong (going into a trance) is a ritual whereby a medium incarnates the souls of gods and spirits. It is associated with the religions and belief systems of various ethnic groups. This paper describes *Len Dong* as it is practiced as part of the cult of the Holy Mothers to minister to the needs of the population and bring good health and prosperity. This form of *Len Dong* originated in rural agricultural society, however, as society has changed and a market economy has developed, the ritual has become urbanised and is particularly popular today among small businessmen and tradesmen. It has now become a familiar phenomenon in urban society in Vietnam. The medium's trance provides individuals and groups with a way to relieve the stresses and strains that are features of urban, industrial society, it helps them achieve a sense of balance, gives them an idea of how to behave and gives them a way of integrating with their community. Some people also find in *Len Dong* a sense of security and trust in the spiritual life that brings them success and good fortune. There are also people who simply see it as a form of entertainment.

Introduction

In the South appears the Tenth Prince who is
A wonderful figure,
With talent, courage and intelligence,
Good at literature and martial arts,
He deliberately wanders everywhere,
With a bag of poems and Buddhist sutras,
Sometimes erotic, sometimes benevolent
Sometimes he admires a blooming flower,
Sometimes he waits for the moonrise.
(Song to the Tenth Prince)

The shamanistic rituals found among many of Vietnam's minority peoples involve 'soul journeys', for example the *Then* of the *Tay* people leads a spirit army on a campaign to recover her client's soul. However, in the *Len Dong* (going into a trance) ceremony of the *Kinh* (Viet) people, the gods are called into the ritual space and incarnated in the body of the medium. Many of the songs performed during *Len Dong* describe deities coming down into the ritual space or journeying through the landscape.

Len Dong, also called *hau bong* (service to the shades of the deities) or *hau dong* (the service of the medium) is performed throughout Vietnam as an intrinsic part of the cult of the Holy Mothers (*Dao Mau*)[1], honoured by the *Kinh*.[2] In this ceremony, the mediums are merely the empty bodies or 'seats' into which the souls, or shades, of the deities and gods will be incarnated. Many of the deities are figures who served the country in the past and were subsequently deified and worshipped by the common people. Nearly sixty deities are worshipped in the pantheon of the cult of the Four Palaces. Depending on the specific occasion and on the medium, only a few of them will come down and be incarnated during any particular performance of *Len Dong*, and some deities seldom, or never, descend to earth.

The divinity's journey into this world, via the medium's body, is expressed through a number of ritual actions: dancing, giving advice, distributing gifts, curing disease and driving evil spirits away. In contrast with many other religions, and with the activities of other spirit mediums among the *Kinh,* the cult of the Holy Mothers does not focus on the world of the dead but on the real, earthly world of good health and prosperity. The cult of the Holy Mothers is therefore very popular among business people in the new market economy. Followers believe that the supernatural world of gods and spirits will grant them their earthly desires through the agency of an *Ong Dong* (male medium) or a *Ba Dong* (female medium) during the *Len Dong* ritual.

To encourage the deities to enter his or her body, the medium relies on a range of techniques, used before and during the rites to achieve a state of ecstasy. Techniques vary from one medium to another, but their ecstatic state is always enhanced by the sensory elements of the *Len Dong* ritual - the strong colours of the costumes and offerings (green, red, and yellow), the music and *hat van* (invocation hymns), dances, and even such stimuli as alcohol, cigarettes, betel and areca nut, tea, incense and flowers. Nowadays, however, many of the mediums' performances seem contrived and their states of ecstasy are unconvincing.

Nobody can voluntarily become a medium; a person must be selected by the gods, and, if the chosen person does not accept their calling, they will frequently experience misfortune (*co day*) in the form of illness or bad luck.[3] Similarly, the gods descend at will into the medium; the medium is not supposed to have any control over which deities appear during a particular performance of *Len Dong*. In practice, however, many mediums clearly decide in advance that they will incarnate certain deities in accordance with their relationship with certain gods or their own intentions in the ritual.

Although *Len Dong* is a religious rite of the cult of the Holy Mothers of the Four Palaces, it includes many artistic elements like music, song, dance and costume. The *hat van* and music are particularly noteworthy examples of the performing arts of the *Kinh* people. Today, researchers have discovered that there is a close relationship between the *hat van* and other categories of folk songs. However, *hat van* could only have originated in the environment of the cult of the Holy Mothers and the ceremonies of *Len Dong*. Some *hat van* tunes are no

longer included in the ceremony; instead they have become secular folk songs and are widely performed. But only in the ceremonies of *Len Dong* can the *hat van* really be appreciated as folk songs of the *Kinh* people in the Red River Delta. The *hat van* could not exist without the ceremony *of Len Dong*, and vice versa.

The pantheon of the cult of the Holy Mothers.

The cult of the Holy Mothers is distinct from other folk beliefs in that it has its own complete and well-defined hierarchy. The supreme divinity of the cult is *Thanh Mau* (the Saint Mother). Sometimes, the Saint Mother is supervised by *Ngoc Hoang* (the Jade Emperor) or *Phat Ba Quan* (Buddha-Avaloketesvara). However, despite the nominal supremacy of these figures, the cult has only a loose association with Taoist or Buddhist belief and practice.

The Saint Mother can be embodied in three or four Mother Goddesses who govern the different domains or 'palaces' that comprise the universe. These are *Thien Phu* (the Realm of Heaven), *Dia Phu* (the Realm of Earth), *Thoai Phu* (the Realm of Water) and *Nhac Phu* (the Realm of Mountains and Forests). Each domain or 'palace' has a characteristic colour - red for heaven, yellow for the earth, white for water and green for the mountains and forests. All of the deities appearing in *Len Dong* wear coloured costumes that link them with one of these domains as a follower of one or other of the Mother Goddesses. Under these Mother Goddesses there is a hierarchy of other divinities. They are:

(i) *Quan Lon* (the Great Mandarins). There are ten gods in this category but only the first five (*Ngu vi quan lon*) are regularly worshipped and incarnated through mediums.

(ii) *Chau Ba* (the Holy Dames). There are twelve of them. However, the first four Holy Dames governing the four palaces are the reincarnations of the four Mother Goddesses, so they are the most important and are often incarnated.

(iii) *Ong Hoang* (the Princes). There are ten Princes, listed in order of their importance. However, the three incarnated most frequently are the *Hoang Ba* (the Third Prince) *Hoang Bay* (the Seventh Prince) and *Hoang Muoi* (the Tenth Prince).

(iv) *Co* (the Royal Damsels). These are listed in order of their importance from *Co de Nhat or co Ca* (the First) to *co Be* (the Twelfth). The Damsels are the attendants of the Mother Goddesses and the Holy Dames. The Damsels often have local names linking them to places where they are worshipped, for example, the Twelfth Damsel is often called the 'Little Damsel of Bac Le in Lang Son Province'. There is also the Damsel of Cam Duong (the First at Cam Duong, Lao Cai), the Damsel of Chin Gieng (the Ninth in Thanh Hoa), the Damsel of Dong Mo (the Second at Dong Mo, Lang Son) and so on.

(v) *Cau* (Boy Attendants). There are ten Boy Attendants who are mischievous attendants to the Princes. However, *cau Bo* or *cau Ba* (the Third Boy Attendant) and *cau Be* or *cau Muoi* (the Youngest Boy Attendant) are the ones most often incarnated.

The pantheon of the cult of the Holy Mothers also includes *Ong Lot,* the Snake (Sir Lot) and *Quan lon Ho* (the five Great Tiger Mandarins) who are also sometimes incarnated.

In addition to the four palaces associated with the Mother Goddesses, folk belief also recognises *Phu Tran Trieu* (the Palace of the Tran Dynasty) which is associated with the worship of General Tran Hung Dao who vanquished the Mongols in the thirteenth century. Some Mother Goddess temples, including Tran Hung Dao, honour him as the highest deity, equating him with the Jade Emperor. When he and his attendants are incarnated they punish evil ghosts and demons and cure disease.

Similarly, some other deities have been associated with historical figures. For example, *Mau Thuong Thien* (the Holy Mother of Heaven) is identified with Princess Lieu Hanh, a daughter of the Jade Emperor who was transfigured as a girl in the earthly world. *Mau Thuong Ngan* (the Holy Mother of Mountains and Forests) is Princess La Binh, a daughter of Genie Son Tinh and Princess My Nuong, and a granddaughter of Hung Kinh. *Ong Hoang de nhat* (the First Prince) embodies the brilliant general, Le Loi, who won national independence from the Chinese Ming Dynasty in the fifteenth century. The Tenth Prince was a mandarin of the fifteenth century Le Dynasty who helped the nation expand territorially. The historical nature of these deities of the cult of the Holy Mothers links daily life - expressed through the needs and wants of the worshippers - with national history. Mother Goddess worship is, simultaneously, an evocation of the nation's history and a deification of patriotism.

The divinities of the cult of the Holy Mothers are worshipped in a number of temples, palaces and sanctuaries - wherever the Kinh people have settled, from the north to the south, from the plains to the mountains. Generally speaking, each god has his principal sanctuary and many subordinate sanctuaries. For example, although the principal sanctuary of the Holy Mother of Heaven is situated in Phu Giay, Nam Dinh Province, and that of the Holy Mother of Mountains and Forests is at Bac Le in Lang Son Province, they are also worshipped in many other localities. Followers often leave their own incense pots at temples or shrines associated with a particular deity to ensure that that particular god protects them.

Len Dong or the 'spirit performances' of the cult of the Mother Goddesses.

Len Dong ceremonies are organised at temples, palaces and sanctuaries on various occasions all year round. A *Chu den* (the medium who guards a particular temple) must hold the ceremonies of *Hau xong den* (the first-footing of the temple after the Ceremony of Passage into the New Year), *hau thuong nguyen* (the fifteenth day of the first lunar month), *hau nhap ha* (the beginning of summer in the fourth lunar month), *tan ha* (the end of summer in the seventh lunar month), *hau tat nien* (the end of the year in the twelfth lunar month) and *hap an* (the washing of the seals, on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth lunar month). However, a medium must also organise a ceremony on the anniversary of the death of his or her patron deity. For example, if a medium's patron deity is the Third Damsel, she must hold a *Len Dong* to honour her on the twelfth day of the sixth lunar month. Most *Len Dong* ceremonies take place in the third lunar month (the anniversary of the death of the Holy Mother) and the eighth lunar month (the anniversary of the death of the Holy Father, who is identified with the Jade Emperor, King Bat Hai, otherwise known as Saint Tran).

Before a *Len Dong* ritual, the medium must make meticulous preparations, including choosing an auspicious day that matches his or her horoscope according to the *can so* (lunar calendar), choosing the temple or palace and inviting the faithful, other mediums and supporters. There must also be four *hau dang* (assistants) and *cung van* (liturgical singers).

Preparing garments and votive offerings for the *Len Dong* ceremony also requires much time and labour. Each deity has his or her specific costume which a medium puts on when that god is incarnated. Thus, any medium undertaking service to the *ra dong* (gods and spirits) has to buy many suitable costumes, especially those of his of her patron god.

The votive offerings should match the special character of each occasion on which the medium conducts a ceremony. The offerings may include cakes, sweets, flowers, fruit, alcohol, cigarettes, toys and jewellery. On the anniversaries of the Holy Dames there may be such dishes as crabs, snails and fish. The medium pays special attention to the colour of the votive offerings so that each deity receives offerings of the same colour as the palace with which he or she is associated. For example, red cans of Coke are appropriate for deities from the Celestial Palace, while the green areca nuts that are used to make betel chews are suitable for deities associated with the Palace of Mountains and Forests.

A typical *Len Dong* ritual at the Dau Temple in Hanoi

This was held by a female medium who I shall call 'H'.

A. Preparation and ritual

For several days before the ceremony, *Ba Dong* H had to abstain from sexual intercourse, eat only vegetarian food and fast completely for some of the time to get her body into an exceptionally pure state. According to mediums, these acts of purification are necessary before they can use their bodies as vehicles for the gods. However, in terms of technique, this physical state makes it easier for the medium to go into a trance. [4]

Before stepping on to the mat in front of the altar where the gods were to be incarnated, the medium performed the rituals of *so* - submitting written requests and giving offerings (rice soup, dried rice and corn, fresh water) to the wandering souls. The letters asked the guardian-god of the temple to give permission for the medium to use her skills to carry out the ceremony of *Len Dong*. This rite was conducted by a person with magic powers and an assistant.

B. The rites of *Len Dong*

After the preparatory rites were completed, the female medium came out of her private room wearing white robes. She greeted all the participants and walked in a leisurely manner to the mat which was surrounded by four *hau dang* [5] (her assistants). These assistants, male or female, must have learned to serve the deities. They were all the trainees or close associates of medium H, and they helped her to burn incense sticks and offer alcohol, to cover her face with fans and to change costumes during the ceremony.

The liturgical singers sat on the right of the mat. They played music and sang invocation hymns accompanied by traditional musical instruments (a moon-shaped zither, drums, tom-toms, bamboo flutes, cymbals, etc.) of which the *dan nguyet* (the moon-shaped zither) was the most typical. Sometimes the singer can also be the zither player. Each temple or palace - particularly the big ones – usually has its own band of liturgical singers who have spent their lives in close association with the temple and the guardian medium. The bands practice regularly so that they can synchronise their music with the medium's actions. They are often rewarded with votive objects for a good performance - or punished by the medium for unsatisfactory work. In such bands there are usually some well-known singers who are the medium's favourites.

Medium H had organised this ceremony to celebrate the *hau thuong nguyen* festival. Normally, neither the mediums nor any of the other participants can predict which saints and deities are going to come down (*giang dong*) or be incarnated (*nhap dong*). The gods appear when they want to, and when the medium invites them. When a deity descended, the medium made a signal with the fingers of her left hand to show it was a male deity, or with the fingers of her right hand if it was a female god. Then the assistants had to hurry to find the appropriate robes and head cloths and then they carefully dressed and groomed her.

When medium H sat, her four assistants placed a red cloth, called a *khan phu dien* [6] (face-covering veil) on her head. This is the most important rite and was repeated many times - whenever a deity entered (*nhap*) or left (*thang*) the medium. The red cloth signals the passage of the deities into and out of the medium in whom they are incarnated.

C. The incarnations.

(a) The Holy Mothers.

At the beginning of every ceremony there are the *gia* (incantations)[7] to the Holy Mothers. Medium H, her face covered with the red veil, placed her hands on her thighs while her body swayed slightly. The liturgical singers sang the airs and songs devoted to the Holy Mothers: *We respectfully request the First Holy Mother of the Celestial Palace ...* Medium H's fingers indicated the descent of the Holy Mothers (one, two or three fingers for the First, Second, and Third Holy Mothers respectively) and the liturgical singers performed the invocation hymn to that Goddess. When the medium crossed her hands on her forehead, it was a sign that the deity had ascended (*thang*). Then the liturgical singers played the appropriate air - *The deity goes back to her palace ...*

Usually, three Holy Mothers (the First, Second, and Third) descend but are not incarnated.[8] When that happens, the medium must keep the red veil over her face. This situation is called *hau trum khan* (*hau trang bong or hau trang man*) to differentiate it from *hau mo khan,* which is when the deity descends and is incarnated. When that happens the red face veil is removed.

Medium H's horoscope is not compatible with Saint Tran, so she could only conduct *hau trum khan* services for Saint Tran and for the First and Second Royal Damsels who are his daughters. Saint Tran's mediums are known for performing remarkable feats like running skewers through their bodies when they incarnate this fearless general.

(b) The Great Mandarins.

Following the incarnations of the Holy Mothers came those of the Great Mandarins. Among the ten Great Mandarins, only four were incarnated (the First, Second, Third and Fifth). These deities were military commanders, so their costumes and gestures were stately and imposing. They usually carry their flags of command, bows and swords. These four mandarins belonged to various palaces:-

(i) *Quan De Nhat* (the First Mandarin) came from the Celestial Palace and wore red garments. He was a celestial god. After coming down to earth to become a mandarin, he lived a religious life and did not make contact with the common people. In the ceremony of

Len Dong he only descended to offer votive incense sticks to the Holy Mothers and then returned to his own world in his *xe gia hoi cung* (chariot).
(ii) *Quan de Nhi* (the Second Great Mandarin) and *Quan de ngu* (the Fifth Great Mandarin) were from the Palace of Mountains and Forests. They wore green costumes. Unlike the First Great Mandarin, they frequently make contact with the common people. After paying tribute to the Holy Mothers, they were incarnated and performed dances with swords and scimitars and showed their appreciation of the hymns that were sung to praise them and their actions.

The Second Great Mandarin manages the deaths and births of the common people:

The Book on Death and Birth written by the Mandarin,
The common people's destiny decided by the Mandarin,
Whoever is dutiful and benevolent,
The Mandarin will bless him.
(Hymn to the Second Great Mandarin)

These two deities also gave advice, listened to requests, distributed gifts and then ... *came back to their palaces in their chariots ...*
(iii) *Quan de Tam Thoai Phu* (the Third Great Mandarin of the Water Palace) wore the white robes that are associated with that domain. After being incarnated, he gave offerings, performed a dance with a sword, received wine and cigarettes from participants, listened to the invocation hymn, distributed presents and ascended.

During the incarnations of the Great Mandarins carried out by medium H, the Fourth only descended on her very briefly, (while the red veil was still covering her face) and he left almost immediately. He was not incarnated into her.

(c) The Holy Dames.
Of the twelve Holy Dames (*Thanh Ba or Chau Ba*), only five were incarnated into medium H. They were *Chau De nhi* (the Second Holy Dame of Mountains and Forests), *Chau Thac Bo* (the Holy Dame of Thac Bo), *Chau Luc* (the Sixth Holy Dame), *Chau Muoi Dong Mo* (the Tenth Holy Dame of Dong Mo) and *Chau Be Bac Le* (the Little Holy Dame of Bac Le). *Chau De Nhat and Chau De Tu* (the First and Fourth Holy Dames) descended but were not incarnated. All the divinities in this category are goddesses of human origin who represent and assist the Holy Mothers of the Four Palaces. Several of them are identified with ethnic minorities. For example, the First Holy Dame is associated with the *Yao* people, the Sixth Holy Dame is linked to the *Nung*, the Tenth is related to the *Tay* and the Holy Dame of Thac Bo is an associate of the *Muong*. Their garments, and the music and dances dedicated to them, are inspired by those of their particular ethnic minority associates.

In all incarnations, after a deity arrives the assistants must hurriedly dress the medium in the costume appropriate to that deity. The costumes of the Holy Dames (tunics, turbans, veils, belts, jewellery, etc.) are very beautiful and imitate the dress of the ethnic minorities with which they are linked. After presenting the votive offerings, the Holy Dames often perform dances with a *mua moi* (a small torch),[9] with a *mua cheo do* (an oar), with a *mua quat (*a fan) or with a *mua kiem* (a sword). The dance with torches can be particularly lively. When medium H was dancing, the worshippers and attendants crowded round her, praising her beauty and her dancing, and, in the guise of the Holy Dame, H threw money to reward the liturgical singers and other participants. The invocation hymns to the Holy Dames were very interesting and meaningful. They are often sung to the tunes of *xa thuong, xa lech*, which are similar to the music of the various ethnic groups. Of the incarnations of the Holy Dames conducted by medium H on this occasion, the First and Fourth Holy Dames descended but were not incarnated.

(d) The Princes.
According to folk tradition, the Princes are mandarins, not military commanders. There are ten Princes, listed in order from the First to the Tenth. All of them were originally people who rendered good service to the common people and to their country. This time, only three Princes were incarnated. They were refined and elegant so their appearance made the ceremony more exciting. They were:
(i) *Ong Hoang Ba Thoai Phu* (the Third Prince of the Palace of Water) wore a white costume consisting of a white brocade tunic, a white turban, white flower decorations in his ears, a white robe trimmed with white beads and a yellow belt.

As bright as a mirror without any dust,
Carrying a sacred wine gourd and a bag of poems,
Wearing the royal white robe and yellow belt, a reward from the King,
With a pair of military shoes on his feet and two heo on his shoulders ...
(Hymn to the Third Prince)

(ii) *Ong Hoang Bay Bao Ha* (the Seventh Prince of Bao Ha) of Nhac Phu (the Palace of Mountains and Forests) wore green garments and was a mandarin who once defended the Lao Cai-Yen Bai region on the northern border:

Travelling from the North to the South,
Respectfully request the Seventh Prince of Bao Ha to descend ...
(Hymn to the Seventh Prince)

The Princes, each carrying two *heo* (stick-like weapons symbolising horses)[10] on their shoulders, often recruit *cham linh or bat dong* (novice-servants) for the Holy Mothers. They select whoever is destined to be a *can dong* (medium)[11] from among the followers of the cult of the Holy Mothers and force them to serve the *cham dong* (deities).

This time, medium H, in the incarnation of the Seventh Prince, recruited some 'servant-soldiers' for the Holy Mothers. After offering incense, H, in the guise of the Prince, danced with his *heo* and all the participants looked worried. Suddenly, the Prince threw his *heo* to a woman trader from Tang Xuan Market in Hanoi. The woman picked it up, attached a VND 10,000 note (about US.70c) to one end and returned it to the Prince. This action implied that she had agreed to become a servant of the Holy Mothers.
(iii) *Ong Hoang Muoi* (the Tenth Prince) of the Palace of the Earth wore yellow robes. He was the defender-mandarin of Nghe An region who performed great deeds for the country. Since his death, he has been worshipped in Nghe An. He is known as a good natured and elegant Prince. He is also extremely sensitive to the beauty of literature. When she manifested the Tenth Prince, medium H sat down to listen to his invocation hymn sung to the tune of *phu co* (declaiming ancient poems). She expressed his pleasure by tapping her thighs and shouting for joy. Then she rewarded the liturgical singers with money. The Prince is always generous in distributing gifts (money, cakes, sweets and jewellery), particularly to women. Everybody received his presents with deep respect and some participants gave him votive offerings in return and asked for his protection, and to those participants he gave more gifts accompanied by good advice and good wishes.

