From Tangible to Intangible, Useless to Development Pillar: the Changing Perceptions of Cultural Heritage in Africa

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Abstract: The definition of cultural heritage in Africa has metamorphosed since pre-colonial times. Many communities had concepts of cultural heritage, its management, and ways of perpetuation, but most went undocumented, and have since been lost over the years, more so as a result of colonial domination and the resultant breaks in oral traditions. Constituting a substantial discussion of the changes in heritage perceptions during the precolonial period is now, therefore, a challenge, although there is no question that the agility of these ways of knowing resulted in some effective management measures that occasioned colonial settlers to find much of the heritage still in existence. This paper discusses the evolution of heritage definition, perceptions and management during colonial times and independent Africa. It explores how heritage, in its broadest sense, has been shaped, developed and utilised in Africa over this broad period. The evolving notion of cultural heritage was influenced by and reflected in the economic and social transformation that took place on the continent. Although the majority of the official definitions of what heritage is, as well as how it is managed and utilized in Africa today are still predominantly derived from colonial discourse, the local concepts have persisted on the side-lines and are slowly filtering into the mainstream. Therefore, the paper explores heritage transformation within dichotomous but often converging Western and African frameworks of perceiving heritage.

Keywords: Heritage definition, perceptions on cultural heritage, heritage conservation in Africa, colonialism and heritage, history of heritage in Africa, uses of heritage in Africa.

Postulado: 12.03.2022
Aceptado: 17.01.2023

The colonial context

Although countries in Africa were colonised by different European powers (mostly by Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal), for many Africans there was a high level of similarity in the colonial experience, especially concerning cultural degradation. The colonial powers had distinct national approaches to colonial domination in Africa, for example, the French colonial approach was 'assimilatory', as was the Portuguese while British and Spanish colonization (in Equatorial Guinea and Morocco) was separatist (MacQueen, 2014). The British prided themselves on their indirect rule, which they considered as 'respectful of native cultures' (Martín-Márquez, 2008: 72), and therefore preserved the heritage of the colonised. The indirect rule strategy utilized "indigenous African power structures, including local institutions, kings, chiefs, eldermen and so on, as conduits for the implementation of British colonial policies" (Njoh, 2000: 163). Spanish colonization was similar, especially in northern Morocco but the native culture was considered less important in Equatorial Guinea (Martín-Márquez, 2008). On the other hand, the assimilation approach rarely considered African cultures worthy of preserving (Salhi, 2004: 9). Instead, it was expected that the colonized would abandon their culture and language to take up the new way of life.

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For example, Portugal did not care to protect the culture of the locals in Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and the Atlantic archipelagos of Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe (MacQueen, 2014). Rather, the colonies were viewed as overseas provinces of one state of Portugal. Therefore, the culture and history of Portugal became that of the colonies, which were considered to have had no worthy history before colonisation. Germany's protectorates on the African continent include Togo and Cameroon in the West, German Southwest Africa (today's Namibia), and German East Africa (today's Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi) in the east (Bechhaus-Gerst, 2012). However, its colonial influence was scuttled as these were taken over by other colonial powers after World War I.

Nevertheless, as expressed in the words of Vansina, nearly all colonial powers in Africa were similar in terms of "patterns of governance, economic exploitation, conversion to Christianity, and social modernization" (Vansina, 2010: 3). They all believed that they were coming to 'civilize' a dark continent, therefore, the impact of these colonial loci was similar across the continent, in as far as they advocated for the abandonment of African cultural heritage. From the colonial standpoint, anything that defined Africaness was backward and evil and was to be abandoned through civilisation. This position was regardless of the national approach to colonialism. For example, the colonial agents in Morocco considered themselves on a "civilizing mission" urging their country, Spain, to undertake the "saintly mission" of civilizing the neighbour (Chira, 2018). In Equatorial Guinea, the local religious beliefs were 'never deemed worthy of consideration' (Martín-Márquez, 2008). Locals were characterised as legal minors who were not entitled to property rights under the law (*Patronato de Indígenas*), first formulated in 1904. This was modified in 1944 to allow farmers who had married in the church and were considered "good Christians" to acquire plots of land and enjoy other legal rights and responsibilities equivalent to those of whites (Martín-Márquez 2008: 281). The other Guineans who were not farmers could only attain the same rights after they "demonstrated the religious and moral qualities essential for a higher mission" (Martín-Márquez, 2008: 281) by obtaining advanced training and degrees needed to fill administrative, medical, and educational positions. Consequently, even though Spain had a separatist strategy, it was accompanied by a perceived racial (and cultural) superiority which then instigated local Africans to aspire for cultural transformation and westernisation through education, Christianity and other cultural nodes.

Conversely, the assimilation policies forced the locals to lose their traditional ways in pursuit of the foreign culture and acceptance into the foreign realm. In Mozambique, "an assimilated person had to behave like a Portuguese in terms of culture and habits […] being assimilated meant also losing personal culture" (Macamo, 2005: 216). Those who had not assimilated were viewed as outcasts or "indigenous", a term which carried derogatory connotations (Macamo, 2005: 52). Therefore, in the end, both assimilatory and separatist approaches led to the poor perception of African cultural heritage among Africans, which is persisting in the post-colonial period. Salhi (2004: 9) argued that the degradation inflicted by colonial rule on culture was so great that many Africans have come to join in the denigration of their historical achievements.

