

Chapter 4

The authentic illusion

Humanity's intangible cultural heritage, the Moroccan experience¹

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Introduction

The preservation of heritage has never been embraced with more energy than in today's uncertain times, at a major junction in the history of humanity, marked in particular by a shift in large-scale contacts between societies and by the relentless, consumerist exploitation of the world's resources. A change in the mechanisms which regulate 'production of locality' (Appadurai 1996) heralded this state of affairs. This new awareness also has a price: it is when everything or almost everything collapses around them that people cast around, in their panic, for reference points or markers that will enable them to steady destinies caught up in the storm. It is in such a climate that heritage, be it of sites, objects, practices or ideas is produced and assimilated into an 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

The acquisition of heritage status of intangible or non-material kind has two major implications. On the one hand, it introduces a distortion between the heritage and the locality (and society) that gave birth to it. Heritage status results in a loss of connection with the territory, can be reproduced anywhere on the planet, even if a link with the locality is kept. It enters, through the mobility of people and the merchandising of culture, a circuit now operating on a global or nearly global scale. Today the virtual dimension of the internet emphasises even more the lack of territorial identity of cultural heritage elements. On the other hand, the production of an intangible cultural heritage inevitably requires sacrificing something, that very thing that turns cultural facts into heritage; these facts can no longer be the same, they become other, especially for those who own or perform them. These two dimensions, one intrinsic, the other extrinsic, stem from the meeting of the global and the local, one defining the other and vice versa. A kind of 'authentic illusion' is thus created and lies at the basis of the process of heritage creation.

It is in this context – where local identification is paired with the work of standardisation undertaken notably by UNESCO – that the recognition of intangible cultural heritage operates. It faces multiple local and supra-local

challenges which have not yet been the subject of close study. The present article hopes to contribute to this research, by going back to the origins of the take-over of the heritage domain, on a local as well as on an international level. We shall retrace the major stages in the process of identification, of recognition and of rendering visible ('visibilisation') cultural elements which have, in the process, acquired a dual status as identity markers both for local communities and for the heritage of the whole of humanity. I shall draw on my participation in the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003 and my engagement, at a local level in Morocco, in defining the intangible national heritage. A critical and constructive analysis of this to-ing and fro-ing between the local and the global should allow us, as much as possible, to understand the creation and the workings of the process of heritage creation at a micro and macro scale. Examples from Morocco, in particular from the Place Jemaâ El Fna in Marrakech and the Moussem of Tan-Tan, declared *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* in 2001 and 2005, respectively, will serve to illustrate this anthropological approach to heritage.

The creation of intangible cultural heritage

What we consider today as heritage was not always so; it becomes heritage through the intervention of a variety of diverse factors. It is not a given from the outset; it is produced, and there are numerous elements at stake in this production. First, there are economic stakes, linked to returns expected from controlling the resource such as business opportunities, job creation, investment, tourism, currency, and so forth. Then there are political stakes since heritage (in its wider sense) is called upon during elections, fuelling competition between groups and individuals to claim chunks of power corresponding to the economic weight – real or presumed – of these groups. There are social stakes too, involving the drive by these same groups and individuals to achieve social prestige, 'notability' and symbolic capital all at once. Finally there are cultural stakes which rest on the affirmation of a strong, homogeneous and unchanging identity, sometimes manipulated to mobilise people (see Skounti in press b).

Heritage is, at first sight, intimately linked to a territory, a locality, and the community that occupies it. However, intangible heritage differs from material heritage in that the former is rooted in the locality in real as well as in figurative terms, whereas the latter considers the locality as a dimension without it being subject to it in a definitive or durable way. The complexity of today's world manifests itself through resources that are no longer bound to territories, through the increase in 'translocal' and transnational networks (Appadurai 1996). It is also reflected in the growth in associations between individuals, the increase in migration, the intervention at arms' length by management established in distant locations, the development of channels of

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international cooperation and the intensification of tourism. The local element is therefore under strong threat, with real but obsolete local communities being overtaken by virtual ones. The latter consist of individuals who depend more on resources that are external to the locality, linked to other individuals through a multiplicity of networks.

Here we take 'local' to mean a territory owned as much individually as collectively by a community. This territory represents both a tangible marker and a material basis, and it is governed by strategies which, under cover of an ideology of synergy, are quite real to the individuals concerned. The heritage contained within, both of the material and intangible kind, is of capital importance as much to the authorities as to groups and individuals. By neglecting it or recognising it, by destroying or protecting it, they attribute a definite importance to heritage, shown in social projects that are sometimes contradictory.

The acquisition of intangible heritage status introduces a distortion between the heritage and the locality and the society that gave birth to it. In a way, heritage loses its territorial identity, loosens its material ties in order to survive. On a number of different levels it renounces, at least in part, its local roots. The internet plays a part in this loss of affinity, in this 'virtualisation' of heritage. There are countless professional or amateur websites, official or informal, blogs and personal pages which give a real visibility to aspects of intangible cultural heritage hitherto inaccessible to most. Yet not all the components of intangible cultural heritage follow the same path, nor have the same destiny. State-wide politics play a major role here, as they produce hierarchies and promote certain types of heritage over others which are often those of minority groups. Political criteria often prevail in a domain where expertise has been lacking for decades, including at an international level. In this respect one may recall that it took a whole generation between the adoption by UNESCO of the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972) and the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003). The delay in recognising the protection of intangible heritage concerns not only nation-states, but the whole of humanity.