A participant gave offerings to the Prince and prayed for help with her son's educational prospects. The Prince accepted. Then, he signalled that he wanted to go back to his palace, so the assistants quickly covered medium H's head with the veil. All the participants were sad that such a cheerful incarnation was ascending.

(e) The Royal Damsels.
Following the incarnations of the Princes came those of the twelve Royal Damsels. At this ritual, six Damsels came down and were incarnated in medium H. They were *co Doi* or *co De Nhi* (the Second), *co Bo* (the Third), *co Luc* (the Sixth), *co Chin* (the Ninth), and *co Be Bac Le* and *co Be Dong Cuong* (the Little Damsels of Bac Le and Dong Cuong). The Royal Damsels are young and unmarried, so their incarnations are always happy, they wear colourful costumes and dance energetically. Like the Holy Dames, the Royal Damsels were usually of ethnic origin so their costumes are related to those of various ethnic minorities. Their turbans and tunics are made of *tho cam* cloth. The Third Royal Damsel of the Palace of Water wore a white costume like a *Muong* girl.

During the incarnations of these deities the assistants had to keep preparing new costumes for H. In the incarnations of the Great Mandarins and the Princes she put on whichever garments she was given by the assistants. However, in the incarnations of the Holy Dames and the Royal Damsels, H looked at the costumes carefully, then she made the selection herself, sometimes embarrassing her assistants.

During the incarnations of the Royal Damsels, after the first rites there were performances of songs and dances, invocation hymns, the distribution of gifts and then the deities ascended. The invocation hymns praised the beauty of the Royal Damsels but told us very little about them:

On the green hills, there are butterflies and flowers,
In the forest, the Royal Damsel descends to flirt with passers-by,
Her garments and shoes are so elegant,
Her two lamps are bright in the sky,
Like a halo.
In her belt she tucks a comb and flowers.
Her lamps shine everywhere.
(Hymn to the Second Royal Damsel)

Sometimes they highlighted the Goddesses' magical powers:

The Ninth Royal Damsel fans the air to create the wind,
To make everybody, male and female, old and young, happy,
To make flowers bloom in the hills
To cool the hearts of the common people.
(Hymn to the Ninth Royal Damsel)

In the incarnations of the Royal Damsels there are always dances with fans, oars, *mua theu hoa* (embroidery), with small torches, with *mua khan* (scarves), with *mua gui* (baskets on their backs) and with *mua lac chuong* (small bells). Compared to the animated *Then* ritual dances of the *Tay* people, or of powerful shamans elsewhere, the dances of the Royal Damsels are graceful, gentle and merry. At this ceremony all the participants clapped and some shouted words of praise: *You, the Royal Damsel, you dance so beautifully, so skilfully!* In the dance of *mua ganh hoa* (baskets of flowers), the Royal Damsel, carrying two baskets of flowers, executed a series of elegant steps. When somebody shouted: *You, the Royal Damsel, please send showers!* H, in the guise of the deity, threw money, fruit and flowers to the participants. Everyone watching the *Len Dong* pushed forward and tried to get some of the gifts being distributed by the Goddess. The atmosphere of the ceremony became very playful.

The Ninth Royal Damsel is good at curing disease. Therefore, in her incarnation, participants often pay tribute to her and ask her for remedies. At this ceremony there was a couple who were praying for a cure. Medium H (as the Ninth Royal Damsel) put a cup of water on a plate and then took three burning incense sticks and put them on the altar. While murmuring some magic words, H inhaled the incense and breathed smoke into the cup three times. At that point the liturgical singers altered the mood, singing songs glorifying the Damsel's ability:

Bright heart, she points at the sky, it becomes blue,
She points at the earth, it is damaged,
She points at blood, it melts away,
She points at demons, they must flee,
She points at diseases and they disappear.
(Hymn to the Ninth Royal Damsel)

Medium H gave the cup to the couple, they immediately drank from it and prostrated themselves in gratitude to the Damsel.

(f) The Boy Attendants.
The final incarnations conducted by medium H were those of the Boy Attendants. There are ten Boy Attendants, ranging in age from one to nine years old. Today, only *Cau Bo* (the Third Boy Attendant) descended and was incarnated. The costumes, gestures and words of the incarnated deity were rather quaint. Apart from the usual rites, the Little Boy Attendant also performed a unicorn dance and a lion dance, shaking his *heo*.

D. The close of the ceremony.
At the end of the ceremony, medium H took off the veil and costumes. She stood up and thanked all the participants. She invited them to a banquet as a gift from the gods, a grand final gesture in the cycle of reciprocal generosity that had occurred throughout the ceremony, with the medium providing offerings to her deities and additional offerings coming from her attendants and the other visitors, and the deities (in the person of H) redistributing them to the attendants and visitors.

Len Dong and urban society - why have 'spirit journeys' flourished in urban society?

In Vietnam, the phenomenon of *Dao Mau* (the cult of the Holy Mothers) and *Len Dong* have traditionally been features of rural and agricultural society in which matrilineality, and a recognition of the important role women play in society, have been reflected in spiritual life and religious beliefs. However, when trading activities,

like country markets in agricultural areas and small businesses in towns, began to develop, particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *Dao Mau* and *Len Dong* turned into religious services for the benefit of trade. Such religious services prospered in the urban environment. The original forms of *Dao Mau* and *Len Dong* were influenced by Taoism from China, and especially by the appearance of Saint Mother Lieu Hanh. The original primitive form of worship of the Nymphs and the Holy Mothers in the Four Palaces changed to a religion concerned with praying for worldly things - good health, talent, good luck and bounty from heaven.

Doi Moi (the economic reforms of 1986) marked the beginning of industrialisation, modernisation and the development of Vietnam's market economy. Urbanisation in Vietnam has developed at such a pace that at times, in some areas, it has been completely chaotic; many industrial zones and suburban regions surrounding Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh cities have grown rapidly. Urbanisation and the growth of the market economy have disrupted society: people have flocked to the big cities, the urban infrastructure has become overloaded and traditional social systems have broken down. As a result, spiritual and cultural life has suffered. Urban lifestyles have led to people having less faith in themselves and in their communities, so they have turned to supernatural powers as a spiritual outlet, for moral support, and to satisfy their need for something to believe in.

In this context of industrialisation and major social change, religion has prospered; many places of worship like temples, pagodas, communal houses, palaces and shrines have been restored or newly built, and religious services have flourished. Therefore, *Dao Mau* and *Len Dong,* which used to be forbidden, have become increasingly popular. The numerous festivals held at Ba Chua Kho Temple in Bac Ninh Province, Phu Day in Nam Dinh Province, Ba Chua Xu in An Giang Province, and elsewhere, are typical of the renewal of religious belief in Vietnam.[12]

According to a survey conducted by the Institute for Religious Studies, there are eighty-three temples and palaces that worship *Mau* (the Holy Mothers). In old Hanoi there are also many family shrines to *Ong Dong, Ba Dong* and *Mau* that are almost as big as temples. People now say *Tien Phat, hau Mau* (worship Buddha and the Holy Mothers). Therefore, the total number of temples, palaces, and shrines (both private and public) where the Holy Mothers are worshipped, and the services of *Len Dong* take place, now runs into the hundreds. A male or female medium often lives in these places of worship, and surrounding them live hundreds, or even thousands of *Con nhang, De tu*[13] (followers of the cult of the Holy Mothers) forming powerful communities of believers in *Dao Mau*. The *Len Dong* services take place every year on the 'anniversary of the death of the father' which falls in the eighth month of the lunar year, and on the 'anniversary of death of the mother' in the third month of the lunar year, in temples, palaces and shrines. In fact, in the three big cities of Hanoi, Hue and Ho Chi Minh, literally hundreds of *Len Dong* ceremonies occur daily in the third and eighth months of the lunar year.

There are various versions of *Len Dong* ceremonies and magical rituals in today's urban society. The people who perform them can be divided into two main types.

Firstly, there are a large number of mediums who enjoy the status and fulfilment they get from performing the rituals of *Len Dong*. Some of them may be deluded or unhappy in themselves, but many of them genuinely want to help others. The ones who become temple guardians often become very rich, especially if they also have other business interests.

Secondly, there are mediums known as *Dong dua* (mimickers). They do not have *can so* (horoscopes that predict that they should become mediums) and they practice *Len Dong* as a kind of hobby. Many of them have taken advantage of the cult to become very wealthy at the expense of ordinary worshippers. *Dong dua* used to be very rare, but today there are increasing numbers of them in the cities, becoming rich and bragging about their wealth.

Because the number of these mediums, or self-styled psychics, is increasing, many people now believe that *Dao Mau* and *Len Dong* simply exist to benefit business. For them, *Dao Mau* and *Len Dong* provide spiritual support for business and trading activities and make the mediums who practice them rich, like the psychics (*Cut*) in South Korea

Len Dong rituals in urban areas have indeed gradually diverged from those in rural regions, in the following ways:

(i) The architecture and the decoration of the temples and palaces, the ceremonial garments, the type of offerings, and the styles of *Len Dong* all display urban features.

(ii) There is now a growing emphasis on the cultural side of *Len Dong* performances, especially in Saigon.

(iii) New, nationalistic styles of costume, modern votive offerings, new types of music and invocation hymns are developing. Some pop songs and other contemporary songs and dances are performed as part of the ceremonies. Performance has become more important than the rituals so that *Len Dong* ceremonies are now cultural events at which having fun is as important as worshipping the gods.
(iv) More and more followers of the cult of the Holy Mothers, and ordinary people, are coming to offer their sacrifices and pray to the deities of *Dao Mau* for their private, earthly needs and wants. *Len Dong* has become more accessible and appeals to a wider spectrum of society.
(v) The cult of the Holy Mothers has become commercialised and mercenary because of the things the followers pray for and the way gifts are given to them 'from the gods'.

Conclusion

Will Len Dong become an important feature of urban religious/cultural life? There has been much discussion about society's attitude to *Dao Mau* and to shamanistic rituals, including *Len Dong.* Many people ask what cultural and/or positive features there are in *Dao Mau* and *Len Dong.* What superstitious and negative aspects do they have that may not be appropriate for people in modern society?

Firstly, it is a belief of the masses - not only of farmers in rural areas, but also of people in other walks of life and people in cities. When making the pilgrimage to Phu Day - the Holy Mothers' centre of worship - to attend the festival of the 'anniversary of the mother's death' in the third lunar month, or when visiting Tay Ho Palace to worship Saint Mother Lieu Hanh, one sees people from Hanoi and many other cities offering their sacrifices. Going to Ba Chua Kho Temple in Bac Ninh, one can see thousands of people from all walks of life, mostly from the cities, flocking to pray for good fortune and material success at the beginning and end of every year.

People still have faith in the supernatural powers and seek the protection and help of the Saint Mother. This is because, although the development of a market economy has improved living standards for many people, it has also affected people's lives in negative ways. The basic difference between *Dao Mau* (and other shamanistic forms) and other religious beliefs is that *Dau Mau* is not concerned with life after death, but with life *now* - with people's aspirations for health, success, material benefit and good fortune. These are things that people have always wanted but they have not normally been available through religion.

Urban society, with its unbalanced lifestyle, increasing economic pressures and need to repress the emotions can cause spiritual inhibition, which in turn can cause mental health problems for many people. *Len Dong,* as a positive therapy, can help recreate balance and a sense of community.

Furthermore, *Dao Mau* encompasses traditional values, history, virtue and culture. It is about being grateful to one's benefactors, thinking about the origin of things and honouring individuals who have served their country. It could be said that the glorification of historic figures and the localisation of *Dau Mau* have made it a symbol of patriotism in Vietnam in which the Holy Mothers are the key characters. The pride and honour of the Vietnamese people has determined that these maternal images have become objects of worship and repositories of people's faith. They stand for the values of humanity, virtue and Vietnamese tradition.

There is much in *Dao Mau* and *Len Dong* that is of cultural value. They serve as repositories of legends, stories and mythologies relating to the gods; in addition, they provide a forum for performing music, songs and dances and an opportunity for creativity in building and decorating temples and shrines. Many people see *Dao Mau* performances as a form of 'spiritual theatre', or even as a culture in their own right. The rites of *hau bong,* the *Len Dong* of *Dao Mau,* have generated a specific style of musical performance - the *hat van* or invocation hymns. According to Professor Tran Van Khe, *hat van*, as popular songs, are now one of Vietnam's most internationally famous art forms. The values of history, tradition, virtue and culture have always enhanced *Dao Mau* as a Vietnamese religious belief; performances of *Len Dong* have become an important cultural experience in the life of many city-dwellers.

Do the rites of *Dao Mau* and *Len Dong* have any negative or backward-looking features? Yes, of course. As we know, *Dao Mau* is a system of beliefs developed over time from the primitive rites of Nymph worship to more advanced rites like worshipping the Holy Mothers in the Three (or Four) Palaces. It is an extremely complex system, with many ancient features that may not always

seem appropriate for modern society.

But like most religious beliefs, Dao Mao and Len Dong embrace the genuine, the good and the beautiful and oppose evil and wrong doing. Religious faiths do not exist in a vacuum but in human society. Members of society have not only followed and revered religions, but they have also adapted them for different ends, sometimes even for purposes that are not particularly 'religious'. As people search for a more spiritual life, religion is experiencing a revival, but unfortunately many people are taking unfair advantage of this revival for personal gain and belief is becoming commercialised. A large number of people are getting rich through the corrupt use of *Len Dong*, which is against the spirit of religion.

How then should we act: should we reject *Dau Mau* and *Len Dong*? We used to think we should, but in reality we know we cannot. Instead of rejecting *Len Dong*, it would be wiser to develop and adapt it so as to promote its positive features and to minimise its negative effects.

(An earlier version of this paper was presented at the *Museums and Urban Anthropology Conference* in Hanoi. See Ngo Duc Thinh, 2009, 'Mediumship in Vietnam Today' *Museums and Urban Anthropology,* (ed) Amareswar Galla, Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Hanoi.)

NOTES

1. *Dao Mau* (the cult of the Holy Mothers) is here understood as that of the Three (or Four) Palaces to differentiate it from the cult of Holy Mothers in general.
2. Ngo Duc Thinh (chief author), 1996. *The cult of Holy Mothers in Vietnam,* Culture Publishing House, Hanoi, and 1992. *The Invocation Hymns,* Ethnicity and Culture Publishing House, Hanoi.
3. *Co day* means the sufferings (illness, diseases, madness, etc.) the deities inflict on anyone with *can dong* who does not hold the ritual to become a medium.
4. Mircea Eliade, 1964. *Shamanism: archaic techniques of ecstasy,* Princeton University Press.
5. *Hau dang* are the assistants of the mediums in the ceremony of *Len Dong.* The number of *hau dang* for each ceremony varies from two to four.
6. *Khan phu dien* is a red rectangular veil used to cover the mediums' head when a deity arrives or leaves.
7. *Gia* is the period the deity is incarnated in the medium. Thus, in a ceremony of *Len Dong* the number of *gia* is the same as that of the divinities who are incarnated. *Gia* also means the 'seat' of the divinities.
8. *Giang* (descending) means a deity descends on the body of a medium and *nhap* (entering) means a deity descends and is incarnated in the medium. In the ceremony of *Len Dong*, not every deity can be incarnated; some only descend and do not enter the body of the medium.
9. *Mua moi* is the dance with a small torch. *Moi* is a roll of rough paper coated with an inflammable substance. The mediums usually hold it between their fingers to dance.
10. *Heo* is a stick about 50–60 cms long with 2 or 3 bells on the end. It symbolises the horse and rod used by the Princes.
11. *Can dong*. According to tradition, a person with *can dong* is one whose destiny is to become a medium of the cult of the Holy Mothers. He or she must serve the gods, otherwise they will be punished.
12. Fjelstad, Karen and Nguyn Thi Hien, (Eds.), 2006. *Possessed by the Spirits: Mediumship in Contemporary Vietnamese Communities,* New York.
13. *Con nhang, De tu* are the followers of the cult of the Holy Mothers. They often go to the temples or palaces dedicated to the Holy Mothers or leave their incense bowls there.

Investigative research towards the designation of shamanic village rituals as ‘intangible cultural properties’ of the Seoul Metropolitan Government

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Investigative research towards the designation of shamanic village rituals as 'intangible cultural properties' of the Seoul Metropolitan Government

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ABSTRACT
Shamanic rituals taking place in Aegissidang, Mount Bonghwa Dodang, and Bamseom Bugundang, were thoroughly investigated by three experts appointed by the Board of Cultural Properties of Seoul Metropolitan Government. This religious belief and its related practices is still carried on by many shamans, religious specialists and their followers with the doctrines being handed down orally rather than in the form of written scriptures. Nonetheless, it is still a struggle to convince many Koreans of the cultural worth of shamanism. Owing to a deeply ingrained and stereotypical definition of what constitute religious doctrines and practices, its value as cultural heritage is often rejected. The Seoul Metropolitan Government and its Board have taken the initiative in designating these rites as 'intangible cultural properties' and hope this will lead to a more positive understanding of shamanism as a significant and valuable part of Korean traditional culture.

Introduction

In this rapidly changing world, all countries wishing to maintain their own national culture must be seriously concerned about the preservation of their intangible heritage. The methods of preserving and protecting intangible heritage are therefore now considered to be of critical importance, with many cultural policy makers and academic researchers increasingly cognisant of the situation and dedicated to preventing the destruction of cultural properties. [1]

In South Korea, Seoul Metropolitan Government's designation system for intangible cultural property has been operated in accordance with the municipal rules for the protection of cultural property. Individuals, or groups with exclusive talents or skills in specific heritage fields, submit an application form to the Cultural Property Committee of Seoul Metropolitan Government. There, a member of the committee, which is composed of ten members, reviews each application form and decides which proposed subjects are likely to be worth

preserving. After the initial selection process, an expert group of at least three members (including one from the committee) with expertise in the specific field under review, conduct an in-depth investigation into each proposal. This usually involves a month of research in the field. When the municipal government appoints the committee, they consider thoroughly what expertise each member has in the different areas of intangible heritage. The research can therefore be done in a very professional manner in terms of both the content and the time limit. Finally, the appointed members for a specific field will hand in a report to the officer in charge. The report will examine the individual candidate's field from a variety of perspectives - historical and geographical background, oral testimony and an evaluation by the researcher as well as a general introduction to the property, describing how it is carried out and giving profiles of the heritage holders. He or she then brings all the paperwork to the Cultural Property Committee for evaluation. These papers are crucial to the final decision since committee members usually give a significant amount of weight to them. The assessment categories are 'not eligible for designation', 'eligible but some weak points need to be remedied', 'eligible for designation,' and so on. The final decision on every application must be unanimous.

The idea of 'cultural property' was developed by academics and intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century to protect Korean traditions from the rapid influx of foreign cultures, especially from Europe and America. It is clear that the maintenance of cultural identity is not merely an academic activity but a living process passed down continuously as part of daily life. Thus the phrase 'cultural property' refers not only to historical artefacts but also to future developments.[2] In recent years, cultural policy in Korea has defined 'intangible heritage' as those cultural assets represented by such things as oral tradition, artistic presentations and ritual customs. Specifically, plays, music, dance, games, rites, martial arts, food and craft techniques with considerable artistic or academic value are all examples of the intangible heritage protected by the Korean government. The process of transmitting this intangible heritage is also very important because the assets are usually passed down from generation to generation, through language or particular types of training. In order to ensure that future generations have a full knowledge of their culture, it is necessary to understand exactly what constitutes cultural heritage.[3] It also means that the next generation must both create and preserve cultural properties.

In Korea, 'important intangible heritage' comes under the rubric of state-designated heritage, which is designated by an appointed official of the Cultural Heritage Administration, and 'intangible heritage' is heritage that is designated locally by the mayor of a city or the governor of a province. These two different terms are used to differentiate between state-designated heritage and city/province-designated heritage. This research paper is about shamanic rituals (*gut*), a type of intangible heritage designated by the Seoul Municipal Government, one of Korea's provincial ministries. Three village rituals have been chosen for discussion: the Bonhwasan *Dodang-Gut,* generated from a mountain culture, the Bamseom *Dodang-Gut,* generated from the cultural region of the Han River, the main natural resource for the citizens of Seoul, and the Aegissi *Dang-Gut* generated from the urban environment of Seoul, which differs widely from agricultural, mountain, or riverside culture. At the outset of the research project, these three rituals were specially selected by designated government officials as representative of the rituals of the Seoul metropolitan area.

The three case studies used in this paper were initially forwarded to the author – a specialist in Korean shamanism - via the officer in charge of designating Seoul's municipal intangible cultural property. The author carried out a month-long investigation of these rituals with two other investigators, from August 1st - 31st, 2004. As a result of this research, the three investigators submitted a report to the Cultural Property Committee of the Seoul Metropolitan Government. The research methods were literary research, research into relevant material, interviewing and fieldwork. The author had himself previously conducted extensive academic research and fieldwork, over a long period, into the practice of shamanism in the Seoul area. In particular, representative examples of Seoul's communal rituals (*Aegissidang-gut* in Haegdang-dong, *Dodong-gut* on Mount Bonghwa, and *Bugundang-gut* in Bamseom) had been closely examined. Moreover, the author made a series of in-depth investigations and a close study of the *Dangju* shaman leading the *Dang-gut,* the *Jaebidangju* musician, the *Jegwan* (ritual officials) and the *Haju* (male village elder who promotes the rituals); other people who participated in the ritual, local residents and heritage bearers were also studied.

