

## **INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES: MANYANGA (NTABA ZI KA MAMBO) REVISITED**

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#### **Introduction: African Renaissance, Intangible Heritage and Empowerment**

Ideas of an African renaissance in many southern African nations today have been associated with African past and traditions, which are seen as the landmarks in determining the future of Africa. Proponents of the concept argue that:

It is all about who we are and what we as Africans are all about. Renaissance is about Africa reflection and African definition and Africans being agents of their own history and masters of our own destiny (Malegapuru et al 1999: xii).

While many proponents of the idea view tangible heritage as monuments from which to derive inspiration, it is the intangible aspects that are seen as defining an African Identity. Though a controversial concept, it has a lot of application particularly on issues relating to the intangible cultural heritage. Intellectuals, politicians and economists are stressing the importance of African identity and of shaping the future of Africa (Malegapuru (ed) 1999). Some long-standing traditions, which constitute the intangible cultural heritage of a people, find relevance with the ideas of African Renaissance.

Intangible Heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage (UNESCO 2003 Annex III: 2). For this paper the intangible cultural heritage discussed manifests itself in the form of social practices, rituals and festive events at a number of archaeological sites in southern Africa (Fig 1). While focus will be principally on developments at Manyanga National monument in the 1990s, discussion on other sites like Nharira Hills, Domboshaba (Botswana) and Tlokwen is meant to give an extended coverage of the different manifestations over a wider area. These seem to reflect a regional trend among the traditional custodians of cultural heritage to practice cultural consultations at their ancestral places or to be consulted in the management of the places.

#### **Living traditions at Manyanga and related sites**

The revival of living traditions at Manyanga National monument (also called Ntaba zi ka Mambo) in the Bubi district, Matabeleland North, in the 1990's presented such a challenge for those who are entrusted by law to look after the monument (Manyanga 1999).

The activities of ritual prayer groups, which also included the building of new structures at the National Monument, were in direct conflict with the National Museums and Monuments Act 25:11. Manyanga National Monument is a Zimbabwe type-site that was declared a National Monument in 1952 and historically has been associated with the Rozvi state of the late 16th to the early 17th century. It is located on the Mambo hills, which are now part of Mambo Ranch. The hills form a natural fortification that resembles the Matopo hills in Matabeleland South. Archaeological research by Robinson in the 1960's has shown that the site was occupied continuously from the Stone Age until more recent times. The monument, which is in private property (Miekles Holding) and administered by National Museums and Monuments, has become the focal point of regular ritual prayer groups. One group from Silobela, led by Andrew Siborani Moyo, who identifies himself with the Rozvi Mambo lineage, has made a strong claim for traditional custodianship of the site. The group has grand plans at the site and has since cleared part of the site and constructed a hut for ritual purposes. The group also has plans to have a granary put up at the site so as to store grain for use during thanksgiving ceremonies. Heritage managers have condemned the activities of these groups as an archaeological disaster and a distortion of the cultural landscape. On the other hand, the ritual groups view the national monument as their rightful heritage, which they need to utilise for their well-being as dictated by their ancestors.

My synopsis in 1996 was that the problems at Manyanga were purely administrative in nature, having to do with different perceptions that relate to the values attached to the monument (Manyanga 1999). I also questioned heritage management practices in Zimbabwe, which, in my view, ignored the traditional view of heritage, one that is not compatible with western perceptions of heritage management. I had seen the problem in terms of the traditional custodians valuing the social and religious aspects of the site and the legal custodian stressing the scientific and aesthetic values of the sites. I had also noted the conflict emanating from Zimbabwe's National Museums and Monuments Act 25:11, which does not recognize the intangible aspects of heritage. Researchers have for a long time looked at living traditional groups as subjects of archaeological and anthropological inquiry. As such, these traditional groups are not regarded as equal participants in the discussions and policies that relate to their cultural past and present.

