

Memory, Identity and Heritage in the south Kenya Coast: Case of Shimoni Slave caves

Herman Kiriama¹,

ABSTRACT

Though slavery was practised in the Kenya coast for a long time, the subject of slavery has, however, been an anathema in Kenya. Nobody has been willing to talk about it or its effects. Slowly, however, things have started to change and now people, especially those thought to be descendants of slaves or slave traders have started to talk about it. This paper, using the Shimoni slave caves on the south Kenya coast, examines what is being remembered and how these memories are being used to construct relationships not only within and between the communities of these areas but with the wider Kenyan nation.

KEYWORDS: *heritage, slavery, identity, memory, Shimoni, Kenya*

Introduction

Most scholars define memory as the things that people retain mentally, usually shaped by collective as well as individual experience – the scale of these experiences determine what one keeps in mind and what one does not keep – in other words, the scale of experiences will determine what one remembers or forgets. It is, however, argued that, while memories are kept by individuals, individual memories are shaped by wider societal memories; the ‘coherence and complexity (of individual memories) tend to correspond to the coherence and complexity at the social level.’ This is to say that memories are to some degree collective, and what an individual remembers is socially mediated.

The notion that memories are shaped by collective and individual events leads to the suggestion that there may be several kinds of memories. According to McDowell (2008), Burk (2003) and Shackel (2003), types of memories include individual or private memory that may involve personal encounters and local or communal memory which come from occurrences that have affected tightly cohesive groups. There is also societal memories ‘which are narratives of the past that are sympathetic to a broader loosely interconnected population’ and public memory which represents the power relations of a particular period. At the top of this hierarchy of memory is the national memory which state-sanctioned and therefore represents the hegemonic order of society. Hirsch cited in McDowell et al (2008) also introduced the concept of post memory, in which she defines as memories that have been transmitted through the generations and are eventually held by people who have no individual connection to the memory. These descendants may try to represent these memories in order to feel closer to their ancestors.

The common denominator of all these types of memories is that they are played out in particular cultural landscapes. For instance, most Kenyans when asked about slavery and where it took place would mention Shimoni. Its representation in the national narrative and in public culture through Roger Whittaker’s song, ‘*Shimoni*’ the Shimoni landscape has been

¹✉ Kisii University, Kenya. kiriamah@gmail.com

etched as the place where slave trade and slavery was prevalent. Therefore as McDowell (2008) argues that 'sites of cultural heritage...incite our memories and reinforce our attachment to particular places'. One can, therefore, argue that sites, cultural landscapes or what Nora calls sites of memory, are an important accompaniment to our recalling or remembering our past and thus play an important role in constructing our identity or establishing our commonness with our fellow 'villagers'. In other words, our memories and the places we play them, enable us to create a common identity. Apart from assisting in identity construction and reconstruction, memories play a role in power negotiations within communities. This is because public memory is a hegemonic struggle between contending forces in society over who has the right to delineate the destiny of the community.

It is argued in this paper that identities are protean and subject to specific social conditions such as interaction and experience; therefore there is no fixed individual identity. Identity is fluid and depends on the circumstances the individual finds himself/herself in. In whatever form (individual or communal), identity construction is seen as a product of the prevailing socio-political imperatives and is thus fluid. Using such an argument, we shall be able to see how the identity of the Shimoni people has been shaped.

This paper presents the results of interviews carried out in Shimoni with a selected group of elders and other knowledgeable people about the Shimoni landscape in order to examine traditional sources that inform the historical narratives, (*lieux de mémoire*) and hence identities associated with the Shimoni landscape from the sixteenth to nineteenth century. This approach has been taken on the premise that identities emerge out of collective memories and therefore the pasts that people remember can tell us much about how those identities have been shaped. I also collected folklore, poems and other stories that the people of Shimoni tell their children. This is because I believe that within folklore we can get a glimpse of what society remembers about the cultural landscape. Oral tradition has been described as the passing down of information orally from one generation to the next and is essential for the survival of cultural and social organization of communities, especially those without the written record. Folklore, on the other hand, is the contemporary, living oral culture of a society. It includes popular songs, yarns and recitations, sayings, superstitions and remedies for sickness, traditional recipes and popular wisdom – all passed on by word of mouth rather than by 'book learning'. These can reveal much of the culture and traditions of a society and often appeal to the popular imagination of successive generations. Some folklore is highly political and plays a part in promoting social ideas such as the sense of national, class and ethnic identity or commitment to a political ideal. Folklore helps to keep alive ideals of a community and therefore can be manufactured either consciously or unconsciously.

Some scholars have rejected the use of oral traditions arguing that they are open to bias and distortion. But then one can argue that all sources have the potential of being unreliable and what should be borne in mind when using oral traditions is that we are not necessarily concerned about what happened or how things were, but about how the past has been recollected by the society. Douglas et al (2008:24) observe that, 'one of the main attractions of oral testimony is that it can provide more "subjective" information about the past; it is very useful for descriptions of experience and feelings, for insights into personalities or for discovering what really lay behind the words and manoeuvres of the past.' Allen and Montell further state that oral history is not only a method of acquiring information but is

also a body of knowledge about the past that is uniquely different from the information contained in written records. In using the oral traditions, I espouse the social constructivist view advocated by Rigney (2005) that focuses on memories as shared pasts that are collectively constructed and reconstructed in the view of the present social circumstances and thus memories are not resurrections from the past.