The investigative reports carried out on three different shamanic rituals for designating them 'intangible cultural property'

A) Aegissidang and the *Aegissidang-gut*

(a) About Aegissidang

Aegissidang is a shrine located in the Haengdang-dong area of Seongdong-gu, an eastern district of Seoul. Initially, the Aegissidang shrine was built in the Wangsimni area of eastern Seoul, but it was moved to the back of the Seongdong Post Office when a railway station was constructed on its original site. The shrine was finally moved to its current location in 1943 when a Japanese residence took over its second site. Aegissidang has also been known as *Salgundang* (the Apricot shrine) since a big apricot tree stood next to it as its main guardian tree. It also used to be called *Jinpeori salgundang,* as it is surrounded by a broad, bare field, called *Jinpeori.*

It is not easy to ascertain the historical origin of the Aegissidang shrine since there are few literary resources relating to the site. This problem also applies to other shrines around Korea. In order to investigate a shrine's historic features, it is necessary to conduct comprehensive research not only into



Figure 1
Aegissidang-gut, dangju shaman Kim-oknyeom



Figure 2
Aegissidang-gut, shamanic shrine

founding records, such as records of construction and repair work, and inscriptions, but also to draw on verbal information from people who were connected to the shrine in the past.

In the case of research into the Aegissidang shrine, most of our information comes from a *Dangju* shaman, a member of the third generation of a *Dangju* shaman family that has managed Aegissidang and the records of its foundation. However, a comprehensive, nation-wide report on folkloric research, conducted by the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 1979, states that records of the construction of the shrine (the so-called *Bonggeongi*) at Aegissidang used to exist.[4] Although they no longer survive, according to the research report … *in 4280 of the Tangun era* (that is, in 1947) *local leaders re-built the shrine which had a 200 year history*.[5] In other words, this record proved that Aegissidang dates back approximately 260 years.

The third villager appointed chief *Dangju* shaman, Kim Oknyeom of the Aegissidang shrine, told the investigators how shamanic rituals in Aegissidang started. According to Kim,

A long time ago, after a war broke out in the north, five princesses fled to this village as people in the court had been separated and scattered all around the nation. Amid blossoming wild roses and briers they were blocked in by mountains to the back and rivers to the front. Forced to stay here in the briers and brambles, they could scarcely get any food other than the roots of plants. Finally they died, with briers in their mouths. Later a village was founded on the site. One day a village leader had a dream in which the five princesses asked for an opportunity to show their resentment of the way they had been treated; at that point the village started to have regular gut rituals

Kim said that one of the five sisters settled in Salgundang and another in Assidang in Yangji-dong, while the other three stayed in Supuldang.[6] All in all, we can assume that the rituals here were originally held to ameliorate the resentment of the five princesses who fled the court a long time ago.

All three shrines in the Haengdang-dong, Yangji-dong, and Wangsimni areas have been set in their relevant context. In doing so, they have been revered as local guardian deities who protect three neighbouring villages and bring tranquil and peaceful lives to the local residents. Yangji-dang, however, disappeared when the area was developed by an urban planning project, and Aegissidang in the Wangsimni

area still has virtually no functional value as a shamanic shrine for the local people, except for a birthday ritual for *Aegissi* (unmarried ladies) conducted annually by the *Dangju* shaman. Kim said that all three shrines were originally built in the Wangsimni area: the first was the one at Haengdang-dong , the second at Yangji-dang, and the third at Supuldang.[7] Meanwhile, the shamanic paintings in Haengdang-dong Aegissidang have a century-old history and reflect recognisable features of other shamanic paintings kept in communal shrines in Seoul. They depict seven deities, along with Aegissi, the main spirit of the shrine, the Sambuljeseok (three shamanistic gods), Sansin (a mountain god), Bugunnim (an old man and wife who act as village protectors), Jowangnim (a kitchen spirit) and Jwajechang (the left commander) and Ujechang (the right commander) rest harmoniously inside the shrine.

(b) About the *Aegissidang-gut*

At the Aegissidang shrine, a large-scale, communal *Aegissidang-gut* shamanic ritual is normally held annually on the most auspicious day between the first and the fourth of the tenth lunar month. Also, on every fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month there is a regular ritual to celebrate Aegissi's birthday. It is particularly remarkable that we can so easily find authentic aspects of Korea's traditional communal rituals - which have been fairly well transmitted over the years - by observing a *Dang-gut* (shamanic ritual for a village community) in such a highly urbanised city as Seoul. This is because the *Dang-gut* in early October is usually a large-scale celebration in which local residents participate. It brings people together in a harmonious and cooperative spirit and creates a kind of festive mood. Since 2005, when the *Aegissidang-gut* was designated as an 'intangible cultural property' by the Seoul Metropolitan Government, it has been revitalised as a local cultural activity.

Aegissidang-gut preparations start twenty days before the actual ritual, when organisers brew the sacred liquor called *Jora*. In order to make *Jora,* the maker should first cleanse his or her body, hoping that his soul will also become clean and that he will behave well. Local people believe that if the maker is not pure and sincere, he or she will not make good-quality *Jora*. Secondly, they clean the shrine and arrange its interior neatly. Moreover, only food of good quality can be selected for ritual offerings. Then the *Dangju* shaman arranges in advance for assistant shamans to perform the ritual, while the *Jaebidangju* musician finds assistant musicians to play shamanic music. Three days before *Dang-gut,* the organisers ward off all possible bad luck from the site by stretching a rope called a *Geumjul* across the shrine gate, putting yellow soil at the shrine, and forbidding 'impure' people (those who have recently been to a funeral or been in the home of a deceased person or of a newborn infant) or animals from entering the place.

(c) The sequence of activities in the *Dang-gut*

(i) Brewing the *Jora* liquor. The brewing has to start twenty days before the ceremony.
(ii) Stretching the *Geumjul* across the gate of the shrine and arranging the vessels of yellow soil. This happens three days before the ceremony.
(iii) Holding a preliminary ritual called *Judangmullim* to purify the shrine where the shrine *gut* will take place.
(iv) Sitting singing shamanic songs and shamanic prayers and playing an hourglass-shaped drum to expel evil spirits. Then shamanic songs called *Bonhyangnorae* are sung to propitiate the god, Gamang.
(v) Performing a *Jinjeok*. A *Jinjeok* is a kind of Confucian ritual: male officials in costume read a written prayer, offer fruit and nectar and bow respectfully, after which the female shamans and other participants repeat the same actions.
(vi) Performing a *gut* called *Bonhyanggeori*. This welcomes the god Bonhyang (the spirit of the local mountain god).
(vii) Performing a gut called *Aegissi geosang* to welcome the god Aegissi who is housed in the shrine. A female shaman wearing a red scarf in the guise of Aegissi wanders around delivering messages from Aegissi to local residents.
(viii) Performing a *gu*t called *Malmyeonggeori*. At this point, the *Mansinmalmyeong* gods (deceased people who were once *Dangju* shamans or their close aides) enter in the following order: *Dangju* shaman Ko Songja, *Dangju* shaman Kim Myobun, Ayangnang (Ko Songja's spiritual grandmother), Daesa (Ko Songja's

spiritual mother), Pyeongsan (Ko Songja's spiritual daughter), Seoksun (*Dangju* of Yangji-dong shrine), Taesangsin (the nurse who previously took care of Ko Songja) and Sim (who arranged all the sacrificial food offerings during Kim Myobun's reign).
(ix) Performing a *gut* called *Jeseokgeori* to welcome the gods Chilseong, Jeseoks, and Bulsa, who make divinations using chestnuts and dates.
(x) Performing a *gut* called *Jesokgeori* which invites the *Bugunmama* couple who have safeguarded the Haengdang-dong area to join the participants and visiting deities in enjoying the *gut*.
(xi) Performing a *gut* called *Mugamseogi* in which local residents in ritual costumes join in the *Simpuri* (origin ritual).
(xii) Performing a *gut* called *Byeolsanggeori* to welcome the god Byeolsang.
(xiii) Performing a *gut* called *Sinjang Daegamgeori,* a rite intended to welcome the gods Sinjang and Daegam and allow them to enjoy the ritual and predict fortunes for the year ahead by choosing one of five different coloured flags.
(xiv) Performing a *gut* called *Seongjugeori* to welcome the domestic deity, Seongju, using a wooden pole called a *Seongjudae.*
(xv) Performing a *gut* called *Changbugeori,* a rite intended to drive out misfortune in the coming year by letting the god Changbu enjoy the *gut*.
(xvi) Performing a gut called *Gyemyeongeori,* at which pieces of *Gyemyeon* rice cake are sold to local residents
(xvii) Burning sacrificial papers called *Soji* in front of a flower-strewn meal table (a table with bank notes on the top of rice, lit by candles) arranged by local residents.
(xviii) Finishing the *Dangjgut* by holding a *Dwitjeon* to end the ritual by letting the miscellaneous gods and spirits leave after they have eaten plants.

(d) Heritage bearers - *Dangju* shaman and *Jaebidangju* musician

(i) *Dangju* shaman Kim Oknyeom.
Kim Oknyeom, a *Dangju* shaman, was born on 25th December, 1936, and is the third *Dangju* shaman of the Aegissidang shrine. She is supposed to live in the shrine to manage and organise the *Dang-gut.* Kim learned how to conduct all the ritual ceremonies from her mother, Kim Myobun, as Kim Myobun did from her mother, Ko Songja. The three generations of shamans know all about the *Aegissidang gut* and its traditions, shamanic songs, shamanic dances, the delivering of messages from the dead or from the gods, the sequence of activities in the *gut* ritual and how the food offerings should be arranged. Kim has been passing her knowledge and experience in rituals down to her disciple, Sin Hyeonju, (another female shaman, aged forty seven), her biological daughter, Oh Soyeon, (a forty four year old female shaman) and other 'spiritual daughters'.
(ii) *Jaebidangju* musician, Choi Hyeonggeum.
The chief musician, called a *Jaebidangju*, Choi Hyeonggeum was born on 18th June, 1954, learned



Figure 3
Aegissidang-gut, To receive the domestic deity called *Seongju*

shamanic music in the Seoul area from his aunt and subsequently became a well-known musician. He is already a top-level musical performer and is a man of immense erudition on the *Dang-gut* and issues related to it. Mr. Choi has been the chief musician at *Aegissidang-gut* since 1981. *Aegissidang-gut* music consists of three different parts; Choi mainly plays a bamboo flute called a *Piri* but occasionally plays a large transverse bamboo instrument called a *Daegeum* and one of the traditional stringed instruments, a Korean fiddle called a *Haegeum*. Many generations of *Jaebidangju* musicians at *Aegissidang-gut* have been leading musicians in their day. *Jaebidangju* Lee Sungil, in the reign of the late Dangju, Ko Songja, played as a *Jaebidangju* with Park Kidong and Jeon Duyeon. In the period when Kim Myobun was *Dangju*, Kim Gamyong led musical performances with such other great musicians of the day as Ji Gwanghi, Park Ilnam, Yang Gwangseon, and Choi Seokgil. Currently, Mr Choi performs with Han Sanggi, Park Munyeong, Han Yeongseo, Kim Chanseop, Park Munsu, Im Gitaek, Kim Seongyeon and others.

(e) Researcher's report

The *Aegissidang-gut* in Haengdang-dong is a traditional communal ritual which takes place in the Seoul area and is at least 260 years old. It is a form of shamanic ritual which is typical of agricultural or fishing cultures, but is remarkable in that it happens in a city. It is widely accepted in the Korean scholarly community that the current and third *Dangju* shaman, Ms. Kim, who has been maintaining the place as a working shrine, is clearly the next in line to inherit this intangible cultural property. In particular, Ms. Kim is proficient in interpreting ritual documents and fulfills her mission as *Dangju* shaman by maintaining a close relationship with the local community. *Jaebidangju* musician, Mr. Choi, has a celebrated talent in musical performance and is extremely well versed in the ritual music of the Seoul area. It is widely accepted by scholars that he is a professional musician who has directly inherited the shamanic musical tradition, and he is also good at inviting guest musicians to accompany him at rituals.

The fact that local residents are keen to participate in the ceremony reinforces the belief that *Dang-gut* enhances communal unity and prosperity. Moreover, with the full cooperation and support of the Seongdong District Office and District Council Office, the ritual creates a harmonious link between the ceremonial officials and the local community. Seven shamanic paintings housed in the shrine have significant value as cultural properties. Given that *Aegissidang-gut* in Haengdang-dong has a long history, and *Dangju* shaman Kim and *Jaebidangju* musician Choi perform their roles in accordance with the traditions that have been handed down to them,



Figure 4
Dodan-gut on Mt. Bonghwa, Shaman chanting



Figure 5
Dodan-gut on Mt. Bonghwa,
Shaman collects money from villagers

Aegissidang-gut is sufficiently important to be designated as municipal 'intangible heritage' by the Seoul Metropolitan Government.

B) The *Dodang* and *Dodang-gut* on Mount Bonghwa

(a) About the *Dodang*

Since there are no literary records about the origin of *Dodang* on Mount Bonghwa, it is difficult to assess the actual value of the place and its practices. Nevertheless, from hearsay evidence we learn that the site has a long history going back about four centuries. According to Choi Seokgil, husband of the previous *Dangju* shaman, Ms. Bang, and himself a famous shamanic musician in the Seoul area, the genealogy of *Dangju* in Bonghwa *Dodang* consists of thirteen generations covering about four hundred years. Choi's testimony is strongly supported by local people who were born in the area and who are particularly interested in *Dodang*. Currently, official documents published by the Seoul Metropolitan Government, the City Office of Jungrang and the City Council of Jungrang, all assume that *Dodang* on Mount Bonghwa has this four hundred year history, but they offer no historical evidence to support this claim.

Fortunately, we can find a very short description of *Dodang* on Mount Bonghwa in a story about *Bonguje* published by the Institute of Local History of the Junghwa-dong area in Jungrang-gu district, which refers to a historic record written by Byeongin in March, in the 29th year of King Sejong's reign (1397-1450). It is described as:-

... a house with water and a heating supply system, was built on the upper part of the stage so that people could store necessary tools and utensils ... initially it was a thatched cottage with a single room but it was remodelled into a tile- roofed and colourfully painted house with four rooms at the front and two rooms at the side in the second year of Gwangmu's reign (1900AD) .... a fire of unknown origin burnt the building down on 27th July 1992. From 22nd September through 30th November 1992, the place was reconstructed as the current red brick/cement building.

However, it is incomprehensible that a storage building, run by a government body, was originally constructed as a very humble thatched cottage. It should have been a house with a tiled roof since it was a place to keep national assets and ceremonial items. All this presumably indicates that the thatched, single-roomed shrine existed before Bongsudae was rebuilt on it. In the meantime, it seems that the place was remodelled as a shrine with a tiled roof and four rooms at the front.[8] What is important is that the existence of the thatched structure in the record

supports the belief that a shrine has existed for a long time on the top of Mount Bonghwa. Considering the scale and form of the thatched building, it seems to have been a functional place for holding a simple communal ritual organised by people in the neighbourhood. Accordingly, the local peoples' belief that Dodang on Mount Bonghwa is more than four hundred years old seems reasonable.

It is easy to see that Mount Bonghwa might well have been a beacon. Mount Bonghwa is 138 meters above the sea, and what is known as *Bonghwajae* by the public and *Bonghwattuk* in shamanic communities, is located on the top of the mountain at a junction between the villages of Sinnae 2-dong, Sangbong 1-dong, and Muk 1-dong. The structure on the top of Mount Bonghwa has been remodelled as a house with a tiled roof, consisting of a *Ujingak* roof and brick walls, and it has two and half rooms at the front and a single one at the side. Under the stairs to the main building there is an annex where the shrine guard lived, and an adjacent small storage house for keeping ritual utensils and preparing food offerings. In the main *Dangjip* building, there is an altar about eighty centimetres high on which are deity figures, candle stands, a censer and a vessel of holy water. The deity figure is the 'mountain lady' who takes care of villagers living around Mount Bonghwa. The current keeper, Ms. Kim Soweon, calls the figure 'Bulsahalmeoni' (immortal lady), while local people call her *Sansinhalmi* or just *Halmi*. The figure is seated and wears a white robe with red wavy drapery and a white trimmed hat. She has a round face and a smile on her lips which give her a merciful look. There is a baby monk figure just to the right of Bulsahalmeoni. According to an unwritten legend, after an old lady who served the mountain god died, local villagers started to revere her as a divine being called the 'mountain lady'.

(b) About the *Dang-gut*

In the past, the *Dodang-gut* on Mount Bonghwa was a communal festival held jointly and amicably by villagers from six villages: Seochonmal (now in the Sangbong-dong area) the majority of whose villagers were members of Heo clan, Hwangchomal (also now in the Sangbong-dong area) whose villagers were mostly from the Hwang clan, Choichonmal (now in the Junghwa-dong area) where many Choi clan families lived, Piul (now in the Sinnae-dong area) where the Papyeong Yun families lived together, Meokgul (now in the Muk-dong area) and Hyeon's village (now in the Myeonmok-dong area). Of these, the Meokgul area



Figure 6
Dodang-gut on Mt Bonghwa – shooting arrows to drive evil spirits away

started to hold its own separate *Dang-gut* rituals a long time ago. Since the late 1960s, villagers from the Junghwa-dong area (Choichonmal) and the Sangbong-dong area (Seochonmal) have formed a community and organised an alternative annual *Dang-gut* with the Sinnaedong area (Piul) villagers. In other words, two communities, one consisting of the Junghwa-dong and Sangbong-dong areas, and the other solely from Sinnae-dong area, started holding annual rituals in turn. Recently, an inter-communal committee for preserving the *Dodang* ritual tradition, started to organise rituals hosted by the City Council of Jungrang and supported by the District Office of Jungrang. In the past, rituals were mostly paid for by voluntary contributions from the villagers but now they are financed from official funds from the City Council and the City Office of Jungrang. *Dang-gut* takes place on every third day of March (according to the lunar calendar). A Confucian memorial service forms part of the *Dodang-gut* ritual.

(c) The sequence of events at *Dang-gut*

(i) A *gut* called *Georibujeong* is performed at the entrance leading to the mountain peak.
(ii) *Jaebi* and *Mansin* (a female shaman) enter the *Dodang* building to a *Gilnori* with *Gilgunak* musical accompaniment.
(iii) A *gut* called *Judangmullim* is performed at the *Somang* (wishing) stone in the court yard of the guard's house.
(iv) A *gut* called *Bulsacheongbae* takes place, at which the female shaman sits and beats an hourglass-shaped drum to receive Bulsahalmeoni, she then performs *Bujeongcheongbae* and *Gamangcheongbae*, and sings *Gamang* songs.
(v) A *gut* called *Bulsageori* is performed in the main building, and then messages from the gods are delivered at the courtyard using *Yonggung danji.*
(vi) A *gut* called *Jinjeok* is performed which involves arranging a ritual table in the courtyard to hold a Confucian memorial service. Representatives from the City Council and Committee read written prayers.
(vii) A *gut* called *Dodang bujeongcheongbae* is performed to expel evil spirits and ward off bad luck by the shaman sitting beating an hourglass-shaped drum.
(viii) A *gut* called *Dodanggamangcheongbae* is performed in the hope that the god Gamang will come down from the heaven, people start singing *Bonhyang* songs, again accompanied by the hourglass-shaped drum.
(ix) A *gut* called *Jinjeok* offers nectar and pays homage to the gods.
(x) A *gut* called *Sangeori* welcomes the Mountain God, and then invites Sansinmalmyeong, Sansingamang, Daesinhalmeoni, Sanjejang, Gulmakjejangharabeoji, Dangjigiharabeoji, Dangjigihalmeoni, and Daejaebiharabeoji to enjoy the performance.
(xi) A *gut* called *Sangsangeori* invites the gods Byeolsang, Sinjang Daegam and the gods in general to enjoy the ceremony.
(xii) A *gut* called *Sanjeseokgeori* invites the god Sanjeseok to sell *Bokbara* and *Myeongbara* and *Gyemyeon* rice cake to local residents.
(xiii) A *gut* called *Changbugeori* is performed to ward off bad luck in the year ahead by inviting the god Changbu to enjoy the ritual.
(xiv) A *gut* called *Sangununggeori* is performed, which consists of taking a cow's head which has been cooked, piercing it with a long sword, parading it round the courtyard and then standing the sword and the head on the ground.
(xv) A *gut* called *Yoggungbulsageori* involves going to Yonggungdang on the top of Mount Bonghwa to invite the god Yonggungbulsa to come to the ceremony.
(xvi) In a ritual called *Daenaerim, Daejaebi,* a man with a pole, prays for good luck by sticking the pole into a bowl filled with rice so that spirits and gods will come down it.
(xvii) Next comes *Yugadolgi. Dangju* and the *Jaebidori,* led by *Daejaebi,* play *Gilnori,* shooting bows towards the villages in this sequence - first Piul, then Meokgul, Choichonmal, Hwangchonmal, Seochonmal, Ankkol, and finally, Bakseondal, to keep evil spirits away from the area.
(xviii) This is followed by a ritual called *Cheonggyeo Byeokkigi,* again intended to keep the evil spirits away. The local villagers gather together and throw roosters, symbolically 'throwing them away'.
(xix) Next to last is the ceremony of *Dodang Dwitjeon* which ends all the ritual activities where *Dodang-gut* took place.
(xx) Finally, they perform *Dwitjeon* to end all the ritual activities at the *Somang* stone in front of the guard's house.

(d) Heritage bearers - *Dangju* shaman and *Jaebidangju* musician

(i) *Dangju* shaman, Sin Wihaeng.

Dangju shaman, Ms Sin Wihaeng was born on June 26th, 1939, in Yeongdeok, in north Gyeongsang province. She settled in the Sangbong-dong area of Seoul at the age of twenty nine. She is known as *Sangbongdong Jjokjipge Mansin* (an exceptionally perceptive female shaman) or *Jjokjipge bosal*. At the age of thirty three she received a spirit god, and stayed alone until she became Bang Sunnyeo's apprentice and her last spiritual daughter. At that time Bang - who was the wife of Choi Seokgil, a famous shamanic musician - was living in the Myeonmok-dong area. Bang had Sin participate in *Dodang-gut* on Mount Bonghwa. After Bang passed away, another of her spiritual daughters, Gang Gisun, succeeded her as *Dangju* shaman. Gang, born on Jeju Island in 1929, was known as *Jejudojip* or *Gatbawi*. Sin continued to join in the *Dodang-gut* rituals on Mount Bonghwa and succeeded to the position of *Dangju* when Gang emigrated to the USA in 2000. Sin is the present *Dangju* shaman.