The Western definitions of cultural heritage in Africa

Heritage preservation in Africa emerged within the above colonial context. In many cases, there was very little effort to conserve heritage at the initial stages of colonisation. In most cases, the settlers were puzzled by the existence of exquisite and sophisticated material culture and works of art, which they did not expect from supposedly 'backward natives'. At first, this material culture was looted before the settler governments acknowledged the need for protective mechanisms. The looted material culture is currently at the centre of returning and restitution debates across the continent and

beyond. The long-running debate on material culture from the Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, is a prime example. Eventually, the entire colonial heritage preservation system in Africa was kick-started by rudimentary documentation of heritage by white settlers who encountered places and other cultural artefacts whilst going about farming, mining and/or exploiting other resources on the continent. Although in many cases, colonies in Africa were taken after the development of heritage preservation processes in Europe (Swenson, 2013b), this was not part of the colonial package therefore it took some time for protective measures to be instituted. No colonial power came to Africa with a plan to preserve the heritage.

Because of the indirect rule policy and the culture of heritage preservation at home, Britain developed heritage policies for its colonies much earlier than its counterparts, such as France and Portugal. However, the definition of heritage under these policies was contrived to reflect its Eurocentric nature. African cultural heritage was largely defined by the physical presence of beautiful sites and objects, a common trait among the colonial powers, which can be traced back to the European preservationist movement of the 1800s (Swenson, 2013b). According to Swenson (2013a and 2013b), during this same period, heritage preservation became a hallmark of civilization, whereupon some imperial powers, such as Britain, considered themselves more civilized than their counterparts in Europe because of their sensitivity to monument preservation. As such, monuments and objects in the colonies were targeted and preserved because of their aesthetics or charm, as one proponent puts it (Swenson, 2013b: 9). As stated by Kamamba, the colonial definition was "strongly related to age, durability and tangibility" (Kamamba, 2005: 14) while the African definitions were mostly based on the spiritual and intangible components that are embodied in the tangible (beliefs, cultural traditions, customs, popular memory and indigenous knowledge systems). The other major distinction is that under the colonial concept, heritage was the "past" and antiquities, whereas Africans defined heritage in the present i.e. the past and the present are connected. This distinction between past (antiquities) and present; justified the appropriation of the heritage and the exclusion of local communities (Ugwuayi, 2021: 357).

The legislative frameworks and the formal heritage protection institutions and organisations entrenched the concept of heritage as a 'past' physical resource such that many early legislations on the continent were targeted at 'ancient remains' or 'antiquities' and historical monuments associated with colonial experience. In Zimbabwe, for example, the first protective measure was the promulgation of the *Ancient Monuments Protection Ordinance* of 1902, meant to stop the looting of monuments such as Great Zimbabwe, Khami Ruins and other stonewalled buildings (Chipunza, 2005: 42). The first legislation in Nigeria was the *Antiquities Ordinance 17* of 1953 (Ugwuayi, 2021: 357) and similarly, in Mauritius, it was the *Ancient Monuments Act* of 1938.

Over time, heritage management was pursued as a highly elitist and academic endeavour undertaken by colonial settlers and the learned few (Bunu *et al.*, 2020). The heritage institutions in Africa joined international organisations and adhered to international procedures and protocols for managing heritage (e.g. UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICOM), most of which were distinctly Western. The colonial settlers who were driving the formal heritage agenda only connected with the African heritage because of its physical appeal and its exotic nature. In South Africa, there was an apparent bias towards monumentality, with more than 4,000 declared national monuments before 1994, the year the country got its independence (Madiba, 2005: 55). The only information collected on these sites was on location and design, with no record of the cultural significance. The same applied to monumental sites such as Great Zimbabwe that were elevated to national monuments status in Zimbabwe under the colonial government (in 1950); mostly because of the grandeur and aesthetics. In all this, there was limited contribution from African people (Munjeri, 2005; Ndlovu, 2011).

Detail of a wall in Khami. Image: ICCROM Archive.

Great Zimbabwe. Image: ICCROM Archive.

The colonial period: the African definition of heritage

Although the colonial governments were driving the formal heritage preservation agenda described above, Africans had their ways of living, including how they defined and managed their heritage. For the most part, these two definitions were moving in parallel, converging only at those heritage places and objects that were considered monumentally significant by the colonial settlers where conflict ensued. African definition of heritage has always been spiritual and quintessential intangible that is embodied in the tangible (Munjeri, 1995). Places and objects were valued not only because of their physical beauty or grandeur but because of their "spiritual *domicilium*" (Munjeri, 1995: 54). The intangible aspects of the tangible sites and objects were revered and heritagised as well as the physical. The physical was as important as the metaphysical and vice versa. There was neither one nor the other, the physical represented the spiritual, whilst the spiritual component manifested in the physical.

African definition of heritage was also essentially different from that of the colonial settlers in its connection to the present communities rather than the 'past' (Ugwuayi, 2021). The past, present and future were interconnected; the heritage was not linear but cyclical. In South Africa, for example, Ndlovu (2011: 127) reports the local Duma clan attached spiritual significance to the rock shelter at Kamberg, one of the famous rock art sites in the uKhahlamba Drakensberg World Heritage Landscape. In Zimbabwe, although sites such as Great Zimbabwe, Domboshava, Victoria Falls, and Matobo were listed as national monuments by the colonial administration because of their physical beauty, they were revered by locals because of their historical spiritual association. As noted by Taruvinga and Ndoro (2003), most of these were associated with rain-making, which was thought of as 'present participial' rather than past tense. Such places were sacred and protected by traditional management systems that included taboos and restrictions. At Great Zimbabwe, for example, the large and magnificent walls were important as the fact that it was an ancestral home as well as a sacred shrine which was preserved through several traditional observations and rites of entry (Mahachi and Kamuhangire, 2009: 44). This is not to say the physical grandeur was not important but it was not separated from the other connections.

The dichotomous African and Western views of the World Heritage Site led Webber Ndoro (2001; 2015) to entitle his research "Great Zimbabwe: Your Monument, Our Shrine", meaning that from a Western perspective it is a monument but to the locals, it's a shrine. Similar examples are common throughout the continent. In Nigeria, for example, the Benin walls were revered as the boundary between the earthly and the spiritual world and not just for their splendour and size measuring 6,000 square kilometres (Eboireme, 2005: 9). Although at all these places, colonial domination resulted in the western concept taking centre stage in the heritage preservation, there is no denying the existence of the original African essence; in most cases, the African definition persisted alongside the colonial one for a long time.