The creation of intangible cultural heritage represents also a kind of 'recycling' process, recycling cultural facts which become heritage. Where they were once left to their own fate, transformed or left to disappear, today they are, sometimes, the object of great solicitude. Those engaged, either at an individual or at an institutional level, in this work of identification and recognition are absolutely convinced that they are contributing to protecting as they are a whole number of forms of cultural expression, be they alive or under threat of extinction. They feel they are working for the long-term survival of elements whose initial function has run its term. In the absence of a new function, these elements risk disappearing. However, what these agents do not realise is that these elements of intangible cultural heritage are

not, and cannot be, the same ever again: they become other, including to those who own and perform them. Their survival depends on sacrificing something of what contributes to their supposed 'authenticity'. The fact that they are considered as heritage introduces in their midst a new, hitherto unsuspected, dimension. Heritage agents are convinced that these elements are 'authentic', faithful manifestations of what they have always been, timeless. But this is only an 'authentic illusion'. The latter is nevertheless necessary, it even lies at the heart of the process of heritage creation. Belief in the 'authenticity' of the intangible cultural heritage element, its anchoring into a past beyond memory and its immutability justify and reinforce the engagement and the activity of heritage agents. At its most extreme, the authentic illusion is akin to 'inventing tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). A number of cultural manifestations present this aspect today, giving to individuals, groups and societies the strong conviction that they are perpetuating or giving new life to well-rooted traditions. Evidently political regimes, thanks to their monopoly over the media, sometimes make disproportionate use of these *constructions*.

On the other hand there is no *one* intangible cultural heritage, there is a wide spectrum, ranging from the non-material dimension of a material heritage element (site, monument, object) to the most intangible aspect (tale, poem, song, musical note, prayer, scent, perfume, etc.). Furthermore, pure immateriality is a fiction: can something intangible exist? There is obviously a material dimension to every element of intangible heritage: the human brain and body that detain it, the book that retains a trace of it, the audiovisual material that captures its sound or image. Without this material dimension this element could not be shared, would not exist. Our awareness and understanding as human beings relies on this material dimension. We need to apprehend it through one of our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, depending on the degree of materiality or immateriality.

Intangible cultural heritage material is both fragile and resilient. Unlike material heritage, which can be destroyed over a very short time (the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan being a case in point), intangible heritage survives longer. It outlives by far the span of the lives of those who carry it. Even in the *longue durée*, transcending the generations of individuals who transmit this heritage from one to the other, it never simply disappears. On the contrary, it is transformed, adapted, hidden (sometimes to reappear with more vigour), it retracts or expands depending on circumstances, it scatters the micro-elements that make up this heritage to be incorporated into new, emerging cultural traits, and so forth.

The transcendence of the elements of intangible heritage, compared to that of individuals, allows these elements to have a longer life. They pass from one generation to another, as genes are passed on. The transmission from individual to individual almost mirrors genetic transmission. Sometimes it is even assimilated to the latter: the most successful child is

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one which we have brought up to resemble us in all respects, including what we master best, our knowledge or know-how.² But this sublimation of the same also allows for the capacity to act differently at times of great cultural transitions: a craftsman will tell his son that it is in the latter's interest to have formal education, even though this course of action diverges from the father's mode of transmission, breaks with tradition and most probably with his trade. Break in continuity or continuity in broken times, these are some of the modes of adaptation, of survival or of voluntary and involuntary disappearance of intangible heritage.

Time is an equally important dimension when considering intangible cultural heritage. It appears to be the same when it is never quite the same even for two closely related moments in history. Intangible cultural heritage changes, it is fluid, it is never performed identically, it is at once true to itself and different. This defines its essence, its unity, its specificity. As for authenticity, what characterises intangible cultural heritage is that it does not have one. Its constant 're-creation' (to use a term used by the 2003 *Convention*, article 2), its differentiated application within a group or society, its diversity of meaning for all and everyone, are at odds with a notion of authenticity conceived as rootedness, faithfulness or fixedness.³ When today we have to fix it to a material support (iconographic, written, audiovisual or digital) we only make a copy at a given time, because we cannot guess the forms it has taken nor predict those which it will take through time. These different faces of a work, past and future, will perhaps always escape us. Moreover, we may well see the work (musical note, song, dance, literary work, rite, etc.) but we might never know the creative process, particularly if it is a collective work, as is often the case in traditional communities.

Finally, the contemporary forms of 'heritage sensitivity' (Candau 2005: 118) differ from an older attachment to objects, relics, images or buildings belonging to ancestors. This also applies to the elements of intangible cultural heritage. It represents at the same time a difference in scale, given the growth of the heritage phenomenon in the last few decades, and a difference in nature, that is, in motivations and in stakes. The difference in scale is apparent, given the popularity which the heritage of the past enjoys the world over, from the most remote village to the smart offices of UNESCO! The difference in nature is visible in the intrusion of outsiders at a large scale in the relationships between societies and cultures, leading the latter to work towards the preservation of distinction vis-à-vis others and the exploitation of heritage elements in the politics of development, towards tourism for example.