(ii) *Jaebidangju* musician, Mr Kim Gwangsu.

Kim Gwangsu was born on November 23rd, 1945, and took on the mantle of *Jaebidangju* musician from his father, Kim Sunseon, who died at the age of eighty four. He has become a very well known musician in *Dodang-gut* shamanic music. As with other *Dodang-gut* rituals in different regions, Bonghwa *Dodang-gut* music is composed of three different parts played on the *Piri, Daegeum*, and *Haegeum*. Kim plays the *Piri*. His brother, Kim Heungsu, Kim Chanseop, Lee Hanbok, Bang Ingeun, Heo Yongeop and He Seungpil play the music with Kim. He was trained in shamanic music by his father and is very experienced and talented in *Dodang-gut* music. In particular, he specialises in the *Gilgunak* part of the Mount Bonghwa *Dodang-gut* performance.

(e) Researcher's report

Dodang-gut on Mount Bonghwa is one of Seoul's most famous communal *guts* and has at least a 400-year-long history. In particular, this is a large-scale *gut* combining six neighbouring villages. The present *Dangju* shaman, Sin Wihaeng, keeps *Dodang*, the shamanic shrine and its shamanic rituals as *Dangju* shaman and has a thorough knowledge of *Dodang-gut*. *Jaebidangju* musician, Kim Gwangsu, also has an orthodox pedigree and shows brilliant musical talent. He leads a group of other inspirational musicians. He is also very knowledgeable about the performance of

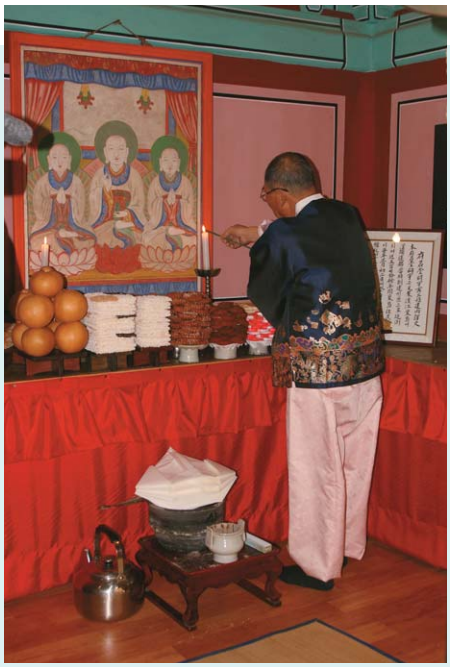


Figure 7
Bugundang-gut in Bamseom, A villager burns incense at the shrine



Figure 8
Sasil – sticking a three-pronged spear in a pig's head as an offering to the gods.

Gilgunak in Mount Bonghwa's *Dodang-gut* ritual.

Dodang-gut is a traditional festival and, for many years, has involved a group of local districts in a friendly, communal activity. What is more significant is that the local authorities (the City Council and the City Office in Jungrang) support the rituals financially as a form of cultural activity. *Dodang-gut* needs to be revitalised as a significant cultural expression by designating it as one of Seoul's 'intangible cultural properties'.

C) Bugundang and *Bugundang-gut* in Bamseom

(a) About Bugundang

Like the two previous cases, the historic origin of Bugundang, a village shamanic shrine in Bamseom, was rarely recorded. Only oral evidence and a few documents provide some clues about it. According to oral testimonies from local people in Bamseom, Bugundang is about six hundred years old. '*Jeungbomunheonbigo*' tells us that people hung paper notes – *Bugun* – in the woods around Bamseom. '*Ojuyeonmunjangjeonsango*', written by Lee Gyugyeong, describes a wooden lingam that was hung on the interior wall of Bugundang. These records indicate that the *Bugun* religion has existed for a long time. In this context, Seoul's Bamseom Bugundang may well be equally ancient.
The 3rd edition of '*Bugundang History*' tells us that:-

Bugundang was founded on Yuldo Island when the capital was transferred to Seoul. Residents of Yuldo Island had conducted rituals on every January 2nd for about 570 years. Since 1968 (4301 in the Tangun calendar), it has been under the national management system - Gukchaek - until it finally settled where it is now in 1995, when the previous location was developed into a giant apartment complex.[9]

According to this, people in Bamseom believe that Bugundang's history is as long as Seoul's history as a capital city. Bugundang settled in its present location in 1995, but when the residents were all moved out of the area in 1968 because of an urban development project, the building was located a bit further to the north.

Bamseom residents believe that the god Bugun still takes care of them. The status of the god Bugun was notably high since people believe that the mountain god of Mount Gwanak bowed to Bugun. People in Bamseom are not willing to talk freely about

Bugun as they both respect and fear him. Whenever they face a difficult situation, they visit him to pray for a solution to their problems.

In the past, people believed that if anyone urinated around the building or entered without permission, he or she would be punished; if children picked fruit and ate around the shrine, they would get boils; people with glasses were supposed to take them off; even pointing a finger at the building was prohibited. Women heading to a washing place could not carry used nappies or clothes spotted with menstrual blood when they were passing through the building. There is also a story that a mounted Japanese policeman trying to pass by the building during the Imperial Japanese era found that he could not move a single step. Accordingly, Bugundang is believed to be a place full of miraculous energy.

(b) About the *Bugundang-gut*

Bamseom *Bugundang-gut* takes place every year on January 2nd (by the lunar calendar). Every year on December 10th there is a preparatory meeting to appoint *Soim* and *Doga*, and *Dangju* and *Jaebidangju* decide which female shamans and musicians they are going to invite. They also discuss what went wrong at the previous *gut* ceremony and suggest ways of avoiding the same problems at the forthcoming one. People then clean the building, and individual residents as well as *Soim* and *Doga* try to avoid visiting mourners' houses or houses with newborn babies. All the expenses for the *gut* come from voluntary donations from residents. A list of donors is posted on the *Dodang* wall.

(c) The sequence of events at the *Dang-gut*

(i) A *gut* called *Judangmullim* is performed to purify the atmosphere around Gutcheong before the main *gut* ceremony.
(ii) A *gut* called *Gosaban* is performed. They go to *Dogajip* (*Soim*), perform a shamanic exorcism and pray for good luck.
(iii) A *gut* called *Yugadolgi* is performed to collect money from each and every house (*Yuga and Geollip*).
(iv) They perform a *gut* called *Bujeongcheongbae*. *Gamangcheongbae* play an hourglass-shaped drum from a seated position, and perform *Cheongbae* to invite the god Gamang and sing *Bonghyang* songs.
(v) A *gut* called *Bugungeori* is performed to call on the god Bugun to take good care of Bamseom's residents, and they perform *Sasil* by sticking a three-pronged spear into a pig's head.
(vi) A *gut* called *Seonanggeori* is performed to invite the god Seonang to the festival.
(vii) A *gut* called *Bonhyangmalmyeonggeori* is performed to invite the gods Dangju, Jaebidangju, Hwaju and Malmyeong.
(viii) A *gut* called *Majiollim* is performed to offer *Maji* to the god Sinryeong.
(xix) A *gut* called *Sangsangeori* is performed to invite the gods Janggun, Byeolsang, Sinjang and Daegam.
(x) A *gut* called *Bulsageori* is performed to invite the immortal god, Bulsa, to the ceremony, and the



Figure 9
Bugundang-gut in Bamseom, Shaman carries steamed rice cake on the her head

participants dance *Myeongbara* to the accompaniment of small cymbals.
(xi) A *gut* called *Gununggeori* is performed when the participants wander around the village and shoot arrows to drive out evil spirits.
(xii) A *gut* called *Changbugeori* is performed to ward off misfortune in the coming year by inviting the god Changbu to the festival.
(xiii) A *gut* called *Dwitjeon* is performed to close the ritual by letting the various gods and spirits eat plants.

(d) Heritage bearers - *Dangju* shaman and *Jaebidangju* musician
(i) *Dangju* shaman, Ms. Kim Chungang.
Kim Chungang was born on March 2nd, 1941, into a shaman family in the Naesu-dong area of Seoul. Her grandmother was a famous shaman called *Jeokseolne* and Ms Kim's mother succeeded her and bore the same nickname. Ms Kim's father died when she was only nine, and two years later, Lee Chungseon, a famous shamanic musician in the Seoul area, became her stepfather. He taught shamanic music to her brother, Kim Chanseop, the current *Jaebidangju*. Kim succeeded her mother as shaman. She has been *Dangju* shaman of Bamseom *Dodang-gut* since 1997. She has also mastered Seoul *Saenam-gut*, an important intangible cultural ritual designated by the central government, and is famous for performing *Daegam-gut*. She has the full support of local residents who participate in Bamseom *Dodang-gut*.
(ii) *Jaebidangju* musician, Kim Chanseop.
Kim Chanseop was born on March 28th, 1945, but his registered birthday is May 6th, 1948. He has a strong shamanic background on both the maternal and paternal sides of his family, and, as we have seen, he is the brother of the *Dangju* shaman, Ms. Kim Chungang. He learned *Daegeum* and *Haegeum* from his step father, Lee Chungseon, and they performed together until Lee died. Kim also learned shamanic music, specifically the *Deureongje* sound technique of the *Piri*, from his foster father, Master Choi Seokgil. Kim has become a shamanic musician of great repute and his performance is already first class. He also teaches a lot of pupils at the same time. His musical passion is Bamseon *Bugundang-gut*, which he is passing on to his son, Kim Pilhong. He is actually one of the most influential people in Bamseom *Bugundang-gut* since he has an exceptionally good relationship with the residents of Bamseom.

(e) Researcher's report
One of the representative communal *guts* in Seoul, Bamseom *Bugundang-gut* goes back approximately 600 years. In the context of cultural history, Bamseom *Bugundang-gut* seems to have a direct link with a culture that formed along the Han River, as well as preserving a very significant religious tradition. *Dangju* Kim Chungang is a renowned shaman who leads the *Bugundang-gut*. Along with her brother, *Jaebidangju* Kim Chanseop, she is in charge of the rituals and follows the authentic principles of shamanic ritual as handed down in Bamseom *Bugundang-gut*. Ms Kim Chungang's literary references to shamanic rituals have been judged to be 'legitimate', and she gets on well with local residents in Bamseom. *Jaebidangju* Mr. Kim Chanseop is one of the most famous shamanic musicians in Seoul *gut*. He is a talented and brilliant performer and keeps to the musical tradition of Bamseom *Bugundang-gut* perfectly. In addition, he is actually one of the most influential people at the head of the Bamseom *Bugundang-gut* tradition, since he has complete knowledge and experience of all the activities related to it.

The local people from Bamseom actively participate in *Bugundang-gut* which makes it a harmonious festival that ensures the continuation of their indigenous culture and tradition. As our investigations have shown, Bamseom *Bugundang-gut* has a long history and the *Dangju* shaman and *Jaebidangju* musician play their roles in a very traditional way. Moreover, they perform *gut* ritual at the highest possible level. Thus it is essential that the Metropolitan Government designate this 'intangible cultural property' in order to make the local residents more aware of it, as well as promoting an indigenous culture formed near the Han River in Seoul.

Conclusion

Shamanic rituals that take place in Aegissidang, the Mount Bonghwa *Dodang* and the Bamseom *Bugundang* were thoroughly investigated by three experts appointed by the Seoul Metropolitan Government's Board of Cultural Properties. As a result, a 'Report for

Designating Intangible Cultural Properties of the Seoul Metropolitan Government' was submitted to the Board, and the three cases were finally designated as municipal properties in January 2005.

Shamanic ritual had not been designated as a cultural property in Korea for a long time due to a lack of understanding of the meaning of such rituals. Unfortunately, many people dismissed shamanic ritual as outmoded and superstitious, without ever clearly defining why this might be so, or indeed why this rendered it culturally worthless. However, as the report shows, shamanism is clearly a form of religion. Shamanic ritual demonstrates a belief in providence, a belief which is enshrined in sacrifices (*guts*) to the gods.

This religious belief and its related practices are still carried on by many *mudang*, or religious specialists, and their followers, with shamanic doctrines being handed down orally rather than in the form of written scriptures. Yet it is still a struggle to convince many Koreans of the cultural worth of shamanism. There is a deeply ingrained and stereotypical definition of what constitute religious doctrines and practices and the value of shamanism as cultural heritage is often rejected.

Yet through shamanic customs in Korea we can identify valuable aspects of traditional culture that help to maintain our unique identity. Through this process of re-examining national culture we can also uncover ideas about the structure and organisation of Korean thinking. Therefore shamanism ought to be considered a cultural asset that has artistic merit, unwritten traditions, ceremonial forms, linguistic techniques, a long history and is also a form of religious belief.

Shamanism's recognition by the municipal government means that Korea can now protect heritage bearers, revitalise the tradition and facilitate the dissemination of this form of heritage nation-wide. Accordingly, training fees, maintenance costs for training groups and other expenses connected with holding ceremonies are subsidised by the Seoul Metropolitan Government. In other words, heritage bearers and their training centres, as well as the ceremonies themselves, are provided with regular financial support. This includes financial support when a heritage bearer is hospitalised, and if one dies, the government subsidises his or her funeral service.

In March 2008, thirty eight fields were designated 'intangible cultural properties'. Forty four heritage holders, masters and various bearers are devoted to transmitting their precious heritage to future generations. By producing documentary films, music CDs, and publications, the government has been trying to ensure that if a current heritage holder dies without leaving a successor, or becomes physically unable to continue their activities for some reason, people will be able to revive their heritage by using these resources as points of reference.

Through labelling the three examples 'intangible cultural properties' via what is, in some senses, an artificial system of designation, a field of intangible heritage which used to be 'naturally' transmitted has been altered in various ways. The negative side of those changes - such as 'prettifying' dynamic cultural practices - has been discussed elsewhere. However, it is necessary to think about the positive consequences of designation as well. This system of designation revitalises intangible cultural assets, some of which were on the verge of becoming extinct as a result of widespread and rapid social change. By being managed and protected in a very systematic and academic way, public awareness can be raised and the value of the cultural property can be reassessed and enhanced.

To sum up some significant points, firstly, as the social status of heritage bearers is raised, they can be confident in what they do and concentrate on handing down their knowledge and skills in a much more stable environment. This boost to their self-esteem and pride in whatever activities they undertake, is one of the most significant changes. Secondly, as local traditional practices become recognised as art forms that are represented on the national stage, this begins to raise national awareness and increase public confidence in those intangible aspects of cultural identity. This means that there are more and more people who want to learn and pass on certain forms of intangible cultural activity. Traditions which in the past lacked new blood, or art forms that were marginalised and dying are offered the chance to be revitalised. As people come to consider intangible cultural properties as significant, their value as part of the historical heritage is also appreciated. Thirdly, heritage bearers have started to contribute to the development of the art and culture industry by participating in secondary or tertiary education institutions and in museum education programmes, thus contributing to the social education curriculum.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government and its Board have been inspired by these changes and look forward to

subsequent developments leading to a more positive understanding of 'intangible cultural properties' as a significant and invaluable part of Korean traditional culture.

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Safeguarding intangible heritage: five key obstacles facing museums of the North East of England

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Safeguarding intangible heritage: five key obstacles facing museums of the North East of England

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ABSTRACT

As international awareness of the importance of intangible heritage grows, the issue of how it can be effectively safeguarded has been increasingly debated. In recent years, museums have been called upon to engage more with intangibles due to their shared concerns for both culture and preservation. However, traditional museology has tended to focus on tangible expressions of heritage as opposed to those of an intangible, or living,nature. In response to this debate, the following paper brings to light five key obstacles facing six museums in the North East of England with regard to safeguarding intangible heritage. Uncovering these obstacles has been achieved through an analysis of data from policies and documents, observation and in-depth interviews with professionals holding high levels of responsibility within these institutions. It is argued that these key obstacles, including the perceptions, efforts and limitations on which they are based, can negatively affect the effectiveness of safeguarding approaches with respect to intangible heritage.

Introduction

In recent years, as the importance of safeguarding intangible heritage (hereafter IH) is gaining recognition on an international scale, the call for museums to become involved has also grown in strength. Indeed, much of this attention has been a direct result of the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* of the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO),[1] adopted in 2003 and currently ratified by110 States.[2] Concern for how the 2003 *Convention* will be implemented on the national level has led some to believe that museums, archives, and other non-museum organisations, should be called upon for these safeguarding efforts despite any inherent

limitations (see for instance Kurin, 2004a, p.73; 2004b, p.7; Lee, 2004, p.6; Matsuzono, 2004, p.13; Boylan, 2006). This was particularly apparent at the October 2004 General Conference of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which with its theme set as *Museums and the Intangible Heritage*, highlighted general limitations that museums can face when engaging with IH. One obstacle cited by participants was the fact that, traditionally, museums are concerned with tangible representations of heritage (Kurin, 2004b; Lee, 2004; Matsuzono, 2004; Yim, 2004). In addition, the preservation practices of museums pose the risk of 'fossilising' intangible cultural expressions since they are, by nature, both alive and ever-changing – concepts that will be further examined in the following paragraphs (Pinna, 2003; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004, p.60; Kurin, 2004b, p.7). Nonetheless, Kurin (2004b, p.7) noted that *museums are generally poor institutions for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage – the only problem is that there is probably no better institution to do so*. This sentiment echoes many authors' opinions on how museums can become better equipped in dealing with IH based on the fact that they are already committed to valuing, preserving and disseminating information about cultural heritage, as well as cultural memory (Kurin, 2004b, p.8; Dubé, 2004, p.125).

Building upon Kurin's (2004b, p.7) questions - *can museums really safeguard intangible cultural heritage…do they want to?* from the aforementioned ICOM conference, the overall aim of this paper is to present specific barriers museums can face with regard to safeguarding IH. This aim is achieved through an analysis of data based on the perceptions, efforts and plans of museum professionals holding high levels of responsibility within six museums in the North East of England. The data from these six case studies has been collected through document analysis, observation and in-depth interviews with managers, curators, and an assistant, depending on the institution.

The following paragraphs will discuss the developing relationship between IH and museums. From there, a brief introduction to the North East of England and the six case studies will set the stage for a presentation of the aforementioned data.

Within the discussion, five key obstacles will be identified and discussed in relation to the data. Conclusions will then be drawn by viewing these obstacles as indicators of the changes museums must undertake in order effectively to safeguard IH.

IH and heritage institutions

When attempting to safeguard any aspect of IH, it is crucial to gain a deep understanding of the expression through consultation with those who are closest to it – its owners (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Kurin, 2007; Stefano, 2008; Stefano & Corsane, 2008). Indeed, at the very heart of IH are *inextricable links to people* that cannot be overlooked (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004, p. 60). In relation to three intangible cultural expressions in the North East of England, Stefano and Corsane (2008; see also Stefano, 2008) have demonstrated that the significance and values that are embedded within, and expressed through, IH can be uncovered when the perspectives of local community members and individuals – the owners of these expressions – are sought. Moreover, these values, emotions and meanings, such as senses of belonging and pride, are at the core of any representation of heritage – be it tangible or intangible – and should be the focus of all safeguarding approaches (Smith, 2006, p.56; Stefano & Corsane, 2008, p.356).



Figure 1
Musicians performing regional folk music outside the city of Newcastle

The sentiments that can be expressed through IH are embedded within interconnected relationships between communities (and individuals), their representations of heritage and their localities (Stefano & Corsane, 2008, pp. 351-353). However, it is through people that IH is expressed, and it is through people that IH evolves in response to environmental, social, cultural and political changes surrounding them. An example is the Rapper dance of North East England, a centuries-old sword dance from the coal mining communities of the region. Originally, this five-person sword dance was performed by miners, who were predominantly men and whose industry has entirely collapsed in the past century. Currently, amongst the Rapper community of non-miners of differing ages and occupations, there are also a number of women's groups performing in pubs, competitions and festivals throughout the UK. Here, this particular intangible cultural expression has evolved whilst reflecting a particular societal change – that is, the acceptance of female participation. Indeed, it can be beneficial to view people as the agents developing intangible cultural expressions to survive as both mutable and relevant. Similarly, Kurin (2007, p.12) states that IH

> *... is not something that can easily be isolated from a larger constellation of lifestyles, nor de-articulated from a broader world of ecological, economic,political, and geographic interactions.*

Therefore, the question becomes: can IH be safeguarded by heritage institutions whilst maintaining these vital 'interactions'?

In general, museums have been looked to due to their shared concerns for preserving representations of various communal heritages throughout the world. Practices including conservation, documentation, archiving, interpretation and contextualisation have formed the cornerstones of institutional aims. However, with respect to IH, its living and ever-changing nature proves to be the chief problem facing safeguarding efforts of these institutions (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004, p.61; Kurin, 2004b, p.7; 2007, p.14; Burden, 2007, p.83; Dubé, 2004, p.125, Lee, 2004, p.5; Boylan, 2006, p.64). As noted earlier, traditional museological practices have tended to concentrate on the collection of tangible heritage. As Davis (1999: 32) has stressed, after being brought into the museum building, material evidence becomes disconnected from its original contexts. Because of this, there is a general need for heritage professionals to work together with the individuals and communities who express IH out in the places and environments in which these expressions have developed. From the relevant literature, institutions have been called upon to *engage in substantive dialogue and partnerships with people who hold heritage* (Kurin, 2004b, p.7), *adopt open, outward-looking views of their role in society* (Boylan, 2006, p.64), *present intangible culture or heritage in a way that will interest and involve the general visitor* (Burden, 2007, p.90), and act as *oxygen masks for local cultures which are slowly suffocating to death* (Lee, 2004, p.6). These calls for 'heritage intervention', as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004, p.58) states, are positive in intent. However, it is also important to uncover specific obstacles that may affect the effectiveness of safeguarding efforts. Focusing within the North East of England, the following paragraphs will examine the

perceptions, efforts, plans and limitations of six museums in relation to safeguarding heritage of an intangible nature.