Nonetheless, as time went by, the influence of colonialism slowly filtered into African perceptions of their heritage. From the onset of colonial encounters, African cultural practices and material culture were maligned and alienated through missionary education, evangelism, and other colonial practices and institutions. As African cultural heritage was considered backward, heathen, and unscientific, it was expected that those who get Western education or were converted to Christianity would neither continue practising African culture nor revere the cultural heritage. A good example of the process of coloniality is presented by Jeater (2007) in her discussion of colonial encounters in eastern Zimbabwe, specifically in an area formerly known as Melsetter, now part of Chimanimani and of Chipinge Districts. The early missionary and colonial native commissioners in these areas dismissed the African culture (or what they termed the native mind) as irrational, superstitious, and unscientific while projecting the Anglo-American lifestyles as superior, rational, and 'scientific' (Jeater, 2007). The missionaries considered the native mind as a contaminated influence, knowledge of evil which was not be associated with educated Africans but with heathens (uneducated, unconverted Africans). As the missionaries were the first to offer Western education in the area, the local converts, and schoolgoers were expected to demonstrate "good evidence to change their lives" by wearing Western clothing, building western houses (i.e. square brick houses) and exhibiting empirical reasoning as a way of "cutting themselves off the old heathen influences" (Jeater, 2007: 103). The traditional was considered the 'old life of sin' and the local crafts and material culture were considered the physical manifestation of heathenism (Jeater, 2007: 103). Colonial administrators took the same trajectory when asserting the Western laws and ways of settling disputes. Local laws and ways of settling the dispute were considered primitive customs and were often overridden by the superior 'civilized practices' and the native law and customs were expected to atrophy as Africans became enlightened (Jeater, 2007: 80). Although customs endured and were later codified under customary law, the initial encounters with the African laws and legal practices had already entrenched their 'primitiveness and irrationality'.

What is described by Jeater of the initial encounters between Africans and colonial agents in Melsetter is not unique. It was a common occurrence throughout colonized Africa. Similar experiences are described by Seroto (2018) regarding the Swiss Mission education offered at Lemana Teacher's Training College in South Africa. The Swiss mission perpetuated the notion that the "spirituality of the indigenous people is backward, uncivilized, and stupid". Seroto (2018: 9) has argued that the education system which was offered by the missionaries in South Africa helped to "spiritualicide" and "epistemicide" African spirituality and knowledge. In Burundi, remains of old royal enclosures, ancient temples, and burial grounds of the kings, the queen mothers and queen sisters as well as many sacred trees and shrubs were destroyed by Catholic Missions in their fight against paganism (Niyonkuru, 1995). Parishes and missions were set up in the royal enclosures and rites associated with these cultural places were banned in the hope they would fade away.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then the Belgian Congo), comparable experiences were recorded among the Kuba of the Kuba Kingdom. Vansina (2010) record that before colonisation, the Kuba's

iconic material culture was its traditional dressing patterns, which was an important common identity marker and a measure of distinction from their neighbours (Vansina, 2010: 304). However, this most distinctive material culture of the Kuba was eventually abandoned through Western education, religion and urbanisation (Vansina, 2010: 319, 321). According to Vansina, the widespread adoption of western clothing can be mainly attributed to Catholic missionary propaganda that rallied women to cover themselves more than was possible with traditional outfits. In 1937, "when the sisters opened their school, they required their girls to wear dresses or blouses, and a few years later most of the boys at the central mission schools also began to wear shirts and short trousers" Vansina (2010: 306) noted.

Stories of similar encounters are commonplace in Francophone Africa as well as in those countries that were under German and Spanish rule. Because of all these sentiments, the Western perspective of heritage gradually permeated into the African mentality, especially that of the emerging middle class, and that marked the beginning of mental alienation from the heritage which has persisted to the present. As Kamal Salhi (2004) says of France's colonies, the withdrawal of the colonial government left colonial structures and institutions in place long after the countries in which they were established gained their independence. This legacy has influenced the socialization of succeeding generations of people perpetuating coloniality even among those who never actually lived through colonisation.

The post-colonial period and the colonial reverberations

In many countries across Africa, the attainment of independence brought hope for a return to cultural traditions and norms. People who still had strong links but had been alienated from their cultural heritage places, saw the attainment of independence as an opportunity for cultural reclamation. Even to most African leaders, "the need to restore lost cultural values and pride" became part of the post-colonial agenda (Pwiti and Ndoro, 1999). Many of these leaders showed zeal to restore the dignity of African cultural traditions and history. For example, in advocating for the revival, preservation and writing of African history, Sir Seretse Khama, the first president of Botswana, argued that "a nation without history is a lost nation, a people without a past is a people without a soul"[1]. As part of his inaugural independence speech, Robert Mugabe, then prime minister of Zimbabwe, said 'Independence will bestow on us a new perspective, and indeed, a new history and a new past" (Garlake, 1982: 15). In line with this thinking, most countries initiated cultural revival programs that included cultural promotion through traditional dance companies, drama groups, music, and opening access to cultural institutions such as museums and art galleries (Pwiti and Ndoro, 1999). The heritage institutions were seen as potential gateways to this cultural reclamation. For example, museums were brought in as education centres accessible to all. Zimbabwe resorted to developing archaeological sites as cultural education resources for local schools and as cultural centres for locals (Pwiti and Ndoro, 1999).