The obstacles which beset identification, protection and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, briefly sketched above, have not prevented nation-states and international organisations from taking a serious interest in these problematic questions. Let us now turn to the macro level, to UNESCO's standardising activity. We shall then present, at a micro level,

examples from Morocco, to show all the difficulties, but also all there is to gain from reflecting on the challenges thrown up by action.

From the material to the intangible: A treacherous path

Reflecting on the modes, mechanisms and politics of safeguarding what we call today intangible cultural heritage goes back to the time when the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* was adopted by UNESCO at its General Conference in Paris in 1972. Voices were then raised to point out that it was necessary to give humanity's intangible past the attention that it merited. Monumentality, one of the major aspects of the 1972 Convention, soon came under fire, because, from the point of view of a large number of (the then-called) Third World countries, it favoured industrialised nations, particularly Western Europe.⁴ The World Heritage List indeed reflects what has, in a French context, justifiably been called 'the monumental abuse' (Debray 1999).

It is only in the second half of the 1980s that this reflexive activity resulted, timidly, in an important document which nevertheless had little impact. The *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore* was adopted on 15 November 1989 by UNESCO's General Conference at its twenty-fifth meeting in Paris. A couple of observations, one conceptual, the other referring to its legal character, must be made on this Recommendation. First, let us consider the notion of 'traditional and popular culture': the notions of 'oral heritage' and 'intangible cultural heritage' were not yet in existence. The Recommendation therefore used the term 'traditional and popular culture', the adjectives reflecting the state of knowledge of the human and social sciences of the time: that is a difficulty in opening up the concept of heritage to embrace the intangible aspect of culture on the one hand, and the imposition of a hierarchy of cultural elements from 'elitist elements' transmitted through formal education to 'popular elements' based on oral traditions on the other. Our second observation concerns the legal status of the Recommendation. A recommendation is defined by UNESCO as an instrument in which:

the General Conference formulates the general principles and the norms destined to regulate a question at an international level and invites the member states to adopt, in the form of a national law or otherwise, depending on the specific questions treated and the constitutional dispositions of the different member states, measures that aim to implement in the territories under their jurisdiction the principles and norms formulated.⁵

The norms thus recommended to the member states are not subject to ratification. A recommendation, though it is commendably presented in a flexible and supple way, is therefore not mandatory for the member states.

The 1989 *Recommendation* provides a general framework for the identification and conservation of a form of heritage then called 'traditional and popular culture'. Moreover, the preservation of intangible heritage raises methodological and epistemological questions then not addressed, problems which are to an extent still unresolved today. Protecting intangible heritage also raises complex questions of law, such as the concept of 'intellectual property' which applies in this domain, or the protection of informants or collectors of material. Finally, the Recommendation sets out a number of measures to ensure, through international cooperation, the preservation of expressions from traditional and popular culture.

The *Recommendation*, however, quickly showed its limitations. Without the mandatory power of a Convention, it had little effect on the conservation of humanity's intangible heritage. It has to be said that expertise in this matter was lacking, among the professionals in the member states as well as among UNESCO's experts. UNESCO consequently started a number of initiatives in favour of this type of cultural heritage. Following this activity, and under the impetus of the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo who had settled in Morocco and of Moroccan intellectuals, the Division for cultural heritage of UNESCO and the national Moroccan Commission for UNESCO organised an international consultation assembling experts on the conservation of cultural spaces in Marrakech in June 1997. A new concept in cultural anthropology was defined at this meeting: *humanity's oral heritage*. It was recommended, among other recommendations, that an international distinction should be created by UNESCO to promote the 'masterpieces' of such a heritage. As a result of this meeting the Moroccan authorities, supported by many member states, submitted a draft resolution which was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference at its 29th meeting. This resolution was debated by UNESCO's Executive Council in two consecutive sessions (sessions 154 and 155). The Executive Council decided in November 1999 to create an international distinction entitled *Proclamation by UNESCO on Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* (hereafter shortened to *Proclamation*).

While preparing an application towards a first proclamation of the Place Jemaâ el Fna as a *Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* in 2000–1 and of the Moussem of Tan-Tan in a third proclamation in 2004–5,⁶ I was able to experience at first hand the complexity of the concepts put forward by UNESCO's experts when confronted with reality on the ground. In our application, in the section entitled 'Justification for your application' one point is specifically dedicated to the analytical examination of heritage as a 'masterpiece of human creative genius'. What then is a masterpiece? The natural history museum in Lyon addressed this question in an exhibition of 2002. Its designers set apparently simple questions: 'How to define a masterpiece? How to recognise one? Why does an object become a masterpiece?'⁷ Without ever answering these questions, they invite the visitor to

find his own answers. The exhibition sets side by side objects as different as a contemporary Inuit statue, a Formula 1 racing car seat or an Egyptian sculpture made of black limestone dated to the fifth century BC.