While all these explanations may be relevant, the conflict also seems to have a strong empowerment dimension that relates to a lineage using cultural heritage to regain access to what they had been denied over the years. I rhetorically asked in 1996;

*Was it a desire to revive their past traditions through the spiritual consultation of the Mambo shrine, or is this coupled with a desire to return to their ancestral land and have a share of it? (Manyanga 1999:13)*

Looking back at the events of the 1990's at Manyanga and other National Monuments like Nharira Hills, the rhetoric above seems true. After many years of being deprived access to shrines, it looks like the 1990's marked yet another phase of cultural revival in which living traditions were used in the quest for correcting past injustices. The idea is further consolidated by looking at a case in Tlokweng, Botswana, where a Tswana community has been able to fend off threats to their territorial rights by using one of their long-standing living traditions of burying their dead in their yards.

Despite the obvious negative impact to archaeology noted at Manyanga National Monument in the 1990's, the revival of these living traditions at the site has enhanced the value of the site. Its utilisation by people who claim a direct link with the builders of the site all but stresses the need for the protection of the monument for scientific, aesthetic and religious cultural values. Sites need to be protected legally by both national and international instruments for the people and on behalf of the people. The activities call for research, documentation, protection, promotion, enhancement and transmission, issues that are highlighted in the proposed UNESCO Convention on intangible cultural heritage. With some flexibility, the activities and involvement of traditional groups at sites like Manyanga can be put to the good use of both archaeology and culture.

### **Nharira Hills**

A case related to the problems at Manyanga in the 1990's can also be observed at Nharira Hills, just 38 km SW of Harare. The conflict at Nharira was centred on Sekuru Mushore and farm owner Mr. Hinde. Just like at Manyanga, the conflict dates back to the 1960's, when Sekuru Mushore came to the hills to maintain his ancestors' graves and to appease his ancestors. Through a gentlemen's arrangement, the farmer allowed Sekuru Mushore, together with some of his aides, to temporarily stay at the hills to conduct their rituals. However, attempts by Sekuru Mushore and his aides to establish permanent homes resulted in their swift removal by the then-farm owner, Mr. Hinde. Mushore is said to have continued to visit the Hills on a regular basis with his aides to conduct rainmaking ceremonies at the site. However, in 1993 he moved to the hills to permanently stay there with this family. National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) was then brought into the picture after the conflict had already established itself. The spiritual significance of the hills was brought to the attention of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, which followed the procedures for any site to be declared a national monument. In the midst of the crisis, NMMZ declared Nharira Hills National Monument Number 169 in 2000.

Nharira Hills are known to have a number of archaeological and historical sites associated with the Nyamweda people. The declared area enclosed burials, rock paintings, cave deposits and grain bins, while Nharira Hills define the boundary of the site. This was done on the basis of the need to preserve Nharira Hills for future formal scientific research and study in the fields of archaeology, ethnography and folklore. As much as the material traces in the Nharira Hills associated with the Nyamweda people are objects of historical and scientific interest to archaeologists and anthropologists, they are important to the Nyamweda people, who value them for spiritual guidance and consultation. The declaration of the Hills as National Monument means that the care of Nharira Hills is now under NMMZ.

### **Domboshaba (Botswana)**

Domboshaba is a Khami phase type-site in the North Eastern District of Botswana. It is interesting to note that in recent years the site has also attracted cultural groups who perform music, dances and other cultural activities associated with *Mwali* ("Supreme Being" in Kalanga) and ancestor worship in celebration of their past glory and cultural heritage (Moffat, forthcoming). The site is generally considered to be associated with the Kalanga. It is interesting to note that some of the communities that conduct ritual activities are not directly associated with the Kalanga past. They are Bapedi from Potgietersrus in South Africa. The activities are coordinated by a cultural organisation known as the Society for the Promotion of the Ikalanga Language (SPIL). Their use of Domboshaba is based on ideas associated with cultural revival, particularly among southern African states associated with the African Renaissance. The situation at Domboshaba presents another perspective to heritage that that does not necessarily have to do with ancestry, but with a dynamic process, which also involves a declaration of faith in a past that goes through a re-evaluation and is re-used in the present (Skeates: 2000:9).