Six museums in the North East of England

For the purpose of this study, the North East of England consists of the three counties of Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and Durham. As discussed elsewhere (Stefano & Corsane, 2008; Stefano, 2008), this region boasts an intensity of heritage in both tangible and intangible forms, with long histories and deep connections to their environments and people. One example mentioned earlier, the Rapper dance, is also closely tied to the folk music living traditions, Northumbrian smallpipe (regional bagpipe) playing, numerous dialects, and the coal mining heritage of the region. There are a plethora of other distinctive intangible cultural expressions that have their roots in occupational skills, the culinary arts, the performing arts, and craft making, among others. This wide array of living heritage has created the need to investigate the attitudes and efforts of heritage sector professionals in relation to safeguarding IH. This is also due, in part, to the homogenising forces of globalisation which affect all corners of the world, as cited in the preamble of the 2003 *Convention*.

In this paper, the six institutions consist of four museums and two heritage centres which are accredited with museum status. Five of these are concerned with the heritage of their immediate localities, while one aims to address the heritage of the entire North East. These museums have been selected from a larger study of sixteen museums and non-museum organisations in order to highlight the most common limitations, or obstacles, which can potentially affect approaches to safeguarding heritage of an intangible nature (see Stefano & Corsane, 2009 for data on five other museums of the region). It is important to note that this larger study also includes the perspectives of the Rapper dancing and folk music communities through participant observation of rehearsals, competitions and informal performances for over two years, in addition to in-depth interviews with forty practitioners (see Stefano & Corsane, 2008; Stefano, 2008). Nevertheless, the scope of this paper is limited to the views, practices and plans of museum professionals with regard to safeguarding the IH of the North East of England. In order to respect the anonymity of those interviewed, the museums have been labelled with the letters A through F.

The remainder of this section will examine data that has emerged from document analysis, museum visits and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seven professionals at these six museums. Two curators were interviewed from Museum F, while the rest are represented by one staff member. The data collected from these institutions will be presented under the following four themes: policy statements, perceptions of IH, perceptions of what safeguarding IH means, and inadequate resources. Five key obstacles facing the museums with regard to safeguarding IH will be identified based on an analysis of this data.



Figure 2
Young musician performing in a Northumbrian Smallpipe competition in Alnwick, Northumberland



Figure 3
Young musician performing in a Northumbrian Smallpipe competition in Alnwick, Northumberland

Policy statements

Each museum is guided by a variety of policies regarding collections management and acquisition, as well as documents covering their missions, aims and objectives (the oldest dating to 2003). All institutional activity aims to adhere to the goals and standards set forth in these documents (Dean, 1994:13). In order to gain an understanding of what viewpoints and activities the museums, as institutions, uphold as most significant, it is, therefore, necessary to examine them. Moreover, the institutional priorities given to safeguarding IH can also be gleaned from an inspection of mission statements, aims and objectives, and acquisition and collection management policies. Indeed, it has emerged that, on the whole, little reference is made to heritage of an intangible nature. As presented in the following paragraphs, the institutional aims and collecting policies of each of these museums are most concerned with tangible representations of heritage.

With regard to overall mission statements, it is evident that the operational purposes of the six museums concentrate on the preservation of local and regional history. Individual mission statements put forth aims to:

> *maintain and preserve the history of* [the immediate region]
> *present, in a dynamic museum, the social history of the people of the North East of England*
> *maintain the historic* [building] *as a notable example of its kind and as an accredited museum of local history*
> *collect, preserve, interpret and display aspects of the heritage of* [the immediate region]
> *preserve, record and make accessible the history of* [the town].

An exception is made for one museum's mission statement which is shared with the local government and states that it is *Working together to improve the quality of life in* [the immediate region].

The above focus on tangible heritage is also echoed within the museums' aims and acquisition policies. Looking more closely, one aim of Museum B is *to interpret the history of the* [town] *from prehistoric times to the present day through seeking to acquire and conserve objects*. Similarly, the 'vision' of Museum A is *to inspire interest in local heritage through acquiring illustrative materials that can be satisfactorily housed and exhibited.* Furthermore, in all the acquisition policies, terms such as 'objects', 'items' and 'materials' are used to describe what is collected, preserved and interpreted by the museum staff. Museum C's acquisition policy states that future collecting will focus on *objects, documents, specimens, and photographs relating to* [the immediate region], as what is currently on display. Moreover, at Museum E, collecting criteria again centre upon tangible representations of heritage by aiming to display and interpret the *development and history of local people using objects, photographs and printed materials*.

In contrast with the other museums, aspects of regional IH are addressed in the acquisition and collection management policies of Museums D and F. The collection management policy of Museum F (within which acquisition procedures are located) makes reference to a *collection of oral histories, both tape and*

transcript. These oral histories have been collected for approximately four decades in order to *preserve the memories of North Eastern people* through the recording of historical facts, family information, stories, dialect, music and song. This collection is a part of the larger Resources Collection which also contains photographs and printed material. Furthermore, within the acquisition policy of Museum D, one sentence is devoted to the existence of a small collection of *oral history recordings reflecting the experiences of representatives of all communities within* [the immediate region]. Nonetheless, the inclusion of oral histories in the collections management and acquisition policies only occurs with Museums F and D, even though three of the other institutions have oral history collections, as we shall see later. From looking at each of the museums' stated directions, it has become clear that tangible heritage is at the core of their preservation and interpretation efforts.

Perceptions of IH

Before examining more conventional obstacles such as limited resources and safeguarding practices, it is beneficial to first examine perceptions of IH held within these six museums. Uncovering the ways in which IH is viewed and defined provides insight into the subtle barriers that can exist in safeguarding approaches. In addition to an analysis of policies and documents, these perceptions may help to further locate where the focus of institutional practices and plans is placed, as well as assist in assessing whether particular expressions of IH, as outlined in the 2003 *Convention*, can be effectively safeguarded by them.

One interesting perception – the notion of 'living history' – was most frequently used as a guiding definition when discussing the nature of IH. Generally, this notion has been associated with certain objects and practices from the past that are disconnected from present usage in the communities outside the museums. For instance, at Museum D, the Manager preferred to use the term 'living history' as opposed to 'IH'. He explained:

> *I have no understanding at all* [of IH]*...I see heritage as something which people are looking at more uncritically than you would as a historian such as collecting memorabilia from past times that enable them to understand something about what was going on and which is still there that they've inherited.*

In addition, oral traditions and historical re-enactments were cited when considering IH at Museum E. Interestingly, it was later revealed that the oral traditions they referenced date back to the 16th century and have ceased to exist outside the museum. Furthermore, at the same institution, the meanings of contemporary sayings - as most often rooted in the past - are also believed to be an *intangible aspect of history*. At Museum F, one Curator mentioned a regional culinary festival that is re-enacted on site once a year, even though it no longer occurs in the North East region.

IH has also been defined as the actual interpretations made in relation to objects, as well as background information used to tell stories about such material heritage. The Curator of Institution B confirmed this by saying: *... we have collections sitting here, but the intangible thing for us, from my point of view, will be the interpretation that takes place around them*. At Museum F, another Curator noted that IH *contributes to the stories of objects*. Moreover, when talking about the displays of Institution E, a staff member noted that *... there is a lot of intangible evidence used to back up the tangible, or sometimes it is the intangible that gives you the sort of string that you follow and then you can find the tangible evidence for it – it's a mix.*

Although these notions deviate from the definitions provided in the 2003 *Convention*, all the interviewees, at one time or another, did cite more familiar examples of IH. One type of IH to which they referred was the recording of memories and stories, or oral histories. Even though the Manager of Museum D was not comfortable with the term IH, he was able to mention 'folk memories' and oral histories in relation to projects other organisations have undertaken. Additionally, at Museum E, documentation of stories, events and traditions through aural and written records was also used as a definition for IH. Moreover, aside from oral histories, dialect, rituals, festivals and music were mentioned specifically at Museums B, C and D. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the examples given were from the past and in the form of records such as musical manuscripts and cassette tapes. In addition to what IH constitutes, the notion of documenting IH was heavily referenced during discussions on safeguarding practices, as we shall see in the following section.

Perceptions of what safeguarding IH means

In order to assess the potential obstacles that these six museums might face with regard to safeguarding IH, the above perceptions uncover how such heritage is viewed. Taking this further, it is also important to examine the ways in which the act of safeguarding intangible cultural expressions is also perceived, practiced and planned for at these institutions. The following paragraphs will present the attitudes and thoughts surrounding safeguarding approaches, as well as any current approaches and plans when applicable.

Documentation, mainly in the form of oral histories, has been most commonly cited as a method for safeguarding IH by all the interviewees. This perception has been both directly revealed – as in the collecting policies of Museums D and F – and indirectly revealed through discussions on the nature of IH. At Museums C and F, IH was also given the vague description of *heritage you cannot touch* and was, therefore, believed to be best *captured,* or *pinned-down*, through documentation. Generally, these documentation activities have centred on recording the memories and stories of people in reference to the past. A Curator at Museum F explained:

> *... we do have some music, but I think there is more of a concentration on getting people's stories and people's histories...*[the collection] *has got the way that people used to work, the way that families lived, how the homes were organised and what the wives used to do, etcetera.*

It is important to note that all the museums, except for Museum A, are currently involved – or have been in the past – with oral history projects. For example, the Manager of Museum D stated: ... *we are attempting to preserve, what I would call living history, in the sense that we are recording, before people die, their memories from the past.* Interestingly, when asked if memories could be safeguarded through other methods, he responded *how else can you preserve a memory?* Moreover, when asked about safeguarding expressions like dance, he again replied ... *if I was setting out to deal with dance, I would want to film it.* The Curator of Museum B noted that recordings offer ... *an interesting way of collecting information which is different from your traditional academic idea of how we learn about the past.* Furthermore, when asked if written documentation is enough to safeguard dialect, the Curator of Museum C disagreed and added that digitally recording the dialect would be better.

An important aspect of this notion of safeguarding-through-recording is the convenience it offers for displaying IH, especially within exhibitions and educational programmes. It is believed that this heritage that *one cannot touch* can be made accessible for learning purposes through video, as well as audio recordings. The ability to play recordings associated with the tangible heritage on display has also been seen to 'add value' to the overall experience of an exhibition or educational programme. For example, a karaoke-like display at Museum B offers visitors the chance to sing along to two folk songs of the region. The Curator stated that these recordings are *a satisfactory way to show intangible heritage*. In addition, at Museum D, a selection of oral histories pertaining to regional life can be listened to at the touch of a button within a display. Moreover, at Museum C, a recording of music relevant to a particular exhibition is usually played overhead. The Curator believed that the recording *gives an ambience* to the room because it *adds to what you've got there* and noted, [professionals] *call it 'added value' now.* The Curator of Museum B believed that 'added value' consists of *more music, noise and things to do, coupled to reading and looking at things* and makes an exhibition more *vibrant*.

Furthermore, the staff members interviewed at Museums B, E and F expressed the view that oral histories, as well as recordings of music, are also valuable when used for research purposes. Most significantly, they contended that the notion of safeguarding IH falls with recording it and holding the recordings as resources for a wider public. Within Museum F, this is most evidenced by their calling their photograph, document and oral archives the 'Resources Collection', as described within the collections management policy previously discussed. With over 1000 hours of sound recordings, the oral archive is used for exhibition and planning developments within the institution, as well as for studies conducted by outside members of the public. When speaking about museums in general, one Curator said: *you can record a lot; you can preserve a lot and you can make it available for when people are doing research...we have a role to be guardians of traditions so that its there for when practitioners want to use it.* At Museum E, a staff member also believed that their collection of oral

histories and music is, at best, a resource, and noted that a prominent musician used their collection when writing a book. Similarly, at Museum B, the Curator also noted that, *we have oral histories in the stores and we have them here as a resource; we may not be interpreting them or taking them out, but they are here*.

Aside from recordings, all staff members agreed that using their museums as venues for live performances and demonstrations is a more dynamic approach to safeguarding examples of IH such as music, dance, storytelling and occupational skills. The Curator of Museum B succinctly phrased this by saying ... *getting people to have a go on the* [bagpipe] *is probably going to be sparking interest more than hearing the piece of music on a rolling tape*. Moreover, giving a reason why live demonstrations should be brought into the exhibition setting, the Manager of Museum D said ... *it actually allows people to experience what took place in an intimate, personal way as opposed to looking at a* [video] *screen or reading a piece of paper*. Nonetheless, as discussed in the next section on inadequate resources, limitations in funding, time and space have kept such activities at a minimum, if they have occurred at all. Most staff members talked of future plans to include performances and demonstrations out of desires to further *enhance the exhibitions*, as one Curator of Museum F put it.

Inadequate resources

When asked about where the priority lies in each of these museums, all the staff members interviewed said that it is with safeguarding tangible heritage. The difficulty in engaging with IH was cited as one reason for its low priority. The Curator of Museum C phrased this concisely ... *tangible things are much easier to handle and research*. He also noted that because of this, there is no institutional desire to 'collect' it, a sentiment also expressed at Museum E where they said ... *we don't actively go out and look for intangible stuff*. However, it is Museum A that remains the least engaged with safeguarding IH. From the Curator's point of view, this is due to inadequate funding, and shortage of staff and time. In her words ... *we have very limited resources and are entirely run by volunteers...it's quite difficult to cover what we already do without trying to cover other aspects as well – we're fully stretched with material heritage.* The staff members of the other institutions also cited similar problems that can affect approaches to safeguarding IH in more dynamic ways. The required resources have fallen under the following four themes: funding, staff, time and space. At Museum E, the limitations of having a volunteer staff and a small budget were believed to affect the amount of time available for researching and making the oral history and music collections more accessible. In addition, an assistant noted that a lack of space limits the opportunities for demonstrations of living traditions, such as local folk music. This issue of performance space was also mentioned at Museum F, where one Curator had to hope for good weather since performances are usually held outside. Moreover, she noted that the money needed to pay performers is also limited.

All the interviewees, except for those of Museum F, described a lack of staff and time. It is important to note that all the museums rely heavily on volunteer staff. The numbers of volunteers and amount of time have been linked on the premise that volunteer effort requires the use of personal time and personal interest as well. The Curator of Museum C, a volunteer himself, addressed this notion by stating ... *if it is something I have to go out and personally work on, then it is more difficult since I do lots of other things than besides being Curator*. He went on ...*it is about having somebody who has got that particular interest, and who has the time to do it and develop it*. Similarly, at Museum B, the Curator stressed that safeguarding IH requires *people, knowledge, energy and enthusiasm,* resources in which they are lacking and, therefore they would need a *specific project officer dedicated to that*. She added that although it is important to safeguard IH ... *the work you would have to do to make it relevant to certain groups of people would be too large*. Furthermore, the Curator of Museum D stated that ... *the people who work with me are more tangible history oriented*, which greatly influenced institutional priorities. This notion was also expressed by the Curator of Museum A, who mentioned that more attention could be given to IH if ... *I had a volunteer who was very interested in that or somebody was funding us to do that.*

Due to these funding, staff, time and space constraints, it has also been suggested that the museum 'themes' should be dedicated to IH in order for institutional priorities to shift. For instance, the Curator of Museum B believed that the best forum for intangible heritage is through performance, however, she noted that ... *I don't think it could lead as a* [museum] *theme*. She added ...*I think the theme* [of the museum] *is always going to be*

representing social history in a fairly traditional manner. At Museum E, an assistant noted that safeguarding local folk music is more appropriate to an institution that is fully dedicated to such traditions. Interestingly, both interviewees referred to the fact that representing IH is not mentioned in their institutions' policies or plans, which accounts for the low priority it is given. This notion has led some interviewees to believe that village halls, churches and other traditional performance venues are where IH is best expressed, as well as safeguarded. For example, the Curator of Museum C said that although there is space for performances … *the streets are a good place to hear folk music* due to the potential for a wider audience. Furthermore, at Museum F, it is also believed that The Sage, a concert hall in the city of Newcastle, has the space, as well as the overall mission, to promote expressions of regional IH such as folk music and dance.

Discussion: five key obstacles

The previous section has presented data on the perceptions of IH, as well as its safeguarding, held by seven high-level professionals at six museums in the North East of England. In addition, institutional priorities were assessed through an examination of the mission statements, aims, and collection management and acquisition policies of each of these museums. Furthermore, the interviewees stressed that museum functions are affected by a lack of funding, staff, time and space, resources that can especially benefit safeguarding approaches concerned with intangibles. Taken together, this data has been analysed and grouped into five key obstacles, which have been identified as follows: the exclusion of IH from policy statements, IH being seen primarily as an accompaniment to tangible heritage, the perception of IH as 'living history', the limitations inherent in documentation and inadequate resources. On the whole, these obstacles are founded upon the most commonly expressed notion that IH is secondary to material evidence. In order to raise the priority of safeguarding intangible cultural expressions within these six museums, and thereby increase the effectiveness of safeguarding approaches, these obstacles need to be considered.

1. The exclusion of IH from policy statements

As noted, four out of the six institutions have mission statements that exclude any reference to IH. Terms such as 'objects', 'items' and 'material' are used to describe the types of collections acquired, stored and interpreted within these institutions. From this fact alone, it is clear that the institutions prioritise the tangible. It can also be argued that the issue of safeguarding IH falls outside the scope of these institutions' goals and standards and is thereby omitted from any consideration. Thus, the absence of IH from policies and documents constitutes one key obstacle in potential safeguarding approaches. For the two exceptions, Museums D and F, references to the recording of the memories, stories and music of local people are included within their collecting policies. In particular, within the collection management policy of Museum F, the archive of oral histories is stated as belonging to the 'Resources Collection'. It is written that this archive is used for institutional research and planning, as well as being made accessible to the public. Through this, it is evident that the value of local memories, stories and music is certainly recognised. Nonetheless, it is also apparent that they are given a lesser status than objects since they are only seen as resources for research purposes when developing displays and programmes.

Overall, the analysis of policy statements has revealed that IH is given a low priority at these institutions. When mention is made of IH, it is relegated to documented form as oral histories – tangible evidence of intangible events. It is important to stress that other expressions of IH, such as the living musical and dance traditions so deeply-rooted in the heritage of the region, are not cited at all. If these museums are to become involved with the safeguarding of regional intangible cultural expressions, they will have to be given a higher priority in institutional policy. A beneficial start would be to amend the stated policies to include both the documentation of IH, as well as approaches to safeguarding those expressions which are living and evolving. Stating institutional aims to safeguard certain examples of IH raises their status to match that given to 'objects', 'items' and 'material' in each of these museums. Most importantly, the museums cannot be held accountable for safeguarding intangible cultural expressions if their mission statements, aims and collecting policies fail to state such intentions.

2. The emphasis on IH as 'living history'

Overall, it has become apparent that a more contemporary view of regional traditions is secondary to

the emphasis placed on those which have occurred in the past. From an examination of mission statements, four out of the six museums aim to preserve 'local history', which can account for the historical emphasis of museum functions. In addition, when examining how IH is viewed and defined within the museums, the notion of 'living history' was the one most commonly expressed. This term was used both directly as a definition (at Museum D), and indirectly through examples of traditions that no longer exist. Five of the seven interviewees also noted re-enactments of past events as a means to introduce IH into the museum setting. For instance, one Curator of Museum F, while discussing a re-enactment of a past festival, stated ... *we're kind of preserving the tradition and saying how it was done, but it won't happen again out there in the real world*. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the majority of oral testimonies collected focus on memories and stories of long-ago events, captured before 'people die'. Although these examples do belong within the definition of IH, the strong emphasis placed on past events and customs can also be seen as an obstacle to safeguarding efforts. The focus on historical intangible cultural expressions needs to also be placed upon those that are still being practiced outside institutional walls within the North East region. Indeed, the international debate, as presented within the Introduction, is most concerned with safeguarding contemporary expressions of IH, including those threatened with extinction. On the whole, it is clear that perceptions of IH need to broaden to include the current examples of regional living traditions, their practitioners and how museums can aid in their survival.

3. IH seen primarily as an accompaniment to tangible heritage

The idea that IH is more of a resource, or accompaniment, to tangible heritage has also emerged as a key obstacle facing all six institutions. This has been shown through observation and in-depth interviewing, as well as document analysis, as discussed in relation to the first obstacle above. Observation of exhibits at Institutions B, C, D and F that include the use of oral history and music recordings, shows that these focus on the objects and not the stories and tunes to which one can listen. For example, the karaoke-style activity at Institution B offers little information on the history and meanings of the two regional folk songs played. In general, these recordings are there to 'enhance the experience' and give an 'ambience' and 'added value' to the tangible heritage on display. Burden (2007, p.83) refers to this manner of using recordings, or representations of IH, in exhibits to enhance the material heritage on display as the *first capacity*, meaning, it is the object which *receives the attention* of both the professional and public, as opposed to a display devoted solely to the intangible, or the *second capacity* (Burden, 2007, p.83). This 'second capacity' approach to exhibiting IH was mentioned indirectly within the interviews through references to holding live performances. Nonetheless, such events would, again, be held to 'enliven' the material on display. In the words of the Curator of Museum B, ... *what we've got on display can be displayed in a more interesting, vibrant way and I think that involves intangible things like music and performance...*

Viewing IH as an accompaniment, or background resource, to tangible heritage is an obstacle due to the fact that it fosters a narrow view of its nature, as well as of the role museums can play in safeguarding it. This secondary, or supportive, role documented IH plays within these institutions may also divert museological attention away from the multitude of expressions that are alive and ever-changing outside museum walls. Through the interviews, all seven professionals agreed that tangible heritage – that is, the acquisition, preservation and interpretation thereof – is the main priority in their respective institutions. It is understandable that if tangible heritage is given the overall priority, then IH would have to play a secondary role. In particular, the interviewees of Museums B, C, and D expressed the notion that it is much more convenient to work with records of IH, especially for display purposes. It has been revealed that recordings of IH are used as resources for research, exhibition and institutional programme planning, which are, indeed, valid uses of such documentation. However, it is evident that IH is perceived to be information (usually from the past), that remains in the background and is used primarily for research and to provide for more 'authentic' interpretation, as one Curator of Museum F mentioned. An assistant at Museum E noted that documenting stories, traditions and memories, among other things, is important because ... *you can't get them back once they're lost; and if they're documented and dusty, there is still the record.* Such statements uncover a perception that intangible cultural expressions are most useful as documented evidence available to support the museum collections. Thus a

barrier exists to thinking about other ways in which intangible cultural expressions can be kept from being 'lost'.