The concept is therefore entirely subjective and it would be pointless to reach a consensus on a definition. This certainly explains why it was called into question by some of UNESCO's member states since 2001, after the first Proclamation was issued. They denounced its elitist character, in a domain where the criteria for distinction of one or another cultural expression is as much a question of taste or of social position than specific to the intrinsic qualities of this expression (see Skounti in press a). It amounts to saying that the distinction of one or other intangible heritage elements is an eminently political decision. Seeing the lists of the first and second proclamations, it is not inappropriate to ask how the criteria adopted by the members of the jury appointed by the Director-General of UNESCO allow progression from a local identification (on the ground) to international distinction (the Proclamation), via national recognition (the decision to apply). The exercise is difficult, and one understands that the jury needs to invoke, in addition to the criteria linked to the content of the heritage element considered, other criteria such as the excellence of its execution or the connection with a cultural 'tradition' as well as other criteria linked to the conservation strategy defined by the agenda of the *Proclamation*.

Questioning the concept of a 'masterpiece' has, for reasons space precludes to explain here,⁸ resulted in the preparation of a new international instrument. UNESCO's General Conference decided, at its 31st meeting in 2001 that a new standardising instrument of mandatory character had to be drafted. UNESCO invited its Director-General to submit a report on intangible cultural heritage as well as a Convention draft project (Resolution 31 C/30, 2 November 2001). At its 164th meeting, the Executive Council decided to invite 'the Director General to convene one or several intergovernmental panels of experts [...] the first to meet in September 2002 in order to define the remit of the draft project of an international convention and to work on the draft of the text' (Decision 164 EX/3.5.2, May 2002).

The intergovernmental panel of experts met three times at UNESCO headquarters, the first time from 23 to 27 September 2002, the second time from 24 February to 1 March 2003, and the third time from 2 to 14 June 2003.⁹ I was delegated by the Moroccan government to take part in the first and third meetings. A draft *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* was worked out during these three sessions and it was adopted at the organisation's 32nd General Conference in October 2003. The processes involved in drafting the Convention, its problems and the issues at stake were also the subject of a colloquium held in Assilah in Morocco in August 2003, shortly before UNESCO's General Conference adopted the Convention in October of the same year (*Internationale de l'Imaginaire* 2004). The text, born out of intense, sometimes heated but

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always constructive, debates departs from the *Recommendation* of 1989 and the *Proclamation* of 1999 on a number of issues. Let us mention among them:

- the fact that it is a Convention makes it a mandatory instrument for the member states invited to ratify it;
- the controversial concept of a ‘masterpiece’ was abandoned in favour of the more appropriate notion of ‘intangible cultural heritage’;
- national inventories were to form the basis for drawing up lists of intangible cultural heritage;
- UNESCO was to fund the implementation of the Convention.

In summary, some 15 years have elapsed between the *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore* in 1989 and the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003. Conceptual developments, changes in methodology and a more determined approach have marked this time. We may however note that the final result does not, on a formal level, differ greatly from the spirit of the *World Heritage Convention* of 1972. Was it worth waiting so long to adopt an international standardising instrument inspired by a Convention already a generation old? It is true to say that the spirit of the 1972 Convention greatly influenced the 2003 Convention. The members of the expert panel who debated the issues in 2002–3 had it constantly in their mind, even though they did not wish to consider it a source of inspiration, arguing that the two texts belonged to different domains which required their own distinct approaches. But this argument only serves to remind us implicitly of the close ties between material and intangible heritage. The examples from Morocco, to which we shall now turn, illustrate this point very well.

From local to global: Two examples from Morocco

In accordance with the Convention of 2003 ‘the Committee includes in the representative intangible cultural heritage List elements declared “masterpieces of humanity’s oral and intangible heritage” before the Convention comes into being’ (Article 31). The two elements that Morocco nominated are Place Jemaâ El Fna (Jemaâ El Fna square) in Marrakech and the Moussem of Tan-Tan (fair of Tan-Tan); they figure among 90 such elements covered by this measure worldwide. How did they achieve such distinction? What is at stake today in terms of protection? Our third part will address these questions.

Place Jemaâ El Fna in Marrakech

The identification and consecration of Place Jemaâ el Fna as a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage are intimately connected with the

programme set up by UNESCO in the wake of the *Proclamation*. In June 1997 Marrakech hosted a meeting of experts organised jointly by UNESCO, the Moroccan Commission for Education, Science and Culture, and the University of Marrakech. While engaged in discussions over methods of identification and ways of protecting the oral and intangible heritage, the participants could not fail to take notice of this square at the heart of the medina of Marrakech, a place vibrant with cultural activity. It was therefore expected that it should be the subject of the first application made by Morocco. However, its identification at a local level and recognition at a national one owes much to the championing of the square and continued support by an illustrious outsider who had settled in Morocco, the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo. His writings and personal engagement did much to illustrate the heritage of this square and he chaired the first Proclamation jury convened by UNESCO's Director-General in 2000. The value that Moroccans place on the heritage of this space undeniably passes through Goytisolo's vision. Place Jemaâ El Fna is also relevant because it is at the origin of a distinction made by UNESCO when defining two major characteristics of 'humanity's oral and intangible heritage' according to the *Proclamation's* official text: the cultural space¹⁰ on the one hand, and the form of cultural expression on the other.