### **Tlokweng**

Tlokweng is a village located just southeast of Gaborone City. A Tswana community known as Batlokwa inhabits it. The Batlokwa originated from present-day Northern Province, South Africa, around 1858, when they escaped from racial unrest in the then-Transvaal Province (Ellenberger 1939). Initially they settled in Bakwena territory, where they were expected to pay tribute to be accepted as subjects. Refusal to pay tribute resulted in the Bakwena ceding the land on which the Batlokwa were staying to the British crown. The British administration then divided the land into ranches and sold them to white farmers on a freehold tenure. The land that was occupied by the Batlokwa was bought by the British South Africa Company and this meant that the Batlokwa had to pay tax to the BSA Company. The lands became known as Gaberones Block, named after the Batlokwa chief (Keitumetse, 2002:9). Efforts to move the Batlokwa from the BSA Co. lands and Crown land proved difficult until about 1933, when a Batlokwa tribal reserve was established. The Batlokwa argued that they could not move away from their land because they did not want to leave their ancestors' graves (Ellenberger 1939:89).

Since the 1850's the history of Tlokweg has been one of struggles over land ownership. The Batlokwa of Botswana refused to part with their newfound territory on the basis of a way of life that insisted that they could not part ways with their ancestors' graves. For centuries, the Batlokwa have always continued with the tradition of burying their dead in their yards as a mechanism to fend possible land alienation from rival groups, colonialism and, more recently, urban encroachment. Keitumetse (2002) views the burial tradition as a subtle strategy, some kind of a land security mechanism to retain their territorial identity and composition. Today Tlokweg is a modern settlement that has become part of the greater Gaborone planning area. Non-Baklokwa people are very reluctant to occupy houses in Tlokweg that they feel are burial grounds (Keitumetse 2002:11).

The above case studies show that some living traditions in southern Africa manifest themselves within the socio-political environment of the day. One of the most depressing legacies of colonial and minority rule in southern Africa was the alienation of the indigenous people from their past and, in some instances, the denigration or denial of its richness and value (Mitchel 2003:413). What has become a classical case is Great Zimbabwe, where the colonial regime denied the proven fact that its construction was the work of indigenous Africans. Under a deliberate policy of cultural imperialism, most southern African local communities were made to feel ashamed of their past and of their religious practices, especially those relating to ancestor worship. Several communities in pre-colonial Zimbabwe interacted with some archaeological sites for a variety of reasons. These included, among others, custodianship of the sites, where people were responsible for the sites, and use of sites for religious purposes. The advent of colonial rule brought in new forms of legislation, such as the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and the Historical Monuments Act of 1937, which denied people access to the sites with which they had always interacted. The transfer and ownership of cultural property to the government and the displacement of people in these areas meant that local communities no longer had legal access to spiritually significant sites (Ngoro & Pwiti 2001:32). This scenario has even continued in the postcolonial period in many countries. However, in some instances local people were allowed controlled access under the new landowners' terms to carry out ceremonies at the sites, especially if the activities were related to rain making ceremonies. In Zimbabwe, adherence to one traditional religion before and after independence became a method of defiance in the face of cultural impeachment. In apartheid South Africa, a policy that aimed at promoting white supremacy and the denial of the great antiquity of the African presence in the region, makes cultural heritage such a contentious and emotional issue today. With this background of deprivation, denial and denigration, issues that relate to intangible heritage will always resonate on issues of empowerment and human rights that aim at correcting past injustices. Traditional custodians look at heritage as an inheritance. Associated with this are feelings of ancestry, continuity, identity and community and a way of claiming this lost inheritance.