Be that as it may, many of these initiatives garnered little success. Pwiti y Ndoro (1999) argued that these initiatives failed because of the negative perceptions and bad relationships the local communities had with the cultural heritage as a result of the lasting legacies of colonial dogma seen in negative self-identities at individual, institutional as well as national levels. At the national level, although they had the will to return to tradition, most African leaders were still using the colonial governing plates with the colonial laws and policies. Therefore, they fitted well with what Amilcar Cabral (quoted by Ishemo, 1995: 210) called vacillators, who on one hand wanted to pass on indigenous cultural elements yet they lived materially and spiritually according to the culture of their former colonizers under the guise of development and modernity. Thus, initiatives were stifled by a lack of supporting policy change.

[1] <http://www.thuto.org/ubh/bw/skquote1.htm>.

At the institutional level, heritage institutions were still using westernised definitions and the manner of managing, protecting, and using the heritage. The post-colonial heritage authorities "simply adopted these alien values at the expense of local concerns and aspirations" (Chirikure *et al.*, 2010) and continued with the established colonial systems. Formal heritage institutions that were run by westerners under the colonial government were shifted into African hands at independence. These institutions and their guiding policies remained unchanged for many years after independence. This happened in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, where it took over twenty years for heritage legislation to be repealed (Negri, 2005). Many of these heritage institutions were out of touch with the expectations of the majority of people and, in some cases, the management systems led to clashes with local stakeholders.

Even for those in countries that repealed their legislations soon after they attained independence, the struggle to shed colonial residues in heritage management was an uphill battle. Nigeria, for example, repealed its heritage legislation in 1953 during the time the country was moving towards self-governance and a new decree was promulgated in 1979, but the colonial undertones remained (Negri, 2005). New laws did little to take into account the African definitions of heritage and traditional management systems (Osuagwu, 2005). The South African situation, although slightly different, had many similarities. The legislation was changed in 1999, five years after attaining independence in 1994. For a time, South Africa was lauded as a front-runner in legislative renewal as the new law tried to address many of the issues that dogged the apartheid-era management systems. These included such aspects as the Eurocentric emphasis on only the physical without including the intangible aspects and the exclusion of local communities in the management of heritage (Hall, 2005). However, the implementation of the legislation was littered with severe challenges as there were no major changes in the management structure and, in most cases, personnel of these heritage institutions remained predominantly white and continued with the status quo. Thus, the changes were not as far-reaching as anticipated. The management system remained typically western, with Ndlovu (2011: 124) arguing that the colonial 'scientific' character of heritage management was not entirely eradicated with the promulgation of the new legislation. For a time after independence, some within the heritage fraternity were even thought to be sabotaging the transformation by not supporting Africans to come up through the system (Ndlovu, 2009). As such, there were demands for a transformative agenda that would allow for the realisation of the ideals of the new legislation (Smith, 2009; Ndlovu, 2011). In archaeology, a 'gang of three' initiated the drafting of a Transformation Charter in 2005, which set out a transformative agenda to include African archaeologists in all aspects of the discipline; research, teaching, museums, cultural resource management etc. (Ndlovu, 2009). This charter was adopted by the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists in 2008, and some improvements have since been realized.

Other countries that previously had no established heritage institutions were also caught up in this colonial quagmire because they began establishing of heritage institutions similar to those that existed in their neighbours, adopting legislation that had colonial undertones. Negri (2005: 6) gives the example of legislation for Malawi, Lesotho and Seychelles, but Botswana is another example where heritage management was not a well-established phenomenon during the colonial period since the country was a British protectorate whose colonial structures were managed from outside, mostly through South Africa. As such, when the country gained its independence, it established formal structures for heritage management (Walker, 1991; Mmutle, 2005). The same applies to Malawi, which was part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Instead of developing heritage management systems of their own, taking into consideration the African sensibilities, these countries borrowed management systems from their neighbours, including the colonial undertones therein.

Asante Traditional Buildings in Ghana. Image: Joy Agyeponng © CC BY-SA 4.0

The colonial definition of cultural heritage and its management in Africa was further perpetuated by international institutions such as UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOM, etc., which advocated for predominantly western management systems. For example, the process of nominating sites on the World Heritage List emphasized the physicality of the heritage. The selection for cultural heritage was based on six criteria, with only Criterion vi referring to beliefs or ideas (UNESCO, 1984). However, Criterion vi had a 'disclaimer' with bracketed emphasis that it can only be used in exceptional circumstances and even then, it should not be the central criteria but should be in conjunction with the other criteria (UNESCO, 1994). This has led to the muting of spiritual aspects of most African properties that were listed, thereby propping the colonial characterisation of cultural heritage. For example, Great Zimbabwe was listed in 1986, six years after Zimbabwe attained its independence. Although Criterion vi was used as part of the justification, it was not emphasising the spirituality and the sacredness of the site. Rather, Criterion vi emphasised the fact that the country drew its name and emblem from the site. The criteria used for listing, therefore, emphasized the physicality of its definitions and all aspects of management, protection, and use. The other good example is the Asante Traditional Buildings in Ghana, listed in 1980. Although they were shrines of the Ashanti people, they were nominated under Criterion v, emphasising the interaction with the environment. The same applies to the Royal Palaces of Abomey, Benin, which was listed in 1985 based on Criteria iii and iv, i.e. they were testimony of a disappeared civilization and as well as an exceptional example of an architectural ensemble. The examples are too many to mention.

Unfortunately, vestiges of colonial dominance did not break off with the attainment of political independence both at an individual and societal level. The colonial mentality that viewed African heritage as evil, backward and uncivilized had become entrenched within the populace. At independence, this presented a catch-22 situation as most people had difficulties in identifying with and finding meaning in the western definition of heritage. Yet, the African definitions were now perceived unacceptable (evil, backwards, traditional). As Mignolo (2011) argued, coloniality hid beneath the rhetoric of modernity. All the western attributes that were lauded for 'civilizing' Africans during the colonial period became signatures of modernity in the post-colonial. As such, formerly alienated heritage continued to play a peripheral role in the lives of the African populace, except for a few who maintained close links with their past as professional heritage managers, archaeologists and others with anthropological interests. This left the relationship between Africans and their heritage in limbo. Today, African youths know less about their heritage than they do about the western modes of modernity.