Following the *Proclamation* of 2001, the question of how to protect the Place Jemaâ El Fna according to the action plan drawn up in Morocco's application needed to be addressed, bearing in mind that there was no precedent for such a project. While we could rely on some experience in the protection of material heritage, we were largely unaware of the difficulties we would encounter when attempting to protect intangible heritage; furthermore we were dealing with an urban space which had been used for centuries as both the container of and the backdrop to this intangible heritage. The French ethnologist Michel Leiris (1950) was right to point out that we should not confuse conservation with protection. The management of Place Jemaâ El Fna came up against two major obstacles.

Place Jemaâ El Fna as container: Some stumbling blocks

The square is located inside the medina within the city of Marrakech, close to the Koutoubia mosque and the souks. Together they form a triangle, the living heart of the city. This triangle reflects its three fundamental functions: urban life, sacred space and trade. The square is a space dedicated to transition and urban integration. It is also a space for 'spontaneous' creativity, a space which invites to performance, to music and dance, a space for outdoor eating and refreshment. The 'square' is a triangle prolonged by a long arm which extends eastwards to the Guessabine mosque. It is bounded to the south by the quarters of Riyad Zitoun El Qdim and Arset El Bilk, to the west by the Fhel Zefriti quarter, and to the north by those of Bab Fteuh and

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the souks. The square is surrounded by shops, cafes, restaurants, hotels and offices.

This space has seen multiple transformations over the centuries. Yet it has always retained an open aspect, set within a broader urban space, the medina. The Place Jamaâ El Fna has been a national monument since 1922 (classified on 21 July 1922) and benefits from a royal edict of 21 July 1922 protecting its artistic qualities. These texts have made it possible to limit the damage around the square, without, however, completely halting it. The building height of 8.50 m prescribed by the first legal document has not always been respected, even though the minarets of the nearby mosques (with the exception of Koutoubia which goes back to the late XIIth century) are not tall. The local authorities have undertaken, following a meeting in March 1999, to remedy this situation, but up to now, no municipal edict has come into being. The same goes for the artistic protection of the neighbourhood of the square, which has seen the growth of 'visual pollution' in the form disharmonious painted and light signs or inappropriate urban furniture, all put up illegally. The fact that the medina of Marrakech was listed in 1985 as a UNESCO World Heritage site did not change anything. As I point out elsewhere (Skounti 2004), this listing will have contributed to the protection of the urban fabric of the medina (which includes Place Jemaâ el Fna) only *by default*.

Nevertheless, the fact that the square was declared a masterpiece of humanity's oral and intangible heritage has contributed towards realising the urgency of its conservation. The town council has put in place new measures since 2001, within a programme aimed at maintaining and embellishing the city of Marrakech. Though the measures concerning the square have met with varied reactions, it appears that the concerns of an increasing number of citizens are finally beginning to be taken seriously. Regulating the circulation of cars was a welcome measure, though alternative arrangements for transporting elderly, infirm or disabled people out of the sector or towards the medina have not yet been put in place. Moped and bicycle traffic also remains unregulated: this anarchic situation can be dangerous for pedestrians. Nevertheless, pollution from car emissions, which had reached alarming proportions, has been brought down to acceptable levels.

The decision to pave the square can also be seen from different points of view. On the positive side, the aspect of the square, after decades of laying tarmac, is improved. When the agency in charge of water and electricity (Régie autonome de distribution d'eau et d'électricité de Marrakech or RADEEMA) was carrying out repair works in 2002–3, it was possible to observe several layers of tarmac. Unfortunately structures and artefacts (wall fragments and pottery shreds) uncovered during these works could not be examined archaeologically and the opportunity to shed light on the development of the square was therefore lost. Paving with sets – reversible blocs set in a thick layer of sand – appears to have been a positive move overall;

connection to the electricity network was carried out at the same time, which benefited open-air food stalls.

Place Jemaâ El Fna's content: more pitfalls

The square provides a setting for a huge repertory of oral and intangible heritage spectacles for a variety of tastes and people: telling tales, playing music, achieving trances, snake charming, showing monkeys, selling herbs, street preaching, performing acrobatics, magic, fortune telling or reading cards (Skounti and Tebbaa 2005). These customs reflect an art conveyed through the spoken word, gesture, costume, sound, and so forth. They are imbued with a diffuse religious content, expressed more formally in the preaching of morals and wisdom.

As rich as these manifestations of the oral and intangible heritage are, as varied are the geographic, social and cultural origins of its performers. Indeed the imperial town of Marrakech has acted as a magnet for neighbouring populations, be they Arab or Amazigh speaking. Place Jemaâ El Fna thus plays a dual role: that of integration and that of perpetuating cultural specificities. Language reflects such diversity: oral literature, among other forms of expression, is expressed in Berber, in classical Arabic and Moroccan Arabic, in a language that also borrows from other languages such as French, Spanish and English.

The performers' know-how shows perfect mastery of the art of story (re) telling, seducing the public and jostling for position among pairs, having eliminated unfair competition. This is precisely what makes the value of Place Jemaâ El Fna as a space and as a manifestation of the cultural expressions that take place there.

Several dozen people, mostly male, perform in this space, which accommodates:

- herbalists, henna 'tattoo' artists, fortune tellers, practitioners of traditional medicine;
- performers or *blaiqia* who offer spectacles of music and song in Berber or Moroccan Arabic, preachers, story tellers, acrobats, animal tamers, and so forth.