Current heritage legislation in southern Africa defines cultural heritage as a physical entity for both scientific and aesthetic values. This Euro-American definition excludes the cultural and symbolic components of heritage, with which the indigenous communities directly associate. Ownership rights of cultural heritage are in practice with the State, which normally manages the resource through a state agency or institution. In Zimbabwe, cultural heritage is principally managed by National Museums and Monuments. In Botswana, it is the responsibility of National Museums and Art Gallery, while for South Africa it is the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA). The respective supporting Acts (although some have been amended and rewritten) continue to be dominated by euro-centric models of valuing the past, which continue to deprive traditional custodians access to spiritual sites (Lowenthal 1990)

Religious prayer groups rarely claim ownership of physical entities of a monument, but seek permission to fully utilize it as their place of consultation and for it not to be desecrated. In many cases where there has been a conflict between traditional custodians and legal custodians there has never been a claim by the locals for the physical structures or features. Rather, it has been on the intangible aspects of heritage, an aspect that is not accommodated by heritage laws in most southern African countries. This has perpetuated a system of denial and exclusion of local communities on issues relating to their sacred sites. While many indigenous societies appreciate the physical structures associated with their cultural heritage, it is their sacredness and religious values that bring them closer to their cultural heritage. Indigenous communities view, for example, the safeguarding of the spiritual purity of Manyanga National Monument and Nharira Hills as their duty and responsibility and they would want to recommend the appropriate behaviour for the monuments and their vicinity. This has presented major challenges for heritage managers who have struggled to implement legislation that is in direct confrontation with the aspirations of local communities and inadequate in defining a people's heritage.

It has been observed elsewhere that indigenous peoples who have been disposed of their land and religion by European colonial settlers often cherish their ancestral relics as icons of group identity and freedom (Lowenthal 1990). These ideas are either articulated within the context of indigenous rights movements, post colonialism or empowerment. This seems to have been the case at Manyanga and Nharira Hills, where the wrangle over access to national monuments for ancestral worship and the subsequent construction of structures, was a concealed request for ancestral land. Equally strong are Southern African beliefs that relate to the worshipping of the Supreme Being (*Mwari* in Shona) (Daniel 1969). *Mwari* controlled the fertility of the land, championed the cause for traditional laws and customs, provided rain in times of drought and advice in times of national crisis. Being at the apex of the ancestral world, *Mwari* was first and foremost regarded as the rain giver (Daniel 1969:16).

Living traditions at National shrines in Zimbabwe and related practices in southern Africa are a reflection of people's desires to consult on national issues with their supreme God and, most importantly, to deal with their day-to-day challenges.

### Challenges for Drafting UNESCO's Convention

It is interesting to note that each time there are conflicts of this nature both sides tend to involve the national agency or institution that deals with Cultural Heritage. In the case of Zimbabwe, where manifestations of living traditions have resulted in conflict over cultural heritage, both sides have sought assistance from NMMZ. Miekles Ranches and Sekuru Sebonani Moyo urged NMMZ to take a stand on the conflict at Manyanga; so did Sekuru Mushore and Mr. Hinde at Nharira Hills. This then calls for national legislation on cultural heritage in which the interest of both sides can be accommodated. This will make it easy for heritage managers to take a position that will primarily centre on the protection and sustainable utilisation of both the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. Such legislation can then be complemented by existing and proposed international conventions on heritage. There is no doubt that the local indigenous communities of southern Africa want their intangible heritage recognized, but this comes with major complications that relate to the implementation of the draft of UNESCO's Convention on Intangible Heritage.

Some of the regionally important cultural sites with strong intangible aspects are already areas of serious conflict between interest groups. The case of Manyanga and Nharira Hills has been highlighted. There are numerous other cases, like the Domboshava (see Tarvinga 1995, Pwiti & Mvenge 1996), Great Zimbabwe, Matopos Hills (Muringaniza 1999, Manyanga 2000), Tulamela (Esterhuysen 2000) and Old Bulawayo (Muringaniza 1998), to name but just a few, where various interest groups are pushing for different stakes at the sites. Some of the conflicts have to do with a long history of alienation and deprivation. A case has been made in this paper that the problems at Nharira Hills and Manyanga are cases where intangible heritage is being used as a medium for fighting past injustices and as a claim over previously denied areas. In these circumstances, can the activities associated with the efforts by some societies in redefining and discovering themselves after many years of cultural imperialism, be neutral?