The independence aftermaths

Although the attainment of independence did not bring immediate change to the official definition, management and use of heritage, the freedoms asso-

ciated with it eventually led to discontent with colonial epistemologies. This process took place against several socioeconomic developments that demanded transformative change. In Africa, a de-colonial agenda has been simmering for a long time until it has come to a head in the last few years. The related social changes in terms of identity and self-esteem issues have also been slowly becoming prominent. Then again, there has been a realisation of the potential economic prospects that may be attained through the extensive exploitation of African heritage resources. Consequently, as we move into the third decade of the century, the definition, management and utilisation of African heritage seems to be on the verge of radical transformation.

The reclamation of cultural heritage and practices

As with the colonial subjugation, the post-colonial mental alienation was not total. Some individuals and traditional leaders continued to have a strong link with their heritage. For these, independence was supposed to bring a sense of freedom to pursue their heritage, but due to the factors discussed above, this was rarely realised immediately. However, some continued the fight (Dande and Mujere, 2019). In Zimbabwe, the case of Sekuru Mushore of Nharira is a good example. He was the spirit medium of the Nyamweda clan that was forcibly removed from their ancestral land at Nharira Hills during the colonial period. The hills housed the clan's shrines, ancestral graves, and were a place for rituals. After the dispossession of the Nyamweda Clan, the area was converted into a commercial farm owned by a white farmer. Sekuru Mushore led a reclamation bid for the ancestral land in the 1960s, but the colonial government evicted him and his people again. After independence, he made numerous attempts to take back the hills but was rebuffed due to the land ownership system that favoured the white farmer who held the title deeds. This did not deter him as he continued to fight and he eventually forcibly relocated to the hills in 1996 with 200 relatives, spurring a long court battle and political lobbying on both sides (Munjeri, 1995). The conflict ended in 2000 with the declaration of the hills as a national monument and the granting of the Nyamweda Clan the right to conduct their rituals and rain-making ceremonies undeterred. Members of the clan were also resettled around the hills.

The story of Sekuru Mushore is not unique. There are several cases of those who fought to reclaim their heritage but were often thwarted by the colonial regimes as well as post-colonial government policies, but they did not give up. Manyanga (2003) discusses similar claims at Ntaba zika Mambo, a stonewalled archaeological site in western Zimbabwe. After the commencement of the Fast Track Land Redistribution in Zimbabwe in 2000, thousands of claimants came forward to demand a return to their ancestral homes (Dande and Mujere, 2019; Mujere, 2021). Most of these had histories of trying to take back their heritage places without success. They took the 2000-2004 Fast Track Land Redistribution Programme (FTLRP) as an opportunity to reclaim their heritage. These claims were often based on the existence of heritage places such as graves, shrines and ancestral homes. The return was not just about custodianship, but it was often about proximity to enable rites and rituals to take place as needed. The Zimbabwean government did not prioritise land restitution based on heritage claims, again, a post-colonial policy challenge, nevertheless, several claimants managed to be resettled in their ancestral land, close to their heritage (Dande and Mujere, 2019). Community links to the heritage also became central to academic and professional circles (e.g. Chirikure and Pwiti, 2008; Manyanga, 2003; Dande and Mujere, 2019; Mujere, 2021).

What happened in Zimbabwe is also playing out in South Africa, Namibia and other countries in southern Africa (Bezerra, 2018; Bezerra and Paphitis, 2021; Ng'ong'ola, 2013; Africanglobe, 2015). The successes in reconnecting with the heritage became a turning point in the valorisation of heritage. Heritage became valuable for many who could use it to claim the land and draw from it a sense of identity.

Reintegration of 'Africanness' into cultural heritage management

It took a long time for the African definitions to be integrated into heritage management after the attainment of an Africa free from colonialism, but the change has been accelerating since 2000. These changes were, in part, made possible by changing frameworks that were also happening on the international scene where non-western perspectives of heritage were getting recognition in policies and guiding principles for heritage management. The *Nara Document on Authenticity* (1994) exposed the unacceptability of universalising the western definition of heritage and conservation practices. On another hand, African heritage professionals were also expressing disgruntlement with the western definitions, especially those that defined the processes of the World Heritage listing (e.g. Munjeri *et al.*, 1995). In addition, the first decade of the 21st Century was generally associated with a de-colonial global push to reject the dominance of western epistemologies (Ugwuayi, 2021: 358). All these have resulted in the progressive reintegration of African definitions of cultural heritage on the continent.

The changes in international frameworks were compacted by the adoption of the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage*. The convention recognises the African concepts of heritage as well as the fact that heritage is part of the 'living' rather than just remnants of the past. The fact that the convention was adopted by ICOMOS at a gathering in Africa (Zimbabwe) was symbolic of restoring the African definition of heritage. On the other hand, notable changes were also introduced in the World Heritage Listing process, where the criteria for nominations were modified in the *Operational guidelines* in 2004 to include the following. Criteria were modified as follows:

> (ii) to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over some time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
>
> (iii) to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
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> (iv) to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
>
> (v) to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
>
> (vi) to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria).