The square also provides a space for many traders: sellers of herbs, orange juice, dried fruit, food stall-holders, and so on. The food offered in the 'biggest open air restaurant in the world' allows visitors to sample traditional and modern Moroccan dishes as well as recipes particular to the region of Marrakech, such as the *tanjia* (meat cooked in an earthenware jar set in the ash of a hammam's fireplace) (Skounti and Tebbaa 2005).

A plan of action to safeguard the Place Jemaâ el Fna proposed by the Moroccan state has benefited from funds made available in 2004 by a

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UNESCO Japanese deposit fund. It aims to revitalise intangible heritage through a number of measures that promote its owners and preserves their knowledge and know-how. This programme, which was carried out by the Moroccan Ministry of Culture and the UNESCO Bureau in Rabat, resulted in the publication of a bilingual French-Arabic book distributed to the schools of Marrakech and its region. It also resulted in research on the transmission of knowledge and know-how (see Skounti and Tebbaa 2006), and in setting up a school liaison programme which invited story tellers from the square to tell their tales in schools and organised drawing competitions for pupils on the theme of the square. It also aims to preserve the memory of the square through collecting written, iconographic and audio-visual documents and by setting up a travelling exhibition and a website.

If programmes aimed at protecting the urban framework and the material conservation of memory are relatively easy to set up, the social rights of the performers and the transmission of their knowledge and know-how are a completely different ball game. First, it is difficult to channel benefits such as pensions, allowances, health cover, etc. towards performers who operate in a context of urban poverty. It would attract too many people and would harm creativity. Conversely, to limit the number of performers through a system of professional cards risks denying the (relative) freedom of the square to people who have always nourished it with new blood. Any project that aims to set up a system of social rights will come up against this dilemma. Furthermore, such a system implies legal and administrative measures that are difficult to provide, as so many different departments are concerned (culture, social affairs, health, finance ...). Such a question may find a solution in a project, the *Human living treasures*¹¹ set up by UNESCO in the Maghreb region.¹²

UNESCO understands transmission to be the contribution of the person recognised as a 'Human living treasure' in exchange for certain privileges. It is difficult to conceive a single system that would suit all categories of intangible cultural heritage (Skounti 2005). If the art of snake charming, monkey taming or acrobatics can be reasonably easily transmitted, it is much more difficult to guarantee the transmission of tales (a genre which is particularly threatened), or fortune telling, or a comic performance. An elderly story teller might have to take on a much younger apprentice, who would have gone to school and become familiar with modern media (television, video, film, internet ...),¹³ with all that this implies in terms of references which would be totally different from those of the master's generation. Fortune telling relies on 'professional secrets', which its practitioners are reluctant to reveal, let alone pass on. Comic spectacles depend on individual performances that are difficult to teach. There are so many 'unique' 'Living human treasures' (such as Charkaoui) that it would be futile to look for a blanket solution for transmission. Some of the square's intangible cultural heritage will have to be sacrificed in order to preserve some elements which a

system, in whatever form adopted, may be able to support. For the remainder, our only tools are those that already exist in heritage conservation: archiving, documenting, recording in all possible forms.

Finally, the square will continue to feed the nostalgia of the people of Marrakech. In our meetings, seminars, workshops and informal contacts, many people complained about the 'disappearance' of their square. It is hard not to share their feelings, to sympathise with them, to regret a square that has lost its nature, has been degraded, has vanished. People who have known the square two or three decades ago feel sorrow for a space that has been defaced and yet remains attractive, a space which awakens unfathomable emotions. Looking a bit closer, it becomes clear that the people who, justifiably, express such feelings are thinking about *their* square, the square that they had got to know in the first decades of their life. It will always be thus, as long as the Place Jemaâ el Fna exists. All will depend on our position, on the generation we belong to and on the knowledge we bring to this changing space. Moreover, the square cannot be reduced to the sum of images that individuals who have frequented it or who frequent it now have of it. If one were to adopt a phenomenological approach, the square will exist as long as there are performers able to attract a public, whatever the form of entertainment is offered. Taken to its limits, it means that even if the story tellers illustrate their tales with graphic or audiovisual reconstructions, even if computers enhance performances, the square will always live, it will just have to adapt to the conditions of production and reception that a global society throws up. The square is destined to change indefinitely. The challenge for conservation is not the form that performances take, but their survival.

The Moussem of Tan-Tan

At the Moussem of Tan-Tan, matters took a different course. This site was not on the list of cultural spaces or forms of cultural expression that Morocco was intending to present during this decade. In 2004, the Moroccan Ministry of Culture had prepared an application for another moussem, the Moussem of Sidi Hmad Ou Lemghenni, better known as the Moussem of the Betrothal of Imilchil, located in the eastern high Atlas Mountains. It was while preparing this dossier that I was asked, in September of that year, to prepare a new application for the Moussem of Tan-Tan; it all happened within a month and attracted media coverage commensurate with the political will that surrounded its (re)birth.¹⁴ Why was the application changed? The answer is complex, but the decision certainly owes something to a suggestion, in all due forms, by another outsider, Kitin Munoz, a Spaniard born in Sidi Ifni in the Sahara, illustrious adventurer, honorary ambassador of Morocco in Spain and a UNESCO good will ambassador. Here we have another example of an outsider's view, which met with a political will to reinvigorate a cultural manifestation that was dying out. The sequence could

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be reversed, but it seems that a necessary condition of recognition is an outside view.