4. The limitations inherent in recording IH

The most common safeguarding approach for IH that has emerged focuses on the production and preservation of recordings. This has become apparent through the exhibits at Museums B, C, D and F, as well as the perceptions revealed by the interviewees. When asked if documentation helps to preserve living traditions, the Curator of Museum A agreed by adding that *taping people* is how to keep them for the future. In addition, five of the six museums are, or have been, engaged with the collection of oral histories. It is clear that 'capturing' the memories and stories of local people is an activity considered effective for preserving records of past life, which is a notion against which it is hard to argue. Nonetheless, certain expressions of IH, particularly within the North East, have been found to consist of interconnected links between people and their environments, through expressions of senses of belonging and pride, as examples. The significance and values held by the agents of intangible cultural expressions are far less perceptible than, for instance, distinctive dance steps and regional accents. Thus, a key obstacle facing these heritage institutions lies with the inherent limitations of actual recording processes. Video cameras and taping devices cannot 'capture' and, therefore, safeguard these embedded senses of belonging and pride. Moreover, as Kurin (2007, p.12) states:

> *If* [IH] *exists just as a documentary record of a song, a videotape of a celebration, a multi-volume monographic treatment of folk knowledge, or as ritual artefacts in the finest museums in the country, it is not safeguarded.*

Most significantly, the interconnected relationships between the heritage at hand, its owners and territory remain neglected if it is believed that taping a sword-dancing performance is an adequate method for safeguarding it. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004, p.60) contends that:

> *It is not possible – or it is not easy – to treat such manifestations as proxies for persons, even with recording technologies that can separate performances from performers and consign the repertoire to the archive.*

Thus, the limitation of a recording is that all it produces is another tangible piece of evidence of an event. This limitation can be overcome through a realisation that the actual safeguarding of intangible cultural expressions involves more than documentation. Moreover, this can lead to the recognition of IH as multi-faceted and inextricably connected to people and the environments within which it evolves. Nevertheless, as presented in the next section, a lack of resources must also be overcome in order to safeguard IH in a more holistic and integrated manner.

5. Inadequate resources

It is apparent that one key obstacle is the lack of funding, staff, time and space needed for safeguarding IH within these institutions. It is important to note that all the interviewees believed that if more of these resources were available, then IH would be given a higher priority in their institutions. The interviewees of Museums A, B, E, and F specifically stated that a limitation in funding has contributed to the low number of their activities that concentrate on intangible cultural expressions of the region. The fact that performances and live demonstrations would be arranged, if funds were available, was also noted. The space needed to hold events – for both the performers and audience – has also been listed as a limitation to promoting living cultural traditions within Museums E and F. This has brought to light the notion that those museums can only be viewed as venues for certain types of intangible cultural expressions, a safeguarding approach that is arguably forward inthinking. However, the perception was also revealed that these events would only serve to further enhance the exhibitions and tangible heritage on display, as opposed to safeguarding the messages and values that are being expressed through them.

The interviewees of Museums A, B, C and D also said that if the number of staff, including volunteers, increased, more projects concerned with intangibles could be facilitated. In addition, the Curators of Museums A, B and C mentioned that the personal interests of volunteers greatly influence what types of projects are undertaken. Furthermore, the idea that a large amount of time would also be needed to complete

projects dealing with oral histories or other intangible cultural expressions was also discussed by the Curators of Museums A and C, who equated time with staff numbers. In general, it is evident that these factors strongly affect the low priority given to IH at each of these museums. Similarly, the professionals interviewed at Museums B, C, E and F felt that if their institutional priorities focused on IH, the overall 'themes' of their museums would have to change. Other venues, such as concert halls, were seen as more appropriate for the promotion of regional folk music and dance traditions. It can, therefore, be argued that if the themes of these museums were to include living heritage, resources could potentially be allocated to safeguarding them.

Conclusion

This paper has uncovered five key obstacles facing six museums within the North East of England. It is argued that these five obstacles, including the perceptions, efforts and limitations on which they are based, can negatively affect the effectiveness of safeguarding approaches with respect to IH. This is due to the fact that, first and foremost, IH requires an elevation of status equal to that which is given to tangible heritage.

Only when IH is seen as representing more than unique dance steps, nuances of dialect and stories to enhance exhibitions, can new approaches to effectively safeguard them be considered. With this shift in perception, recordings can be used for documentary and research purposes without being burdened with the intention of preservation. Moreover, the emphasis placed upon examples of IH which no longer exist, can also begin to extend to those expressions still evolving beyond institutional walls. Recognition of the authority and expertise of the agents of intangible cultural expressions can lead to partnerships centred on promotion and transmission. Moreover, safeguarding approaches can begin to take into account the interconnected relationships between people, environments and the heritage being expressed. Taken together, these five obstacles demonstrate an overall perception that intangible cultural expressions can be safeguarded if they are taken from their original contexts and brought into the museum building to support the material evidence on display. In the words of one Curator *...it is when you are outside the museum that you find intangible heritage*. Therefore, the question still remains as to whether museums can effectively safeguard IH whilst maintaining these vital connections to the outside world.

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NOTES

1. Referred to as the 2003 *Convention* in this paper.
2. The number of State Parties was found on http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/ on 6 March 2009.

Short Papers, Reports & Reviews

Seeking tangible benefits from linking culture, development and intellectual property

Wend B. Wendland

Seeking tangible benefits from linking culture, development and intellectual property

An interim report on WIPO's cultural documentation training programme for a Maasai community and the National Museums of Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Culture is a tool for development as well as part of the process of development. Taking this proposition as its starting point, WIPO's Creative Heritage Project provides practical training to local communities and museums and archives in developing countries on recording, digitising and disseminating their creative cultural expressions and in managing IP issues.

In partnership with the American Folklife Center/Library of Congress and the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, WIPO ran a pilot training programme for the Maasai community of Laikipia, Kenya and the National Museums of Kenya in September 2008. The intensive, hands-on curriculum included project planning, research ethics, photography, sound and audio-visual recording techniques, digital archiving methods and database and website development. In cooperation with the US Copyright Office, WIPO staff provided the IP component of the training. WIPO will purchase a basic kit of recording equipment and knowledge management software for the community, help the community and museum to develop their own IP protocols, continue to foster a mutually-beneficial working relationship between the community and the museum and further develop links established between the community, the museum and the national IP offices in Kenya. Lying at the interface between the safeguarding of living heritage and its legal protection, the programme seeks to advance a range of valuable policy goals - promoting cultural diversity, fostering economic development, using culture as a communications tool in development, bridging the 'digital divide', promoting responsible tourism and creating local cultural content. Early results from evaluation of the pilot are encouraging, and WIPO and its partners have received several requests from other communities and museums and archives to participate in such a programme. However, something so ambitious presents many challenges and it remains an unpredictable cultural and legal experiment. This article will describe how and why the programme was conceived, its various objectives, the challenges, expected results and lessons learned so far.

Introduction

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) has recently launched a pilot programme to assist indigenous communities to document their own cultural traditions and safeguard their intellectual property (IP) interests in authorising the use of their documentation by third parties.

New technologies provide communities with fresh opportunities to document and digitise expressions of their traditional cultures. This can meet the strong

desire of communities to preserve, promote and pass on their cultural heritage to succeeding generations. Yet these new forms of documentation and digitisation can leave this cultural heritage vulnerable to unwanted exploitation beyond the immediate community. The WIPO training programme recognises both the usefulness of technology for indigenous communities and the paramount need to empower communities to make informed decisions about how to manage IP issues in a way that corresponds with community values and development goals.

The pilot programme began in September 2008, when two members of a Maasai community from Laikipia, Kenya and an expert from the National Museums of Kenya travelled to the American Folklife Center (AFC) and then to the Center for Documentary Studies (CDS) in the United States of America for intensive, hands-on training in the documentary techniques and archival skills necessary for effective community-based cultural conservation. WIPO staff provided relevant IP training. WIPO will also provide the Maasai community with a basic kit of field equipment, a computer and software for their own use. The pilot programme is a collaboration between WIPO and the AFC at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. and the CDS at Duke University in North Carolina.

This innovative capacity-building partnership with the Maasai community of Laikipia addresses a pressing yet legally and practically complex question – how can indigenous and local communities record and disseminate their traditional cultural expressions without ceding authority over how those recordings are used by third parties? The goal of the programme is to empower tradition-bearers to preserve and pass on their own traditional cultures, if they wish to do so, while safeguarding their IP interests. The results of the pilot will be shared with other indigenous communities and, depending on the feedback, WIPO and its partners could envisage offering similar programmes to other communities and to museums, libraries and archives from other countries.

The training programme enables the Maasai to acquire the requisite technical skills and equipment so they can themselves record their own cultural traditions. The National Museums of Kenya, which also participated in the programme, will be available to provide ongoing institutional support. The Maasai community and the National Museums of Kenya have participated directly as partners in evaluating this pilot initiative and together will make recommendations for its improvement and further development.

This programme tests a number of complex and controversial assertions in a very practical context. This article describes how it all began, and its main features, including the intellectual property dimension and how the programme aligns with other WIPO activities and projects. The article seeks to initiate reflection on the possible impact of such a programme and on the policy, legal, logistical and other challenges it faces. As an interim report, this article acknowledges that its intended and unintended consequences are not likely to be known for some years.

Origins of the programme

This pilot programme stems from a request received by WIPO from the Maasai community, semi-nomadic pastoralists located in the Laikipia area of northern Kenya. In a submission to WIPO in April 2006,[1] the community wrote that although the Maasai are one of the most researched ethnic groups in Kenya, they *remain among the most misunderstood and misinterpreted*...

The community stated that its cultural expressions, traditional occupations and livelihoods were at risk due to inappropriate policies and practices that were *destroying the wealth of skills, heritage, livelihood practices and cultures that has been built over years.*

Of particular interest to WIPO was that the perceived threats to the community's culture included the exploitation of cultural resources, the patenting of traditional knowledge and the commercialisation of Maasai culture without the prior and informed consent of, and benefit-sharing with, the community. As the written submission eloquently put it, *the disintegration, assimilation and erosion of cultures particularly in Africa, have transformed communities into spectators rather than rights holders.*

In order to combat what it sees as cultural erosion and piracy, the community advised WIPO that it had established a corporate entity, the Maasai Cultural Heritage Foundation (MCH), to spearhead a collaborative process in which the community would be empowered to document its own cultural traditions and creative expressions. It wished to do so in order to safeguard these traditions and expressions, protect them against unauthorised use, promote Maasai culture, derive economic benefit and use Maasai cultural expressions in teaching, conflict mitigation, conflict resolution and awareness-raising on issues such as HIV/AIDS.

The community set out its objectives clearly (this is quoted verbatim from the submission):

a) To preserve, protect and promote Maasai culture through cultural education and cultural talks.
b) Promote recognition of and respect for Maasai indigenous people's culture by designing a website and posting all cultural information.
c) Promote tolerance and understanding of the cultural, spiritual and language diversity through recording traditional songs and information dissemination.
d) Enhance sustainable economic development drawing on the wealth of knowledge and experience of the Maasai culture to advocate against corruption and protect human rights.
e) To use the traditional songs to raise community awareness and education on productive health and HIV/Aids.
f) Establish a cultural museum and documentation centre for the storage and preservation of the cultural artefacts and community research and database.
g) Enhance and uplift the economy of the Maasai people through livelihood support programmes, and encourage the advancement of their cultural practices that forms the backbone of their economy.
h) Create awareness of the rich culture to the policymakers and lobby for the participation of the community in the policy making/formulation processes at the national level.

It seemed that the community's submission implicitly recognised that culture, as a manifestation of a people's identity, is creative, dynamic and forward-looking. As such, culture exists as a fundamental component of sustainable economic, social and cultural development. The community sees its culture not only as a tool for development but also as part of the process of development. In approaching WIPO, the community also seemed to recognise that balanced and strategic use of IP rights can bolster culture's place at the centre of development.

WIPO reacted positively to the community's request for assistance. At its invitation, WIPO first made an exploratory visit to the community in late 2006, together with the International Labor Office in Geneva (ILO), which is working with the same community on human rights and local economic development. The community lives on the Il Ngwesi group ranch which is located some seven hours by four-wheel drive from Nairobi. The group ranch is owned by the community. The community also owns and manages the award-winning Il Ngwesi Lodge.

This first visit was crucial as it enabled a certain level of trust and cooperation between WIPO and the community to be established. It was, and remains, key that this development project be soundly based on the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)). WIPO provided some initial IP training, and time was spent in laying out options for decision by the elders and other members of the community. The consultation took place over three full days under a large tree at the community's *manyatta* (village); both men and women participated. WIPO's visit to Kenya was also used to facilitate contact between the community and key governmental agencies in Kenya, such as the Copyright Office, Kenya's Traditional Knowledge Task Force and the Kenyan Intellectual Property Institute (KIPI).

Guided by the lessons learned during this visit, WIPO recognised that the starting point – in order to really

empower the community to participate in their own development, as the community had rightly put it - should be to train the community in cultural documentation and on how to manage IP issues and options when doing so. This seemed preferable to having the community's cultural expressions documented and managed by outsiders.

As indigenous communities increasingly wish to record and represent their own cultures, and in keeping with a human rights and development-centred approach, it seems only appropriate that indigenous communities should lead and direct these recording projects, with WIPO playing a supportive and facilitatory role only.

The intellectual property dimension

The IP dimension is, theoretically at least, quite straightforward. 'Traditional' cultural expressions are often 'in the public domain' under the conventional IP system, and therefore unprotected. However, recordings of these expressions – whether in the form of photographs or sound or audiovisual recordings, for example - are new intellectual works. Very often, the person making recordings of traditional cultural expressions is a third party ethnomusicologist or anthropologist, or an institution such as a museum or archive. In such cases, the rights in the recordings are vested in the people who made them. On the other hand, when the community is in control of the making of such recordings, it is the owner of the rights in them. Ownership of the rights, in turn, empowers the community to decide if, and when, third parties may have access to the recordings and what they may do with them. The community may decide to allow free use of its recordings, or it could decide to commercialise some of them. The point is that by having created IP rights and as the owner of those rights, the community gets to decide. Protecting recordings does not, of course, protect the underlying traditional cultural expressions embodied in them.[2] But in practice, having control over the recordings can be valuable, and it is preferable, from a community perspective, that the community should own such rights rather than the rights being vested in a third party.

Next steps

Following the visit, and in consultation with the community, WIPO contacted Dr. Peggy Bulger, Director of the AFC, and, based on the Center's successful history of producing Folklife Field Schools for Cultural Documentation, invited the AFC to develop a pilot training programme in cultural documentation with WIPO. AFC in turn contacted CDS, led by Dr. Tom Rankin, and AFC and CDS then together developed the curriculum for the training programme. The curriculum includes such topics as project planning, research ethics, digital archival methods, documentation techniques and database and website development and management. WIPO provides IP training, focusing in particular on copyright and related rights and the protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. The full programme –together with presentations made and materials handed out – will in due course be accessible on the websites of WIPO, the AFC and CDS.

Following the programme in Washington D.C. and Durham, the trainees visited WIPO in Geneva, for debriefing and evaluation. The evaluation is still ongoing. If the pilot is deemed a success, WIPO and its partners



Figure 1
John Ole Tingoi and Anne Tome Sintoyia receiving training from Chris Sims, CDS, on the use of camera equipment, CDS, September 2008
Photo: Dr. Guha Shankar, AFC/LOC

hope to offer the programme annually to indigenous communities and museums from different countries.

The community was invited by WIPO to select two members to receive the training. The community selected Mr. John Ole Tingoi and Ms. Anne Tome Sintoyia. These were excellent choices. The gender balance was valuable. Both trainees are development workers within the community, relatively young and computer literate, but not experts. They had both had some prior experience in conducting interviews with community members. They embraced the training with enthusiasm and seemed ideally placed to apply what they have learned in the community.

The role of the National Museums of Kenya

Museums, archives, libraries and other cultural repositories play an invaluable part in preserving the rich cultural heritage of our planet. Yet, over the past several decades, there has in some cases been a publicised absence of trust between indigenous communities and the museums, archives and other repositories that hold pieces of their tangible and intangible heritage.[3] This absence may arise from the complex historical, cultural, legal and political conditions under which collections were established in the first place. Yet, it would benefit both indigenous communities and cultural institutions to step beyond this uneasiness. Indeed, many cultural institutions now see themselves not as the 'owners' of their collections of indigenous materials, but rather as their 'stewards' and 'custodians'. They wish to work more directly and instrumentally with indigenous communities, actively engaging with indigenous expertise to foster new, cross-cultural partnerships that could both enrich museum work and benefit indigenous communities. Management of IP issues can play a part, albeit perhaps a small part, in changing the way cultural repositories and communities see each other.

With this perspective in mind – and while deeply conscious of the sensitivity, complexity and even controversial nature of this perspective – WIPO's approach has been, as far as possible, to involve national and local museums, libraries and archives in its training programme.

WIPO accordingly invited a representative of the National Museums of Kenya, Mr. Kiprop Lagat, to join in the consultative visit to the community in October 2006 and in the training programme that took place in September 2008. As expected, Mr. Lagat participated more as trainer than trainee, and the three Kenyan participants worked together as a team. Longer term, the community is likely to benefit considerably from the ongoing support of Mr. Lagat and his colleagues at the National Museums of Kenya.

Next steps

The training programme provided in Washington D.C., Durham and Geneva was only 'Phase One'.

During the training in Washington D.C., it emerged that the community had in the past made recordings of music and oral histories on audio cassette tapes. These tapes were not necessarily in the best of condition. The AFC kindly offered to clean and digitise these recordings, which the community could immediately archive and catalogue and make available to the public (if it so wished). In this way, the two community members could rapidly apply some of the training they had received. At the time of writing, this cleaning and digitisation process has been completed and the digitised recordings have been transmitted to the community.

Representatives of the three organisations will travel to the community in mid 2009 to complete the training programme ('Phase Two'). This visit will include a formal handover of the equipment purchased by WIPO for the community, a return of the tapes cleaned and digitised by the AFC, further on-site training provided by the AFC and CDS, and an IP workshop conducted by WIPO which will aim to assist the community in developing its own IP policy and protocols. The visit will also serve as an occasion to launch an IP handbook for the community written by Mr. Ole Tingoi with the support of WIPO.

Longer term, the National Museums of Kenya, WIPO, the AFC and CDS will remain available to provide ongoing advice and guidance to the community. Should the community so wish, it could, for example, be helped to establish a website in order to make some of its recordings available to the broader public. It may even wish to commercialise some of its recordings. However, these decisions lie exclusively with the community. The community owns the IP rights to the recordings and this empowers it to make decisions in accordance with its own developmental objectives.

The place of this training programme within WIPO's broader activities

This pilot project forms part of WIPO's Creative Heritage Project [4], which is developing an integrated set of practical resources and guidelines for cultural institutions such as museums, libraries, archives and indigenous communities on managing IP options when digitising intangible heritage. These resources include:

(a) a compendium for museums, libraries and archives on identifying and managing IP options, provisionally entitled *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage and Protecting Traditional Cultures: The Management of Intellectual Property Issues and Options*. Although WIPO has already published a more general guide for museums (*WIPO Guide on Managing Intellectual Property for Museums*), this complementary resource will deal more specifically with the management of IP in relation to collections of indigenous cultural materials. It will be based on surveys conducted for WIPO on the experiences of museums, libraries and archives in this area (see below);

(b) a searchable database of existing codes, policies and practices developed by institutions and communities relating to IP and indigenous collections[5];

(c) surveys of museum and archival experiences with these issues in North America, France, India, Bulgaria and the Pacific.[6]

This capacity-building initiative is distinct from, but complements, efforts to develop special (*sui generis*) systems for the protection of traditional cultural expressions and knowledge, such as are being discussed in the WIPO Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore. [7]

Reflections

As suggested above, the training programme builds on the notion that culture, as a manifestation of a people's identity, is creative, dynamic and forward-looking, and exists as a fundamental component of sustainable economic, social and cultural development. It seeks to make culture not only a tool for development but also part of the process of development.

Furthermore, the programme lies at the interface between the 'safeguarding' of living heritage and its 'legal protection'. The protection of IP and the safeguarding of intangible heritage have always had a somewhat uncertain and awkward relationship. This may stem in part from an inherent ambiguity in the meaning of 'protect' and a need to clarify the relationship between the *safeguarding* of cultural heritage and the *legal protection* of creativity against unauthorised use.[8]

This uncertainty appears particularly visibly in the recording and documentation of intangible heritage. Many initiatives are underway––internationally, nationally and locally––to document, record and digitise intangible heritage, and these play an invaluable role in preserving the rich cultural heritage of our planet, fostering educational opportunities and promoting respect for the cultural expressions, traditions and ways of life of the world's diverse peoples and cultural communities. However, indigenous and local communities sometimes express concerns that documentation activities do not take adequate account of their rights and interests, and that documenting and displaying an element of intangible



Figure 2
John Ole Tingoi facilitating the WIPO and ILO consultation with the community, Il Ngwesi, October 2006. Photo: Wend Wendland, WIPO

heritage––for instance, the recording of a traditional song or a tribal symbol––may make it vulnerable to intellectual misappropriation. There is particular concern over safeguarding activities for 'traditional' cultural expressions (or 'folklore') and culturally sensitive materials that may be perceived as being 'in the public domain' by conventional IP laws, as mentioned earlier. Indigenous and other local communities argue that they do not have adequate control over research conducted into their cultures, nor over how their cultures are recorded and presented to the public at large. The handling of secret and sacred materials held within such collections can be a particularly acute source of concern. The ethnographic collections of museums and other institutions often include invaluable, even unique, records of ancient traditions, lost languages and community histories which are integral to indigenous peoples' identity and continuity. Yet the intellectual content of such material is often not owned by the indigenous people, but rather by the people who 'made' the film, sound recording, photographs or manuscript.[9] By enabling communities to record and document their own cultural expressions, the WIPO programme described in this article seeks to vest intellectual ownership in the records in the hands of the communities, thus empowering them to decide who may have access to the records and under what conditions.