Consequently, drastic changes have taken place within the African heritage management discourse. The changes include the revision (or amendment) of the heritage laws and the crafting of new policies and frameworks. The inclusion of local communities into the decision-making process at heritage sites was a significant indicator of the intention to move away from rigid formal heritage controls of the colonial period (Chirikure and Pwiti, 2008; Chirikure *et al.*, 2010; Bunu *et al.*, 2020; Mokoena, 2017). Community participation has become a norm all across Africa (Schmidt, 2014). This move came with increased access, allowing for stakeholders and special consideration of the intangible heritage, especially associated with monuments. These have now been legislated in countries such as South Africa (1999), Botswana (2001) Kenya (2006), Mali (2010). In some countries, changes in heritage management practice began to be implemented without supporting legal framework adjustments. The use of "traditional" methods and systems is acknowledged, including the recognition of traditional authorities (Jopela, 2011; Abungu and Katana, 2016; Boko, 2016) and these have become mainstream (Chirikure *et al.*, 2017; Hussein and

Armitage, 2014). In Zimbabwe, for example, community participation in the management of heritage was taken up at all levels even though this was not accounted for in the legislation (Mahachi and Kamuhangire, 2009). Local stakeholders have gained more say in the management of heritage places as consultation of traditional leaders and local communities has become standard (Chirikure and Pwiti, 2008). Consideration of local communities in heritage management makes it easy to integrate African customs, traditional conservation practices and perceptions in the management, protection and utilisation of heritage. Although the road is still long, all these developments bring back some confidence and value to African heritage.

The deafening calls for decolonisation

Probably the greatest milestones can be credited to the ubiquitous calls for decolonisation from the mental shackles of colonialism. The lack of general transformation from colonial governance in social, economic and political spheres has come under increased scrutiny with African politicians, academics and others advocating for change through a decolonisation process. Before independence, decolonisation was centred on entangling the continent from the shackles of colonial governance. But, with the attainment of independence by South Africa in 1994, the continent became 'politically' free of colonial rule, although, from the experiences of many African nations, it had already become apparent that political independence alone was not enough. Luminaries such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), Fanon (see Maldonado-Torres, 2017), Cabral (see Rabaka, 2021) had long deciphered the psychological effects of colonialism on the African mentality and advocated for mental decolonisation (coloniality). It has long been obvious that the change brought by political independence was just one of replacing white government officials with black ones, without changes in other spheres. Without entangling itself from coloniality, Africa would remain under western influences socially, economically and even politically through the control of power relations. Similar to other former colonies in Latin America and Asia, western domination continued in various spheres of the life of the local populace. There was still coloniality of power as well as domination in knowledge and knowledge production (coloniality of knowledge) (Mignolo, 2011) with former French colonies closely controlled by French ideals while Anglophone Africa was aligned with the United Kingdom and other English-speaking first-world countries. None reflect this more that the attitudes towards cultural heritage.

The struggle to decolonise has been a long and arduous one for the continent. In academic circles, many frameworks have been employed since the 1960s to try to untangle Africans from the grip of coloniality. These include postcolonial (emerged 1960s, decolonisation (1990s) and de-coloniality frameworks (2000s) and epistemologies, an approach that elevates local achievements as a way of countering coloniality (de Sousa Santos, 2021). However, the de-colonial discourse came late to heritage management, with perhaps the one of earliest forays being Pwiti and Ndoro's 1999 publication, the *Legacy of colonialism: Perceptions of the cultural heritage in Southern Africa, with special reference to Zimbabwe*. There were few immediate follow-ups until the late 2000s with the publication of Schmidt's edited compendium in 2009. After that, postcolonial theory gripped African heritage management, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Lane (2011) argued that the advocates for this theory come in three forms; those who take the usable past model, those that opt for the indigenous epistemologies model and those who combine the two. The usable past model looks at heritage as a resource that should "produce practical knowledge for the benefit of the members […]" of African societies while the indigenous epistemologies emphasize "understanding and writing about the past using indigenous knowledge systems" (Lane, 2011: 11). These focused approaches have shaped the accelerated deployment of postcolonial discourse in heritage management as well as the ubiquitous de-colonial turn. Now there are deafening calls for decolonisation of everything from the definition of heritage, to the management, presen-

tation and use (Ndoro and Wijesuriya, 2015; Basu and Damodaran, 2015; de Jong, 2022; Ugwuanyi, 2021; Bolin and Nkusi, 2021; Msila 2020; Thondlana and Garwe, 2021; Pikirayi and Schmidt, 2016; Chipangura and Mataga, 2021; Ogundiran, 2021, Chirikure *et al.*; 2021; Chirikure *et al.*, 2016). Ultimately the focus is on unravelling the coloniality of knowledge which is reflected in the definition of what is right or wrong, real or unreal continued that has for a long time been governed by western epistemologies. The continued perceptions of African cultural heritage as evil and backward is a prime example of this. Thus, there is a need for a de-colonial process (or de-coloniality) that "discredit, dismantle, and de-link" the mental vestiges that were constructed through the colonial system (Mignolo, 2007).

The return and restitution of African cultural material

The return and restitution of African cultural heritage in European museums have become another facet of the de-colonial turn. It is now common knowledge that the emergence of colonialism saw rampant looting of cultural heritage from living heritage places, archaeological sites, and personal collections, with the material culture eventually coming under the care of European museums (Sarr and Savoy, 2018). Many individual families, communities and countries have been fighting to retrieve these for decades but museums in Europe, for the most part, were ignoring or refusing to attend to these calls for restitution and return of cultural property to Africa giving a myriad of reasons including the inability of African nations to look after the cultural heritage properly. Unfortunately, many of these fights for return and restitution were at an individual level, not collectively (e.g. Buffenstein, 2017; Ruiz, 2019). However, the publicity generated by the demands for restitution together and the few successes together with the social environment that is clamouring for decolonisation all have made the issue significant, even at the continental level. The repatriation of cultural heritage is now one of the aspirations of the continent as entrenched in the aspirations of *Agenda 2063* (2015), the African Union's ambitious 60-year project. Therefore, the fight for return and restitution is likely to dominate heritage circles for decades to come, with "African nations, historical polities, activists, as well as the African diaspora demanding restitution of stolen cultural property" (Hickley, 2019; Silverman *et al.*, 2022).