The site of Tan-Tan is located on the western coastal road used by caravans of traders who travel between Guelmim, Tafnidilt and Tan-Tan in Morocco, Atar in Mauritania, Timbuktu in Mali and Senegal. It is also a meeting point for nomadic people and their herds of dromedaries, sheep and goats in the summer and autumn; it provides shelter from the desert heat, access to the sea, abundant water and grazing. The moussem started as a place of spontaneous, but regular, meeting around a well, located on the edge of the nearby wadi of Ben Khlil where the future town of Tan-Tan, then only a place name, was to grow. According to local tradition the word *tan-tan* has its origins in an onomatopoeia which recalls the drip-drip of water at the bottom of the well.

The gathering of the nomads from the Sahara and other peoples from north-western Africa on the site of Tan-Tan is part and parcel of the nomadic calendar: it fulfils the need for dispersed pastoral populations to meet once a year to exchange, in the widest sense of the term, material and intangible products in an enjoyable atmosphere. Dressed in their finest clothes, they buy, sell, feast, marry, play, sing, dance, recite poetry and tell stories in the *hassanya* language, exchange news, talk about the weather, plants, medicine, rituals, and so forth.

These gatherings have taken the form of a moussem (locally known as an *almouggar*¹⁵), that is, an annual fair, fulfilling economic, social and cultural functions. These fairs have taken place since 1963, when the first fair was organised to celebrate local traditions and cultural diversity, in a spirit of exchange, meeting and pleasure. The moussem period is, so to speak, the nomads' annual holiday. Clearly for the Moroccan authorities, these gatherings were to be incorporated into the 're-insertion' programme for the western Sahara, under Spanish occupation, which was sealed by the Green March initiated by King Hassan II in 1975. Originally linked to Mohamed Laghdef, a resistant to Spanish colonisation who died in 1960, the Moussem of Tan-Tan gradually became a politico-cultural manifestation. The Moussem could not take place after 1979, because of the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario (a political movement claiming the independence of the Sahara) that lasted between 1976 and 1991. An attempt to revive the Moussem was made in 1982, but it was not to last.

The Moussem of Tan-Tan showcases an assemblage of materials and oral and intangible traditions which represents the intangible heritage of the Hassani nomadic populations who occupy the entire Western Sahara, from Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, to Mali and Senegal. All participate in creating the identity of this form of cultural expression, the annual nomadic fair; they create the framework and the content, without which the fair would be just an empty shell. Black tents (living spaces), camels (for transport, milk and meat), horses (transport for heads of wealthy families) occupy prominent places, but space is also given to music, to Hassani poetry, to story telling, games, crafts, costume and traditional medicine.

Given the political situation of the Saharan conflict, applying for the Moussem of Tan-Tan to be declared a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage, was quite evidently a difficult task. Granted, the application was made well after the 1991 cease-fire, but it nevertheless led to protests by the Polisario and its supporters in Algeria, giving rise to a kind of politico-symbolic competition. UNESCO had to exercise great care when considering an application with an explicit political agenda. But the visit to the first revived Moussem by UNESCO's Director-General, Koïchiro Matsuura, accompanied by Prince Moulay Rachid of Morocco and a large delegation of UNESCO ambassadors, as well as numerous journalists from the international press, helped dispel the anxieties of the Moroccan authorities. Yet, it was not all plain sailing. The section of UNESCO charged with intangible cultural heritage kept a tight rein on procedures, requesting further information on several occasions. Without going into details, let us mention one question asked by UNESCO's section, which illustrates very well its apprehensions concerning the inclusion of a politically loaded element of intangible heritage: was the fair rooted in a cultural tradition or was it a creation? Morocco's answer was inspired by the spirit of the Proclamation emphasised by the Convention of 2003, that is, that the elements of intangible cultural heritage are part of a permanent cycle of 're-creation' and that the Moussem of Tan-Tan, interrupted for a while, was revived within a rooted cultural 'tradition'.

The challenge for the Moussem of Tan-Tan is less about the form it takes as it comes back to life after decades of interruption, than about the conservation of the intangible cultural heritage that constitutes its framework. How to nurture among the populations of the region the enthusiasm first shown after its revival? What measures could be put in place to ensure its survival and viability? The management plan proposes a number of points of action. In brief there are two essential points: (i) a fixed date is set to ensure that the fair is held annually, so that it becomes part of the calendar of a population which has become largely sedentary and urban but which hankers back to a former way of life; (ii) a strategy aimed at conserving the memory of this cultural element must be drawn up; it has to be based on concrete actions and institutional as well as legal measures >which will identify, recognise and value its owners and their knowledge and know-how. Although the Moussem has now been held four times in its new form, the management plan has not yet been applied on the ground. A programme is currently being worked out between the Moroccan Ministry of Culture and the UNESCO Bureau in Rabat and should be implemented this year.