Some part of the intangible heritage is a known form of resistance to prejudice and deprivation of access to resources. The case of Tlokweng village has been outlined. But how then can the living traditions of a society be protected in a site that has become part of a greater development area for a modern city? Can the burial practice be sustained in an area already encroached by the growth of the City of Gaborone? There is certainly going to be conflict between the city council bylaws that designate areas for specific purposes and the long-standing tradition of burying the dead in one's yard.

Some of the intangible aspects of heritage are not necessarily utilised by the descendants of the original inhabitants of the sites. The popular group that conducted rainmaking ceremonies at Manyanga National Monument is a Ndebele-speaking group, whose association with Rozvi mambo lineage can be questioned. Domboshava National Monument in Botswana is being utilised for ancestral worship by some groups that are not directly related to the archaeology of the site. In South Africa, Tulamela also showcase a related problem where the Shangaan and the Venda groups had a dispute over who was to pride over the excavation and reburial of the excavated grave during the reconstruction of the monument (Esterhuysen 2000). This brings in the question of authenticity of the practicing groups and may bring about serious disputes among local communities over custodianship of sites and the right to practice ceremonies.

There could also be a real and imagined incompatibility of management approaches, especially where archaeological sites are used as places for ritual activities. Can efforts of spiritual purity advocated by traditional custodians be compatible with the material and structural integrity that legal custodians are currently stressing on? Archaeological sites that are still being used for ritual purposes present a case where excavations and restorations are considered as part of disturbing the spiritual purity of the sites. On the other hand, the construction of structures on archaeological sites and the activities of ceremonial groups are considered a threat to the monument. Others are based on the wrong assumption among legal custodians that the management of sites began with colonialism. Ndoro (2001) argues that sites in southern Africa have always been managed, and the fact that Europeans found many sites intact is testimony to the fact that the sites survived because of some management system. It has been noted in recent years that traditional custodians have always looked after their shrines through a value-based system of education, which protected sites through a system of restrictions and taboos (Ndoro 2001; 8). In this respect, it is therefore necessary for relevant institutions to acknowledge the knowledge systems of traditional custodians in the process of managing intangible cultural heritage.

### Conclusion

It is interesting to note that UNESCO, with its proposed Convention on intangible cultural heritage, is indeed making a bold move in broadening the concept of the world's cultural heritage, which previously had ignored the traditional living cultures of the world. By acknowledging intangible cultural heritage, the Convention is compatible with human rights issues in archaeology, especially the rights of indigenous populations to have at least a share in the decisions, treatment, interpretation and management of their sites and material relics.

The proposed Convention will empower local communities, who have always felt let down by both colonial and post colonial legislations on cultural heritage. But because of a shameful history of denial, deprivation and past injustices, management, promotion and research become extremely sensitive issues and a challenge for the proposed UNESCO Convention on intangible cultural heritage.

The acknowledgement of such challenges and backgrounds only serves as a useful caution, if those who adopt the convention are to effectively implement it.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, cultural heritage has been used as a way of empowering local communities, particularly in situations where they have been denied access or have been alienated from their heritage. Under the guise of the so-called *African Renaissance*, cultural heritage has been used as a rallying point by local communities in their demands for access to previously denied areas. This has manifested itself in the form of living traditions or the revival of cultural practices on archaeological sites. It is argued in this paper that the developments at Manyanga National Monument (Ntaba zi ka Mambo) in the 1990's were part of a drive for empowerment, rather than just a clash over the value and management of the site: a challenge for the proposed UNESCO Convention on intangible cultural heritage. While the Convention is undeniably a useful tool in managing such heritage, these challenges are a useful caution, if those who adopt the convention are to effectively implement it.

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