Heritage as a driver of development

Apart from the sentimental value attached to it, the heritage has gained an economic facet in recent years. The colonial policies viewed heritage management and conservation as a non-profit making endeavour, what Chipunza (2005: 44) has termed "site welfarism". This means that heritage managers concentrated on the welfare of the sites rather than the benefits that can be derived from these resources. Many countries adopted the same approach after independence, rendering the contribution of heritage towards the economic development of individuals, communities and nation-states negligible. This impacted the valorisation of heritage leading to its poor perception in the eyes of both policymakers and the public. In many African countries, it soon became apparent that without contributing to the economic well-being of the citizens in a significant way, the sustainable conservation of cultural heritage would remain a pipe dream. For example, Munjeri (2005: 34) reported that by the end of the 1990s, it had become clear that there was little chance for the proper conservation of heritage without it contributing to the economy in Mauritius. At that point, much of the cultural heritage lay in various states of decay and neglect while policymakers prioritised funding for areas that generate revenue such as agriculture and mining (Chirikure, 2013).

This realisation for the need of economic empowerment from heritage has not been confined to Africa alone. Even at the international level, institutions such as UNESCO and ICOMOS have been seeking to find ways of enabling economic beneficiation of heritage properties including those on the World Heritage List (Baycan and Fusco Girard, 2011; UNESCO,

2012; Ndoro, 2015; ICOMOS, 2016). In 2013, UNESCO, among other initiatives, held an International Congress on Culture: Key to Sustainable Development, in Hangzhou, China, where one of the outcomes was a declaration of the need to place culture at the heart of Sustainable Development Policies. The Hangzhou Declaration advocated for the integration of culture, and by extension cultural heritage, within all development policies and programs. UNESCO's quarterly magazine, World Heritage (2016) was dedicated to exploring African Heritage and Sustainable Development. These are just, but, some of the many initiatives to push culture to the centre of economic development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) marked the first time that culture was referred to within the context of such an international developmental agenda (Poole, 2018; Hosagrahar, 2017).

Since then, heritage has become "both an engine and a catalyst of promoting diverse livelihood activities to support better standards of living" (Bunu *et al.*, 2020: 61). Although heritage was always considered a potential driver of economic development (Klitgaard, 1994: 75), there were no clear approaches of enabling this process except as a tourism resource. Yet, the question of its contribution to sustainable development was cropping up with increasing frequency, especially in Africa, where everything is centred on bread-and-butter issues (Nhamo and Katsamudanga, 2019).

Tourism

In Africa, tourism resource remains the major point of departure for the utilisation of heritage. Countries continue to try and optimise the utilisation of heritage as resources, especially those on the World Heritage List that can easily draw visitors (Chirikure *et al.*, 2021). Individuals and private entities have also seen the potential for economic benefits accruing from the use of heritage for tourism. Nhamo and Katsamudanga (2019) found much enthusiasm from small-scale tourism businesses that are eager to optimise their business by using heritage resources in Zimbabwe. Masele (2012) noted similar enthusiasm for private business investment opportunities in Tanzania. The opportunities included the construction and operation of tourist museums, information centres, campsites, restaurants, lodges and hotels near monuments and heritage sites. Conscientious private investors and local communities had opportunities to take part in tourism-related activities in other capacities such as the sale of materials related to heritage sites (e.g., publications, postcards, casts, and handcrafts) and guided tours. Historic buildings such as the Mikindani Old Boma in Mtwara, and the Old German Fort in Bagamoyo, were operated as hotels by private investors (Masele, 2012).

However, tourism in Africa was and remains volatile because of its dependency on international tourist markets, especially, those from the European and American markets. In many ways, tourism has been defined by western concepts and prejudices. Although the diversity of tourists coming the continent is increasing, the tourism policies in Africa are heavily geared towards attracting western tourists who for most parts are interested in wildlife and nature tourism rather than cultural attractions. Duval and Smith (2013) have shown that even though rock art attracts a lot of tourists in Europe, it ranks lowly on the tourists' agenda coming to South Africa. They argued that this is a result of European romanticism of African natural attractions as well as the historic rejection of indigenous cultural heritage under the Apartheid system. These affect the presentation and attraction of the resource to tourists. Similar biases towards nature tourism have been observed in Rwanda (Mazimhaka, 2007) and other parts of Africa.

Going forward, the depth of the tourism sector may lie in attracting to tourists who are interested in the profundity of cultural heritage. Many countries have identified domestic, regional and continental markets as being more attuned to the genuine cultural tourism products. The increase in domestic tourists is identified as boosting in cultural tourism in Botswana, Rwanda, Ethiopia etc (see for example Mazimhaka, 2007; Manwa and Mmereki, 2008; Bayih and Singh, 2020). However, domestic tourism is still depressed on the African continent with the lack of disposable income and a culture of tourism as major impediments.

Old German Fort in Bagamoyo. Image: Mbwana Habid © CC BY-SA 4.0.