The programme may also directly, and indirectly, advance a number of other valuable policy goals, such as promoting cultural diversity, fostering economic development, bridging the 'digital divide', promoting responsible tourism and 'nation branding', and creating local cultural content.

Challenges

Yet, there are numerous logistical, political, technological and resource-based challenges associated with such an ambitious programme.

Perhaps in the interim it may be useful to catalogue some of the challenges already apparent.[10] These may be classified as follows:

(a) Policy: the very premise of the programme bears constant evaluation and reflection. Are recording, documentation and digitisation the best ways to safeguard living heritage? How do such projects transform social relationships, power dynamics, cultural development and exchanges within such communities? How does such a project – which rests upon the more conscious and strategic use of existing IP rights – interface with efforts to establish new (*sui generis*) IP systems for traditional cultural expressions and knowledge?

(b) Legal: in whom, or in which entity, would collective rights in the recordings actually be vested? How would rights in contemporary creative expressions be managed? How would collective and individual claims to rights be reconciled? Is there a role for some form of community-led collective rights agency?

(c) Logistical: who or which entity would own the equipment purchased by WIPO for the community? Where would it be stored? How would the equipment be maintained, insured and upgraded over time?

(d) Sustainability and scalability: at what point does the programme 'end' and the community is left to continue on its own? Can all the community's expectations be met? How does such a narrowly focused programme complement and advance all the developmental goals of the community? How frequently can WIPO, the AFC and CDS hope to offer such a course to communities and museums/archives from other countries? What additional resources and which other partners may be needed to expand and enhance the programme so that it can reach a wider range of beneficiaries? Could the programme also be offered in an online, distance- learning format?

(e) Political and organisational: how is the community organised and who speaks for it? How are decisions taken? How do WIPO, the AFC and CDS know that the instructions they receive are credible and truly reflect the community's wishes?

Concluding remarks

This programme is an innovative and pragmatic attempt to empower an indigenous community, in partnership with the national museum, to take decisions about which elements of its culture should be recorded, to undertake the recording itself and thereafter to manage access to the recordings. In introducing IP rights management as a useful tool, it seeks to promote both the safeguarding of intangible heritage and its legal protection. It tests a number of complex and controversial assertions in a very practical context. While the results of evaluation so far

are positive, the programme remains an unpredictable cultural and legal experiment. WIPO and its partners fully appreciate the level of ambition and complexity associated with the programme.

Evaluation is ongoing and the true value and impact of the programme will probably only be measurable longer term, and it will take time to observe and understand its foreseen and unforeseen consequences.

NOTES

1. April 2006. *Maasai Cultural Heritage Foundation, Profile and Concept Pape*r, copy on file with author
2. Although performances of traditional cultural expressions are protected internationally, through the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty, 1996. See generally WIPO, 2003. *Consolidated Analysis of the Legal Protection of Traditional Cultural Expressions/Expressions of Folklore*, pp. 59 -71.
3. Anderson, J., 2005. *Access and Control of Indigenous Knowledge in Libraries and Archives: Ownership and Future Use*, the MacArthur Foundation and the American Library Association, Columbia University. Paper available at http://correctingcourse.columbia.edu/program.html
4. See http://www.wipo.int/tk/en/folklore/culturalheritage/
5. See http://www.wipo.int/tk/en/folklore/creative_heritage/index.html
6. See http://www.wipo.int/tk/en/folklore/culturalheritage/surveys.html
7. See http://www.wipo.int/tk/en/igc/; Wendland, Wend, 2008. 'It's a Small World After All - Some Reflections on Intellectual Property and Traditional Cultural Expressions', in Beat Graber, Christoph and Burri-Nenova, Mira (eds.), *Intellectual Property and Traditional Cultural Expressions in a Digital Environment*, Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar.
8. See generally Prott, Lyndel. V., 2001. 'An International Legal Instrument for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage?', in *In einem vereinten Europa dem Frieden der Welt zu dienen' Liber Amicorum Thomas Oppermann*, Claus Dieter classen et al; Sherklin, Samantha, 2001. 'A Historical Study on the Preparation of the 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore', in Seitel, Peter (ed.), *Safeguarding Traditional Cultures: a Global Assessment.*
9. See Anderson, Jane, ibid.
10. I am grateful for the discussions and communications I have had on these points with my WIPO colleague Jessyca van Weelde, with colleagues at the AFC and CDS, and with external experts such as Mat Callahan of Berne, Switzerland and Daniel Sherman of the University of Maryland, USA.

Drawing-up a nation-wide inventory of intangible heritage in Portugal

Paulo Ferreira da Costa

Drawing-up a nation-wide inventory of intangible heritage in Portugal

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ABSTRACT
The Institute for Museums and Conservation is the body of the Ministry of Culture which is responsible for promoting the study, documentation, recording and safeguarding of Portuguese intangible heritage by developing standards, guidelines and information systems for inventorying and providing public access to IH. The drawing up of the National Inventory of Intangible Heritage is a task to which the Institute of Museums and Conservation is presently committed according to both its mission statement and to the legal framework soon to be implemented under Portuguese Heritage Law. The text discusses the main legislative, institutional and scientific issues that must be taken into consideration in order to implement this inventory and that must be considered as opportunities and/or strengths in the implementation of the National Inventory of IH and, simultaneously, as key factors for the success of the Portuguese administration's strategy for the safeguarding of IH.

The legal, institutional and scientific framework

In recent years a set of important measures has been developed in Portugal aimed at safeguarding intangible heritage (IH), both at the legislative, and at the institutional, level.

The first of these measures coincided with the coming into force of a new heritage law in 2001. This established a specific paradigm for the safeguarding of IH within the general measures dedicated to the protection of Portuguese cultural heritage. This paradigm for IH can be seen as innovative, for it considers all elements of IH as being of equal importance, no matter how different their social, historical or geographical scope may be, thus not subjecting any element of IH to the hierarchical system of legal protection that is applied to movable and

immovable heritage under the law. That legal paradigm is also innovative because it is clearly based on an integrated approach to both tangible and intangible heritage. Further developments in Portuguese heritage law relating to the safeguarding of IH are currently in the making and are expected to come into operation in 2010, both as an expression of the ratification of UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (operating in Portugal since August 2008), and as an expression of recent work at the Institute for Museums and Conservation to establish a system for creating a national inventory of IH.

At the institutional level, the main measures being developed in Portugal are largely derived from the restructuring of the administration of cultural heritage in 2007. New agencies with competencies in IH were created within the Ministry of Culture. At a central level, there is the Institute for Museums and Conservation (IMC) to which the mission of defining and implementing the national cultural policy for the safeguarding of IH is assigned, and at a regional level there is a set of five bodies in charge of cultural administration that support the documentation of IH according to the directives and guidelines produced by the IMC.

Although it was only created in 2007, the Institute for Museums and Conservation followed on from the work of the Portuguese Institute for Museums (1991/2007), a former part of the Ministry of Culture which had a long history in the management of Portuguese heritage. The IMC currently administers thirty-four national museums and palaces covering art, archaeology and ethnographic collections of outstanding importance for Portugal's national heritage. Beyond the safeguarding of IH, the IMC's mission is dedicated to the development and implementation of national cultural policy in the area of movable heritage, namely on matters relating to museums' collections, conservation and restoration and legally protected cultural property. The IMC is also responsible for the co-ordination of the Portuguese Network of Museums, which presently consists of a hundred and twenty-five museums.

As the central agency for IH in Portugal, the IMC has a department exclusively dedicated to the safeguarding of IH through its study, documentation and recording. Its main task, in the short term, is to create a nation-wide inventory of IH, as well as to produce and edit inventory standards and guidelines for the accurate management of information within the database that supports that inventory. The nation-wide inventory of Portuguese IH will be an on-line, freely accessible database in order to meet UNESCO's demands regarding the participation of communities, groups and individuals in the safeguarding of its IH and the making of IH inventories.

This inventory will be founded on IMC's long and solid experience in creating the digital inventory of Portugal's movable heritage and promoting online access to it. The future database is expected to be fully operational at the beginning of 2010. It will, in fact, appear in an updated version of IMC's own software (Matriz© and MatrizNet©) for the management of information regarding museum collections, and it will be of fundamental importance in promoting an integrated approach to both tangible and intangible culture among cultural institutions in Portugal. This database is also expected to make a major contribution to the visibility of many institutions that have for a long time played an important role in documenting IH in Portugal, such as ethnology and ethnographic museums, and universities and research centres for anthropological studies. This scientific context and the information already available on Portuguese IH should thus be seen as a major strength when it comes to formulating a plan of action for safeguarding IH in

Portugal, as well as for the implementation of a nation-wide inventory of IH.

The role of Portuguese museums in safeguarding IH

As a first step in raising awareness about the importance of safeguarding IH, in 2008 the Institute for Museums and Conservation organised a wide debate on the main issues raised in the Portuguese context by UNESCO's 2003 *Convention*, in particular from the point of view of museums and the role they play in Portugal in documenting and safeguarding both tangible and intangible heritage. A series of six conferences under the overall title *Museums and Intangible Heritage: agents, boundaries, identities* took place between February and November that year.

The legal, institutional and scientific issues referred to above were some of the main issues to be debated. Public discussion also considered our main strengths for the implementation of a nation-wide inventory of IH in the Portuguese context, such as the inventories and studies of traditional culture that have been being produced for over a century, mainly by anthropologists and other social scientists and by ethnological and ethnographic museums. Each conference was dedicated to a given theme raised by UNESCO's 2003 *Convention* and/or by the operational directives for its implementation, as follows:

1. Portuguese masks: authenticity and re-invention
(*Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis, Oporto, February 2008*)
In small villages in the north-east of Portugal there used to be a number of mid-winter festivals that traditionally involved the presence of masked men. Those festivals could be understood as rites of passage both for the community, marking the beginning of a new year, and for young men, marking their transition to adulthood. These social practices were exclusive to this cultural area of Portugal but have been abandoned in most villages since the 1960s. However, since the 1980s many of those practices have been re-invented or re-created to promote those villages and their region for folklore and touristic purposes. Women were formerly forbidden to participate in these rites, but today women take the place of men in some villages in order to revive the local festival, and now they too are the bearers of the masks and the local 'tradition'. Such examples of revivals and re-inventions were the theme for debating whether such transformations of social practices should be considered 'traditional' or 'authentic', and what should be their assessment according to UNESCO's *Convention* on IH.

2. Listing, protecting and assessing how representative different traditions are
(*Museu Nacional do Teatro, Lisbon, April 2008*)
According to the UNESCO *Convention*, the definition of intangible heritage largely coincides with cultural property produced or used in a popular or folk context. But in fact it is not specific to ethnography museums; many 'art' Museums also deal with IH. This is the case in the Portuguese National Museums of Music, Theatre and Costume, which presented their points of view in the first part of the conference, regarding their work on IH from the perspective of the study, documentation and inventorying of their respective collections. The second part of the conference was dedicated to the presentation, by a representative from UNESCO's Portuguese office, of the thematic scope, pre-requisites and mechanisms for safeguarding IH according to UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. This was followed by a presentation of work-in-progress in redefining the Regulation of Portuguese Heritage Law for Intangible Cultural Heritage, which will be of the utmost importance in the definition and implementation of a nation-wide inventory of IH. From a comparison of both protection mechanisms it became clear that the applicability of the first to the Portuguese social context would greatly depend on the implementation of the latter.

3. Memory, identity and project
(*Museu da Luz, Mourão, May 2008*)
The first part of the conference focused on the Museu da Luz, a small museum in the south of Portugal which was conceived as a memorial site, as well as an institution for documenting the tangible and intangible heritage of a small village whose population was entirely displaced as a consequence of the construction of a dam that flooded its original location. The second part of the conference was dedicated to film and sound archives, as well as to several projects documenting IH in the region where that museum is located. Overall, the conference was dedicated to the role that local museums and archives play in the safeguarding of IH, as well as to recognising the importance of IH as a major source of identity for local communities.

4. Knowledge and techniques: from recording to transmission
(*Ecomuseu Municipal do Seixal, June 2008*)
Museums often play an important role not only in recording elements of the intangible heritage of a given community, but also in its transmission for future generations. In cases where the transmission of such practices has been definitively interrupted, and where, according to UNESCO's definition, the practices can no longer be considered as 'living heritage', the study of social and individual memories becomes of utmost importance in order to document cultural property that would otherwise not be fully understood. Two key examples of these different ways of understanding and using IH from the perspective of museums were confronted in the conference, both dealt with the gunpowder industry and its documentation in two different museums in the Lisbon area. Other contributions focused mainly on science and technology museums and collections. Among the themes under discussion was the fact that many social practices are difficult to record and safeguard if media such as photography, sound and film are the only tools available, thus stressing the importance of the role researchers and their written registries play in documenting various elements of IH - mnemonic and traditional knowledge processes, for example.

5. Portuguese fieldwork: what do anthropologists do?
(*Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Lisbon, October 2008*)
Inspired by the truism *anthropology is what anthropologists do* the conference took place in the university where, thirty years ago, modern anthropology became part of postgraduate studies in Portugal. The conference opened with a brief portrayal of the development of the discipline in Portugal since its inception in about 1870 up to the present day, which made it clear that the scientific background is extremely important for the building of any action plan for safeguarding IH in Portugal. The speakers at the conference mostly talked about the current diversity of types of fieldwork and other subjects of interest to Portuguese anthropologists. One of the main issues discussed in the conference was which sorts of fieldwork and subjects should - or should not - be considered as intangible heritage under the UNESCO *Convention*.

6. Global museums and intercultural dialogue
(*Museu Nacional de Etnologia, Lisbon, November 2008*)
The last conference of the series was entirely dedicated to the role ethnographic and ethnology museums play in the modern world, notably in the context of multicultural societies, as well as to the challenges and opportunities that inventorying and documenting intangible cultural heritage presents today. The importance of ethnographic collections in the strengthening of relations between museums and their communities, together with the creation of archives for the documentation of intangible heritage within museums to form a basis for intercultural dialogue, constituted the main theme of the conference. The conference took place within the context of the *European Year of Intercultural Dialogue*, as well as in the context of the theme ICOM chose for 2008 - *Museums: agents of social change and development*.

This conference was held in the National Museum of Ethnology in Lisbon which was created in 1962 and is a 'cutting edge' scientific institution which sets a new standard for Portuguese ethnographic museums. Together with the National Museum of Ethnology, two other major ethnology museums presented their strategies for documenting and displaying intangible cultural heritage: they were the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Quebec) and the Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève.

All sorts of different museums were involved in this series of conferences – national museums, municipal and local museums, as well as specialist museums of ethnology/ethnography, art (music, theatre, and costume), science and industry. Three different kinds of professionals were involved in the debate: museum professionals (museum directors, programmers and registrars), anthropologists (researchers, scholars, museum professionals, etc.) and anthropological film-makers. Given the significance of anthropology for the study of IH in the Portuguese scientific context, one of the conferences was exclusively dedicated to this discipline and some of its fields of interest and activity. Thirty-four speakers contributed to the making of the series of conferences and they were attended by six hundred and five participants.

Conclusion

The series of conferences afforded an important opportunity to debate the definition of IH according to both UNESCO's 2003 *Convention* and the operational directives for its implementation, as well as to debate their applicability to the Portuguese social context. In fact, one of the main issues raised by the debate was the fact that over the last forty years Portugal has been undergoing major social changes and Portuguese IH has therefore also undergone major changes. Many traditions have disappeared, others have changed dramatically and some new folklore-based traditions have been invented. Although it is sometimes very hard to distinguish between tradition and representation of tradition, the nation-wide inventory of IH clearly must distinguish between them, and, most importantly, must document the role and significance each element of IH plays amongst its bearers at any given place and time.

Investigating the impact of world heritage site tourism on the intangible heritage of a community: Tsodilo Hills World Heritage site, Botswana

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Investigating the impact of World Heritage site tourism on the intangible heritage of a community: Tsodilo Hills World Heritage site, Botswana

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ABSTRACT

In places that are not World Heritage sites, communities produce material culture continuously as a form of interaction between themselves and their environments. In the Okavango Delta region, crafts are a good example of such material culture. Today, the concept of 'World Heritage' is led by socio-economic needs – through tourism - rather than socio-cultural interactions. In this process, the indigenous systems of knowledge that create intangible heritage are modified, usually in a negative way, and this affects the social networks that sustain the practices of craft production. The results of research projects conducted in June-August 2003 and June-July 2007 are used to illuminate this discussion. The paper concludes that while in the developing world, giving a site World Heritage status is likely to encourage tourism, the impact on the resident community's intangible heritage must be considered and safeguarded.

Introduction

This paper uses craft production by communities at Tsodilo Hills World Heritage site in Botswana (hereafter TH-WHS) as a case study to examine the potential impact of tourism on world heritage sites. The underlying hypothesis is that changes in the values associated with the production of material culture have an impact on communities' systems of indigenous knowledge and bring about a degree of change in their socio-cultural practices and in the networks within communities. This article shows that, over time, the quantity of craftwork produced changes, as do the ways in which craft items are used, illustrating changes in the application of traditional knowledge and skills within Tsodilo

communities' socio-cultural networks of production, consumption and interaction.

In TH-WHS, crafts are a dominant form of material culture. Various craft items were used in the past for wedding gifts, bride price currency and initiation ornaments, to mention but a few usages. See Table 3. Currently however, crafts are produced for money in the Okavango Delta (Moepeng 2006). Consequently, this change from traditional to economic production impacts on those craft skills that rely on established systems of indigenous knowledge and intellectual expertise accumulated over many years.

In current heritage management practices, a new challenge facing intangible heritage manifests itself through changes in the ways communities perceive and value the things they make. Tourism is the catalyst. As producers of material culture, the socio-cultural and psycho-social values (intangible heritage) a community attaches to the items it makes determine the sustainability of that aspect of their intangible heritage. For instance, research findings in Tsodilo illustrate that while in the past necklaces were produced to be worn by young brides during their marriage ceremonies, and used as bride price, currently they are produced solely for sale to tourists. See Tables 2 and 3.

Crafts and heritage tourism among Tsodilo communities

The Tsodilo Hills are located in the Ngamiland district of Botswana, 250 kilometres from Maun, the tourism capital of northern Botswana. It is approximately 50 kilometres west of the wildlife sanctuaries of the Okavango Delta. See Figure 2. The Tsodilo Hills are a major geological landmark in Botswana, comprising four quartzite hills, traditionally known as *mosadi* (female), *monna* (male), *ngwana* (child) and *ngwana-wa-ngwana* (grandchild). These rock formations are covered with over 4,500 paintings on 400 rock panels, and many carvings are concentrated on the site's three main hills, or *inselbergs* – making this one of the highest concentrations of rock art in the world. As with all World Heritage sites, the inscription of Tsodilo followed the bureaucratic procedure of assessment against pre-defined criteria; the report of the 25th session of the World Heritage Committee describes how Tsodilo fitted criteria (i), (iii) and (vi) of the *World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO 2001).

The Tsodilo outcrops have immense symbolic and religious significance for the people who continue to live in the area today (Keitumetse et al 2007).

Research and findings

An investigative questionnaire was designed with some questions focusing on the amount of craftwork produced by the local communities at Tsodilo before and after the settlement became a World Heritage site. Another set of questions focused on the quantity and purpose of the craftwork produced today. The focus on quantity was used to make a qualitative analysis of the changes in cultural values which represent the impact tourism has had on the communities. Follow-up questions and



Figure 1
The decorative motifs are based on plants and animals.
(c)Keitumetse 2007

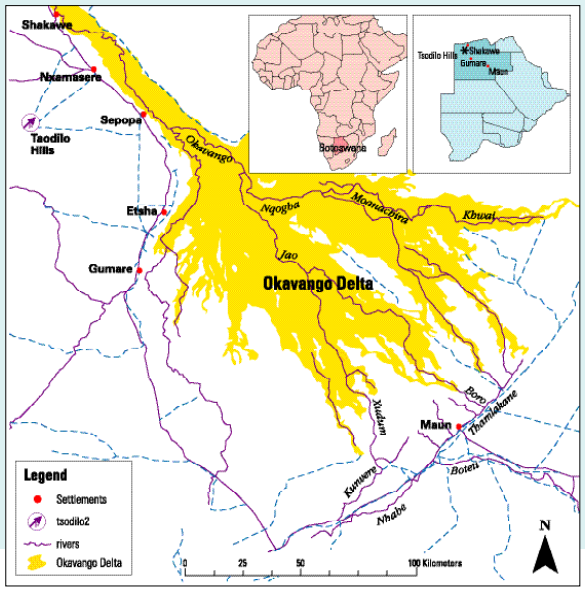


Figure 2
The location of the Tsodilo Hills world heritage site in Botswana.
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conversations were also undertaken in order to collect more information from key respondents, and from non-respondents. The questions, both qualitative and quantitative, were designed to show the degree of change in the volume of production which will in turn indicate what changes take place in the knowledge and skills used in craft production over time at the TH-WHS.

Most of the respondents (83.9%) were female, while 16.1% were male. The respondents were from two ethnic groups commonly known as the *Hambukushu* and *Ju/Hoansi* (*San*) and a small percentage were members of the *Yei* people who had intermarried with other groups outside the Tsodilo settlement. See Figure 3.