Conclusion

Intangible cultural heritage has recently become one of the major challenges facing the construction of local, regional and national identities. UNESCO has taken up the mantle on an international level and is attempting to find

the most appropriate means of securing its safeguard. The *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore* adopted in 1989 soon showed its limitations. Gradually progress was made towards a programme that led to the *Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* of 1999. Although this programme has initiated a debate and has led to three proclamations identifying and recognising 90 elements of the intangible cultural heritage, it was found wanting in respect of the inappropriate use of the concept of 'masterpieces' and in its non-mandatory character. UNESCO consequently undertook to prepare a new standardising instrument, the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* that was adopted in 2003 and came into force in 2006.

UNESCO's standardising activity aims to support and help member states and the communities who own intangible cultural heritage to preserve this heritage, which becomes *de facto* part of the heritage of the whole of humanity. Such a process takes place within a context of ongoing heritage creation; in fact, this process can sometimes trigger or feed the latter. Socio-economic difficulties and cultural changes facing the groups and communities engaged in this process exacerbate a latent malaise, causing confusion and sometimes even anxiety. However, this gradual detachment from what was up to then considered part of one's own identity motivates a new quest for self. This quest is never-ending, giving rise to new hopes and sometimes new illusions. What within a culture (in the anthropological sense of the term) was ripe for new functions or meaning, as it would otherwise disappear, is perceived as cultural heritage worth preserving. Those who act in this sense, whoever they are, act within a *heritage time*, where competition is severe and challenges multiple. An *authentic illusion* is created because these agents are convinced that they are taking possession of, and prolonging, the work of their ancestors, whereas in fact the challenge is not so much the past, but the present and above all the future.

Notes

- 1 Translated from the original French by Dr Madeleine Hummler.
- 2 For example, Moroccans say: '*berfet bouk la igbalbouk*'—'[be faithful to] your father's trade [or your likes] will overtake you!'
- 3 To give an example from a completely different domain, the Islamic habitus is taken as the reproduction of the time of the Prophet. This is a modern phenomenon, part of the contemporary history of Moslem societies or of societies containing communities belonging to this religion. The conviction that they are reproducing the Prophet's precepts, perfectly anchored in the minds of the followers of this movement is symptomatic of the 'authentic illusion', which occupies us here.
- 4 While taking part in 2002 and 2003, as a delegate for Morocco, in the sessions working towards the 2003 Convention, it was not rare to hear government experts from southern countries describe the instrument being drafted as a revenge from these countries on the 'monopoly exercised by the North on the 1972 Convention!' The Global Strategy put in place by the World Heritage Committee since 1994, tries to redress this imbalance by a

- series of measures aiming to produce, in time, a 'representative and balanced World Heritage List'.
- 5 See http://portal.unesco.org/fr/ev.phpURL_ID = 23772&URL_DO = DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION = 201.html
 - 6 UNESCO proceeded with three Proclamations within this programme in 2001, 2003 and 2005. Morocco filed two applications: one at the first Proclamation, the other at the third. The 2003 Convention includes a provision that allows it to incorporate the 90 *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* to the Representative List (Article 31) which it programmed (Article 16). The way this integration was to proceed was hotly debated at the first extraordinary meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee on ICH, which was convened in Chengdu, China, in May 2007, given the complexity of such a procedure.
 - 7 See website of the French daily newspaper *L'Humanité*: www.humanite.presse.fr/journal/2002-02-20
 - 8 See UNESCO's official documents concerning the drafting of the text on the 2003 Convention See: www.unesco.org
 - 9 The second was attended by a member of the Moroccan Delegation to UNESCO.
 - 10 Though they are fewer than the elements recognised as forms of cultural expression, the list of declared masterpieces contains other 'cultural spaces' such as the island of Kihnu in Estonia, the cultural space of Sosso-Bala in Guinea and the district of Boysun in Uzbekistan.
 - 11 A number of countries (Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Romania, France, Mali, Mauritania) have experimented with this system and made recommendations to UNESCO's other member states. The system consists of identifying persons who detain knowledge and/or know-how within the non-material cultural heritage domain. These persons are recognised by the state during an official ceremony and certain advantages (which vary depending on the state) are conferred in exchange for transmitting knowledge to young apprentices.
 - 12 I was commissioned by the UNESCO Bureau in Rabat and the Moroccan Ministry of Culture to carry out the Moroccan study within this programme. See Skounti (2005), which can be accessed on request to the UNESCO Bureau in Rabat.
 - 13 Juan Goytisolo emphasises the rich links which exist between primary oral traditions and other forms of non-oral information and inspiration in his speech opening the meeting of the First Declaration of *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* (see Tebbaa *et al.* 2003: 11–13).
 - 14 The Moussem of Tan-Tan, known locally as Almouggar Tan-Tan, had not been held in an organised form for two decades. The last moussem took place in 1979 and an unsuccessful attempt was made in 1982, according to local information. In 2004, thousands of inhabitants of the Sahara took part; it was opened by Prince Moulay Rachid who was accompanied by the Director-General of UNESCO, a delegation of ambassadors from the organisation and other personalities. For moussems in Morocco in general (see Reysoo 1991).
 - 15 This Berber word means literally a meeting, and by extension an annual fair around the grave of a saint.

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