Apart from domestic tourists, the other potential market for cultural heritage tourism products are the African Americans and the diaspora population. It has been recognized that most Africa-Americans visit Africa for the symbolic reason of 'returning home' to experience social and cultural repatriation that was lost long back with the slave trade (Dillete, 2020). Observations have shown African-Americans visitors to West Africa become quite emotional when visiting slave trade cultural places (Dillete, 2020; Teye *et al.*, 2011). Even those who come for the natural attracts report a profound cultural connection with the continent. Testimonies Black American tourists travelling to Africa, Ghana, and Kenya, expressed a feeling of 'returning home' and appreciate the acceptance with no prejudices that they face in their home country (Natasha Takyi-Micah 2022; Kwin Mosby 2021). All this shows that this is a major market that remains untapped by most African countries. The potential for this market can be seen through the case of Ghana, a country that has been developing strategies to tap the African American market since the 1990s (Teye *et al.*, 2011). Ghana has been putting together policies and tourism packages that attract Africa-America tourists through development of its slave heritage tourism offerings. This has enabled the diaspora communities to revive their African identities and connections helping them in dealing with the legacies of western enslavement (Higgins-Desbiolles *et al.*, 2022). Some of the tourists were interested in just experiencing the motherland while others are interested in tracing their roots (Dillete, 2020). But all in all, the trips are not simple vacations but are emotional journeys that connected cultural experiences with personal needs. The Ghanaian case study is an eye-opener to how heritage can be used as tourism products that offer intrinsic value to the African diaspora.

Innovation and the heritage-based industrialisation

In recent years, the discussion has broadened beyond tourism as the hallmark of the utilization of heritage in the economic sphere. The need for heightening the economic value of heritage has coincided with a shift in the perception of heritage by African governments and other economic stakeholders. Most African countries have been dependent on importing goods and services from the West and in recent years from China and India. For its part, Africa exports raw materials. This situation has led to the continent remaining in debt due to the high import costs of value-added goods vis-a-vis the low prices of its exported raw materials. African countries have been grappling with this problem for a long time with no viable solution in sight. However, it seems a solution has been found in heritage-based innovation and industrialisation, i.e. the use of local resources, natural and cultural heritage included, to transform, grow and industrialise the continent's economies. The realisation that the continent could harness its rich natural, as well as cultural resources to develop unique goods and services that are tailor-made to solve its myriad of challenges, is synthesised in the African Union's African Agenda 2063. The African Union's *Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa* (2020) applauds the rise of interest in home-grown innovation and industrialisation on the African continent.

Individual countries have since taken heed to the call and developed their developmental strategies that seek to utilise heritage resources for the greater good of their countries and the continent. Such an approach is at the core of Kenya's *Industrial Transformation Programme* (2015). The same applies to Nigeria's *Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Policy* (Igbinovia and Krupka, 2019). In Zimbabwe, Ghana, Rwanda and several other countries, the developmental agendas of the last several years have all been hinged on innovation and industrialisation (Abdulai *et al.*, 2015; Rwanda, 2014; Juma, 2016; Yongabo and Göransson, 2020; Zimbabwe, 2020). In Zimbabwe, *The National Development Strategy 1* (2020) came riding on the heritage-based philosophy of industrialisation and modernisation adopted by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development, which seeks to optimise heritage-based research conducted in the institutions of higher education and use them as bases to start new industries and grow existing ones. The overarching aim is to reduce the importation of goods and provide local solutions to local challenges. This augurs well with the de-colonial agenda that emphasises a usable past (Chirikure *et al.*, 2021).

The positive attitude reflected in governance circles concurred with a shift in attitude towards the use of indigenous knowledge as a source of innovations that address modern challenges. Although it has already become common for university researchers from diverse backgrounds such as agriculture, medicine, and other natural and social sciences to study indigenous methods, the results of these studies were rarely making an impact on the actual practises outside of the laboratories. Much of it remained in the master's, and doctoral theses filed in the cabinets of the academic libraries. A lot has also stayed in published western-based high-impact academic journals with very few locals getting access even if they had known about them. However, in the last few years, the potential in using such heritage knowledge encapsulated in the indigenous knowledge systems has taken centre stage not just with researchers, but among the wider public too. In many cases, it is the people who are outside the academia who see the economic potential of this research, but they lacked the skill sets needed to unlock the value of these assets. For example, traditional healers always knew the value of traditional medicine but had little capability to establish drug discovery factories that could industrialise the manufacturing of these medicines. In many countries, their efforts were also frustrated by the medicine control policies that prioritise western medicine and western ways of manufacturing medicine. Again, the effects of coloniality in knowledge generation as discussed above.

Nevertheless, the potential of indigenous knowledge in alleviating some of the continent's problems was demonstrated during the Covid-19 global pandemic when traditional medicine took centre stage in alleviating some of the symptoms of the disease. Consequently, these medicines can be harnessed to produce drugs on the continent. For a long time, the traditional medicines in Africa were expropriated by big pharmaceutical companies outside the continent, in part because Africans did not have confidence in their own. The same medicines would come back to the continent bottled and packaged as western medicine. Medicine is just one of many heritage-based products that has the potential to seed industries. Indigenous knowledge has the potential to be utilised in all spheres of development across the continent. As Mavhunga (2017) noted, the continent can benefit from looking at past African modes of the industry to inform on innovation and industrialisation of the continent. The continent can come up with a unique industrialisation model that does not have a European capitalist mentality of large-scale manufacturing that requires extremely large tools capabilities that are expensive and destructive to the environment and cultural settings. Rather, cultural heritage can also inform sustainable processes of innovation and industrialisation.

Conclusion

This paper has given evolving definitions of heritage and how it has been perceived by both colonial

administrators and the local African populace since the commencement of colonialism on the continent. Due to the aggressive nature of colonial subjugation, the colonial system took precedence over African sensibilities even after independence. Africans, to a larger extend, were forced to abandon their heritage and were disenfranchised for several decades. Although the postcolonial environments were defined by the will to change and restore the traditional norms and values, the struggle to remain using the models left by colonial governments derailed the path to that objective. This was made worse by international standards that were crafted along the same model. However, even though it has taken time and will probably take more to correct the distortions, the changes that have been witnessed in management, government policies (and attitudes), and public perception indicate great strides towards greater valorisation of the cultural heritage. Africans are anticipated to embrace their heritage and utilize it for the social and economic benefit of individuals, families, communities, nations and the entire continent.

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