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	5	16.1	16.1	16.1
Female	26	83.9	83.9	100.0
Total	31	100.0	100.0	

Table 1
The gender of interviewed and observed respondents

Hambukushu women traditionally produce baskets within the TH-WHS. However, due to the amount of time that has to be invested in making a basket and in collecting the raw materials, most women have gone over to making jewellery in the form of necklaces; a practice traditionally associated with the *Basarwa/Bushmen* women. This is because necklaces can be produced easily and quickly in large quantities to sell to the tourists; other crafts, such as baskets, take much longer to make. The change in craft specialisation demonstrates the point we made earlier about communities being the key to the sustainability of their own culture. In this particular case, the communities' economic values transcend the value they place on their cultural heritage.

Our research findings also show evidence of some relatively new attitudes to craft production at the Tsodilo site. See Table 2. It shows that a significant number of respondents produce crafts solely for sale, with no respondents producing solely for traditional or cultural purposes as was the case in the past. The activities surrounding craft production processes have therefore evolved in ways that affect the authenticity and integrity of the indigenous systems of knowledge that inform craft production (intangible heritage).

Respondents' uses of crafts	Baskets	Bows & arrows	Necklaces	Woodwork	Total
1. Entirely to be sold for income	2	2	10	0	14
2. To be sold and used for traditional purposes	2	0	7	3	12
3. Entirely for traditional purposes	0	0	3	0	0

Table 2
Uses for craft items at the time of research

Items/Crafts	Traditional use(s)
Bags	- storage for valuables - storage for harvested fruits - storage of items when travelling
Baskets	- food storage - decoration of the house - food storage and to be sold
Woodwork	- used as kitchen utensils e.g. wooden spoons - for house decoration
Necklaces	- worn by young women during menstrual initiation ceremony - worn by a bride during wedding ceremony - worn by women to accessorize their clothes - used as part of bride price
Bows & arrows	- for hunting and gathering

Table 3
Uses for craft items in the past

The dominant factor influencing trends in craft production at the Tsodilo settlements is the generation of income from tourists. See Tables 2 and 3. Very few respondents produced craftwork for both sale and traditional purposes. Craft makers in Tsodilo therefore now produce material culture to address their socio-economic needs rather than their socio-cultural ones.

Table 4 shows that 51.6% of community members learnt craft making skills in the traditional way – from their mothers and grandmothers. The way people learn a skill demonstrates the dynamics of craft production, and consequently explains some of the challenges faced by indigenous heritage and the expertise attached to it.

Acquisition of skill	Frequency	Percent
Traditionally	16	51.6
Workshops	5	16.1
Self-taught	10	32.3
Total	31	100.0

Table 4
Methods of acquiring the skills of craft production

Although Table 4 indicates that most craft makers learnt to produce crafts in the traditional way, on the extreme end of the spectrum there are a growing number of people who have learnt craft skills purely to make money, as is illustrated by the following extracts from interviews:

> *I recently learned how to produce necklaces from friends so I could have something to sell too at the craft shop as tourists see them as part of our culture.* (Female, craft worker, 19)
>
> *Craft making is important to us because it is a way for us to make money from tourists who come to see the rock art. We can then buy one or two things for our children.*(Female, craft worker, 30)

Currently however, community members learn by observing friends (32%) and, more radically, through workshops conducted by NGOs (16%). These two new methods of acquiring skills indicate a transition from systems based on traditional and indigenous knowledge (intangible heritage) to systems outside the socio-cultural context - which in turn shows that the way of life of the resident community is changing.

Research findings further show a gradual trend towards the mass production of crafts for tourism rather than production for the traditional purposes and activities outlined in Table 3. Figure 4 quantifies the approximate volume of craftwork received from respondents by the site museum staff, which is evidence of mass production when compared to Table 2. The change illustrates changes in the way that communities perceive and value material culture, a process that is motivated by informal tourism development on the site.

Discussion: the desperate indigene and the nostalgic tourist: their impact on intangible

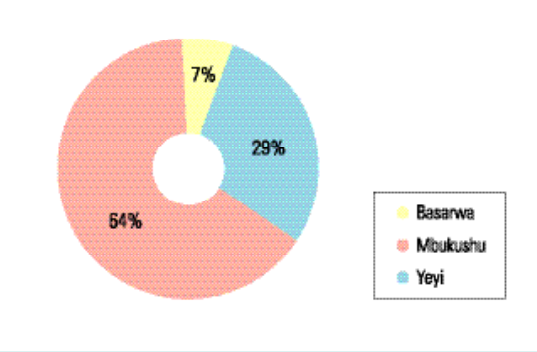


Figure 3
The ethnic groups of the respondents

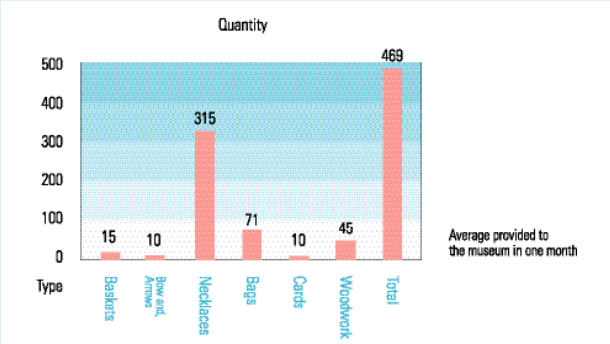


Figure 4
The average quantity of crafts received at the Tsodilo site museum from the respondents. Note the inclusion of cards as a new development

heritage

World Heritage status accords heritage sites in developing countries international recognition and publicity, and that attracts international visitors and tourists. However, tourism often triggers changes in traditional patterns of demand and supply, and in the process affects the indigenous knowledge systems and processes (intangible heritage) that sustain traditional production. As the TH-WHS findings indicate, in the past the production of necklaces was motivated by socio-cultural needs, while today the same production is motivated by economic needs addressed through informal tourism activities on the site.

Material culture, or tangible heritage, is often viewed by communities as a medium that expresses their cultural 'footprint' as well as representing their cultural heritage, and this is communicated and expressed to visitors through crafts. Conversely, for visitors, tourism can be a special form of 'play' involving travel, or 'getting away from it all' (Graburn 1989: 22-23). It can also be interpreted by visitors as ... *a metaphysical search for completeness* (Meethan 2001: 90) as often remote indigenous landscapes and people are viewed as ...*attractive mysteries, promises of spirituality* [just as] *Aboriginal people have become the foci of promotion and marketing in Australia* (Whittaker 1999: 34). Therefore, hosts often feel compelled to meet visitors' needs by mass producing versions of their material culture. In such cases, the authentic cultural experience that the tourist is seeking is likely to be destroyed or blurred by the host community. The loss of cultural authenticity is aggravated by an observed relationship that ... tourists are less likely to borrow from their hosts than their hosts are from them ... (Crick 1999: 18). That this relationship makes tourism a form of acculturation is further perpetuated by the observation that ... *the majority of indigenous people will never travel abroad because they lack the funds, so their impression of Western culture is also flawed* (Keefe 1995: 43) – with the result that the on-site communities fail to comprehend that the mass production of their material culture contradicts the key principles of eco-tourism - as well as those of the eco-tourist who is interested in environmental and cultural integrity. The resident community's perception of what tourists really want to buy has implications for the sustainability of their intangible heritage which can be 'perishable' (Misiura 2006). Case studies that document the potential impact of heritage site tourism on local perceptions of heritage need to be undertaken alongside the promotion of World Heritage sites if we are to aim for sustainable growth in the development of heritage tourism.

Conclusion

Earlier research on the Tsodilo settlement has shown that World Heritage site status is designated in communities' cultural landscapes (Keitumetse et al 2007) and brings with it a culture of interaction that did not exist there before (Keitumetse 2005). However, there is a very limited amount of research that investigates the potential impact that the World Heritage designation has on other forms of heritage on sites. The relatively recent adoption of the UNESCO 2003 *Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Heritage* provides a basic framework for research in this direction, where management options for safeguarding intangible elements of heritage in World Heritage sites

can be investigated. This paper shows that communities at Tsodilo have reacted to World Heritage designation by transforming their traditional systems and processes of producing material culture to take advantage of the new opportunities their status has brought. This has had a negative effect on elements of their intangible heritage. This paper illustrates this by showing how the quantity, and form, of the crafts produced has changed over time, as well as how the end use of those products has altered. See Tables 2 and 3. The conclusion is that the designation of the Tsodilo Hills as a World Heritage site has had a negative impact on the intangible heritage of the area. The increased number of tourists has transformed local craft production from a socio-cultural activity to an economic one. The traditional systems of knowledge and skill that act as regulatory mechanisms sustaining the integrity of intangible heritage have been damaged. The mass production of material culture inhibits the sustainability of indigenous systems. Tourism as a medium of expression for cultural heritage is sustainable only where it represents a

> *... means of achieving a satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence ... a set of capacities that allows groups, communities ... to define their futures in an integrated manner.* (http://portal.unesco.org/culture).

The conservation of the intangible heritage values associated with the production of material culture within a community enhances residents' sense of belonging to a group, as well as inspiring the community to take responsibility for the conservation of heritage as a whole.

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The role of cultural and heritage education at *Bakoni Malapa* Open Air Museum: demonstrations of cultural practices and craftwork techniques

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The role of cultural and heritage education at *Bakoni Malapa* Open Air Museum: demonstrations of cultural practices and craftwork techniques

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ABSTRACT
Open air museums are of vital importance in preserving and safeguarding cultureand intangible heritage. This paper explores how *Bakoni Malapa* Open Air Museum preserves the culture of the *Bakoni* people by showcasing their cultural heritage and educating visitors about it. Although various methods are used to preserve the culture of the *Bakoni* people, this paper's analyses are based on just two of the museum's main activities in connection with intangible heritage – putting on demonstrations of traditional cultural practices and demonstrating craft techniques. We also discuss what other cultures around the globe can learn from the way *Bakoni* cultural heritage is presented at *Bakoni Malapa*.

Introduction

The museum industry plays a significant role in preserving the cultures of different societies (Gore, 2004; Uzzell, 1998). South Africa, like other developing countries, established museums to preserve the culture of societies by safeguarding their tangible and intangible heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. For that reason, there are approximately 300 museums in South Africa including ones dealing with agriculture, geology, military affairs, archaeology, arts, mining, and natural history (*South Africa Arts and Culture Yearbook 2006/2007*). *Bakoni Malapa* Open Air Museum was established in 1985 by the erstwhile apartheid regime in order to preserve the cultural heritage of the *Bakoni* people (Jordaan, 1992). *Malapa* means 'homesteads'. The *Bakoni* are a sub-group of the Northern *Sotho* speaking people who were living in the Lebowa homeland when the museum was established. The homeland system was designed by the apartheid government to keep the vast majority of blacks away from the lands occupied by the white minority in South Africa (Beinart, 1994). During the apartheid regime, the *Bakoni Malapa* Museum was mostly visited by international tourists and members of the white minority in South Africa. It has been suggested that the white minority who visited the museum wanted to know more about different black cultures in order to be



Figure 1
Cultural demonstrators performing a traditional dance at the museum. Source: Musinguzi 2007

able to manipulate their members more effectively.

On the other hand, the museum had only a limited number of black visitors from the area because the majority of the local people resented the apartheid government for taking their land and forcing them into so-called 'homelands' where living conditions were extremely poor (Jeffrey *et al.* 1977). Therefore, *Bakoni Malapa* did not impress the local community when it was founded. However, the demise of the apartheid regime and the establishment of a non-racial government in 1994 led to the formation of the Department of Arts and Culture. In addition, other arts and culture organisations were created - the National Heritage Council, the South African Heritage Resources Agency, the National Arts Council of South Africa and the South African Geographical Names Council (*South Africa Arts and Culture Yearbook, 2006/2007*). The emphasis the Department of Arts and Culture and the various other organisations placed on traditional cultures probably helped local communities to recognise the importance of cultural institutions in their society. Nowadays, cultural institutions like *Bakoni Malapa* Museum are considered vital in preserving cultural heritage and in educating the local black community about it, and it is envisaged that such cultural education will be passed on to the younger generation so they, too, can understand the significance of their intangible heritage. *Bakoni Malapa* Open Air Museum would have no role to play in educating the *Bakoni* people about their cultural heritage if it did not preserve their intangible heritage (in the form of demonstrations of cultural practices and traditional craft making techniques). The presence of the museum is determined by the intangible heritage it showcases and safeguards. In turn, the safeguarding of their intangible heritage is possible because the museum now provides an appropriate environment for regular demonstrations of cultural practices and the making of traditional craftwork.

An open air museum is defined as *a number of buildings placed in an area set aside…these buildings are shown as they were in the past* (UNESCO, 1958:25). In South Africa, open air museums include the *Tsonga Kraal*, the *South Sotho* Museum, the *Ndebele* Museum, Kliptown, and the *Bakoni Malapa* Museum (*South Africa Arts and Culture Yearbook, 2006/2007*). In all these museums, demonstrations of cultural practices and craftwork play a significant role in reminding people of their cultural background. This study uses the UNESCO (2003) definition of intangible heritage to identify what can be classified as intangible heritage at *Bakoni Malapa* Museum. Intangible heritage is *…the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces* … of a society (UNESCO, 2003:2). According to that definition, the demonstrations of cultural activities and craft making at the museum are forms of intangible heritage. Although the museum also has tangible artefacts, this study only explores the role of cultural and craft demonstrations at *Bakoni Malapa* Museum in post-apartheid South Africa.

Preserving the cultural heritage of the *Bakoni* people

The high rate of destruction of cultural heritage in the world (Niknami, 2005; Ruijgrok, 2006) has been attributed to modernisation (Woods, 2009; UNESCO, 2003), which means that 'borrowed' lifestyles are often preferred to a

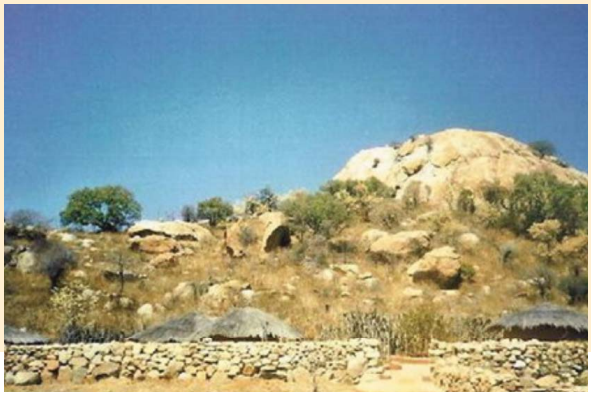


Figure 2
A view of some of the traditional homesteads of the *Bakoni* people. Source: Musinguzi (2007)

society's traditional cultural heritage. As a consequence, cultural attributes such as dress codes, music, customs and lifestyles that were considered meaningful by previous generations are gradually replaced by foreign imports. Therefore, preserving cultural heritage and teaching people about it is socially very important (Salazar and Marques, 2005). *Bakoni* society preserves and showcases its intangible heritage at *Bakoni Malapa* Museum in the form of cultural and craft making demonstrations.

In this paper, 'cultural demonstrations' mean traditional activities performed by museum workers to educate visitors (both local and international) about the culture of the *Bakoni* people. The main examples are the performance of traditional dances such as the *Dinaka* for men, who play pipes, and the *Mmapadi* by women who play drums and small wind instruments (but not the pipes) and demonstrations of traditional dress. During the performance of traditional dances, visitors are taught about gender specialisation among the *Bakoni* people. For example, men blow metal pipes and dance while the women beat drums of different sizes (Musinguzi, 2007) (Figure 1). The *Bakoni* people, like the *Basotho*, attach great importance to their attire (Martie, 2007). Their traditional dress code dictated that men and women should dress differently. The women wore two items of dress - front and back aprons - while the men only wore one, the loincloth (Jordaan, 1992). The attire for *Bakoni* men is akin to that of the *San* people at Kagga Kamma Cultural Village in the Cederberg Mountains, South Africa (Goudie *et al.* 1999) and it is generally believed that these two groups once lived in the same geographical region, possibly in central Africa.

Gender specialisation among the *Bakoni* people signified respect for both genders; the mixing of gender roles was regarded as disrespectful. This cultural belief is something the *Bakoni* people still think is important and worth preserving for future generations. One of the demonstrators at the museum explained that gender specialisation is gradually dying out in modern society and this is divisive, families argue and the elder generation thinks the young are behaving disrespectfully – so, clearly, there are benefits when the younger generation is educated about the traditional roles of gender amongst the *Bakoni*.

Education at the museum

According to the ICOM 2004 definition of a museum, museums are expected to play an important role in educating societies about the intangible heritage they preserve. In the case of *Bakoni Malapa* Museum, education is offered to both adults and children, ensuring that it is a place where visitors can all learn something. Education for the adults involves explaining to them at length about the origins of the museum and its operation in the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. There are also tours around the museum's traditional homesteads (Figure 2) where there are demonstrations showing the old *Bakoni* way of life. The museum sees children as 'building blocks' for a future society that will be culturally sensitive and responsive (Jillian, 1996) and therefore it teaches school children about its origins too, but in a simpler way than it teaches adults. This is because children are unlikely to pay attention to long stories. In order to keep them interested, the museum gives them shortened versions of the stories and also engages them in hands-on activities such as making crafts and local

food, and smearing the homesteads' floors with cow dung – a traditional way of controlling dust and parasites. By engaging in such activities, children from local communities learn about the origins of their own cultural identity, while those from different societies ... *develop an understanding and an appreciation of other cultures* (Jillian, 1996:37).

Contemporary culture is often regarded as superior to traditional cultures and this causes conflict, yet it is evident that contemporary culture is really anchored in tradition. Indeed, without traditional culture there would be no contemporary culture. Therefore, it is traditional culture - the 'mother' of contemporary culture – that should be seen as superior. For example, this conflict can be seen in attitudes to craftwork (Follad, 2006). Another example of contemporary culture conflicting with tradition can be seen in Nigeria, among the *Igbo* people, where indigenous knowledge is displaced by western education. As a result, there is ... *the loss of or limited access to indigenous knowledge* (Abidogun, 2007:33). *Education, community interactions* ... and the sharing of cultural demonstrations may have a transformative effect and enable people who see themselves as ... *other/foreign* to be able to *identify* [themselves] *without fear or apprehension* (Lowen, undated). Also:

> *Connecting to others, from within our own cultural background expanding out to those less familiar is essential to inhabit a world where we live at ease within our global communities. An opportunity to enter into the cultural space of others dissolves the defensiveness of fear of the "other" and enables a sense of security and the happiness of connection, understanding and even celebration of sharing a larger human landscape.* (Lowen, undated)

Thus, cultural education, demonstrations and other forms of interaction developed to introduce the culture of one particular group can help the visitor towards a deeper and more profound understanding of other cultural groups and reduce his/her sense that they are 'other'.

Craft demonstrations are another important aspect of cultural heritage education at *Bakoni Malapa* Open Air Museum. They show the artistry and skill of the *Bakoni* people and the way they used natural materials to produce different types of items. This is another aspect of intangible heritage that is preserved and demonstrated at *Bakoni Malapa*. The crafts demonstrated include, among others, making hide paintings, calabashes, sleeping mats, wood carvings, winnowing baskets (Figure 3), necklaces, walking sticks, wooden porridge plates and spoons. Such craft items are produced and sold to visitors as souvenirs of their experience at the museum. The importance of being able to buy crafts at a tourist destination is described by the World Tourism Organisation thus:

> *... handicraft taken home from an enjoyable holiday has* [the] *continuing power to evoke wonderful*



Figure 3
Bakoni craftwork on display in the museum
Source: Musinguzi (2007)

> *memories, and indeed to arouse the interest of others who see it and to encourage them to visit the destination.* (World Tourism Organisation, 2006:1)

This implies that crafts can be vital marketing tools for tourist destinations.

Although crafts play a significant role in tourism and also at the museum, it is important to note that producing craftwork suitable for both cultural and tourist consumption poses a challenge for today's cultural craftsmen. The challenge is inevitable because the craftwork produced for tourists is normally of a different standard to that produced for traditional cultural purposes. Traditionally, most *Bakoni* craft items (such as baskets and clay pots) were large because they were produced for communal, not individual, use; thus, the size and weight of certain craft items have a cultural significance. On the other hand, tourists prefer items that are small, designed for individual use – and that fit in their suitcases or travel bags (Musinguzi, 2007). The above scenario may be described as a conflict between tradition and contemporary cultures. However, *Bakoni Malapa* Museum, as an institution committed to safeguarding intangible heritage, has not yielded to foreign demands for small crafts that are convenient for travellers. Making crafts specifically to please tourists leads to a loss of authenticity (Follad, 2006) which is why *Bakoni Malapa* does not produce crafts or perform demonstrations simply to please the tourists. Therefore, the size and the weight of craft items made at the *Bakoni Malapa* Museum follow the traditional forms. The museum values the need to preserve intangible heritage above all other considerations.

Conclusion

Demonstrations of aspects of *Bakoni* culture show how their roots and identity differ from those of other peoples. Craft items remind visitors of traditional *Bakoni* artistry and skills. This intangible heritage gives the *Bakoni* a sense of their place in the northern part of South Africa that should not be lost. Due to the importance of cultural heritage in the tourism sector, this study recommends that other South African cultural traditions should be demonstrated and preserved in the same way as *Bakoni* culture is demonstrated and preserved at the *Bakoni Malapa* Open Air Museum. This could be achieved by establishing other open air museums for different cultural communities. It is, however, important to guard against modifying traditional culture to suit tourists, because the unrestricted use of culture for profit through tourism can lead to the loss of valuable knowledge about cultural heritage (George, 1973). However, demonstrations of cultural practices and of traditional craft making techniques also mean that cultures can be seen in a global context.

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Instructions to Contributors

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The International Journal of Intangible Heritage aims to play a role as a comprehensive academic journal on the intangible heritage, as defined in Article 2 of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003. It seeks to promote international communication about research, investigation, conservation, transmission, performance and communication, and the exchange of ideas among scholars, researchers, professionals, educationalist and other practitioners and bodies involved in the intangible heritage sector.

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