Location of Shimoni

Shimoni is a small village on the south coast of Kenya. The name 'Shimoni' is a Kiswahili word that means 'a place of the hole' or 'inside the hole'. The name is derived from the existence of caves by the seashore formed as a result of natural forces. The caves are spread over five kilometres and have complex tunnels that have been used for different functions and different times. During the peak of the slave trade in the eighteenth century, the caves are said to have been used as a place of confinement of slaves before shipment to the slave market in Zanzibar. Currently, there are pieces of iron hooks attached to the cave walls, which some people argue were used to shackle slaves in order to stop them from running away. Concomitantly, the caves have been and are still being used as a religious shrine and, thus some people argue that the hooks inside were used to hang animals slaughtered during rituals.

The exact date of occupation of Shimoni is not clear. The initial settlement is said to have been at Kichangani, which is one kilometre south of the present settlement. Ruins of an old mosque mark this old site, which is now used as a burial ground by the local community. According to the elders, the site of Kichangani was abandoned after a band of Wasurs (these are said to be Arabised African slaves) invaded the area and killed their spiritual leader, one Hassan Mwalago. People then moved further north and founded the 'Kaoni' settlement, which is present day Shimoni. It is claimed that the place was called 'Kaoni' because of the cave and the fact that when one is inside the cave, one is unable to see (*Kaoni* may be derived from the Kiswahili word '*haoni*' which means 'one cannot see').

The current population of Shimoni is about 2000 and is composed of people from all over the world. The original inhabitants were the Bantu speaking Digo, who were later joined by Arabs (Vumba) who came from Vanga around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries AD. The Arabs first occupied the opposite Island of Wasini before crossing over and conquering the mainland. According to Digo elders, inter-marriage between the Arabs and Digos gave rise to the Wa-kivundi. Presently, the Wa-kivundi are said to be the majority inhabitants of Shimoni.

As a result of this mixed population, there is contestation of the memory of the historical landscape of Shimoni. The different groups and particularly the Digo and the Arab descendants have different 'memories' and stories about the past functions of the cave; whereas the Digo descendants claim that the cave was used as a slave pen by Arab slave traders who kept slaves there while awaiting transshipment to the Zanzibar slave market, the Arab descendants, on the other hand, deny this claim. There are thus two stories, running contemporaneously, on the functions of the caves.

Shimoni oral traditions

There are various oral tradition versions on the name, settlement and use of the Shimoni caves. For instance, according to one of my informants, the late Dereva Msitu, a former Assistant Chief of Shimoni sub-location, the Shimoni caves are believed to have been one tunnel stretching over 7km from Fikirini village to Shimoni. Msitu said that these are natural formations that no one has been able to explain. He further claimed that the caves were used extensively during reigns of the Sultans of Zanzibar for holding slaves on transit to Zanzibar and other parts of the world. These caves are also associated with sacred activities; that is, locals use the area for worship. According to Msitu, the person who found the caves is said to be a man called Zahrani and who became the leader of religious functions at the caves. Currently, his son, Ali Zahrani is the religious leader at the cave.

Another elder, Mzee Twamimu Abdalla claims that locally, the caves were known as Mwanangoto and revered by locals as sacred. He further claimed that the cave, the cemetery (where a British soldier killed in 1888 is buried) and three other sacred spots (Mji Mkuu, Mji Mwiru and Kwa Jingu) are used by locals for spiritual consultations. These spiritual consultations were originally presided over by the family of Mzee Mpigabao, who is thought to have come from Kigirini Village near Tanga in Tanzania.

Ramtu Bakari Mwaramtu, a Digo elder who estimates his age to be 95 years, claimed that the initial Shimoni settlement was at Kichangani where a mosque was constructed. Before that people settled at Jasini (this is a village on the Kenya/Tanzania border next to the site of Vumba Kuu where descendants of the Wasini Vumba are said to have come from). According to Ramtu, a lone Arab man came to Jasini where he built houses and settled. With time the settlement grew until there was infighting amongst the people. This forced some people to move and eventually, they ended up at Shimoni where they found the Segeju already settled. They asked the Segeju if they could go and settle at the *kisiwa* (Wasini Island). The new-comers who were now called Wavumba thus settled at Wasini. These two groups started intermarrying.

Ramtu further claimed that there are two caves at Shimoni. One is known as Pangawazi, which has fresh water and the other one is the one now called the Slave Cave and is open to the public. He claims that a hunter known as Kirudzu Mwabanana discovered the caves and, that at that time the caves were not being used and the entire area now known as Shimoni village was a bush. Consequently, Kirudzu's family started using the caves as a shrine and that up to now the same family has been responsible for carrying out religious ceremonies at the caves. Ramtu further argues that when Arab traders raided Kichangani, people first ran to Barigogo where a new settlement was established. But when Arab slave raiding persisted, the locals went to the caves to seek divine intervention from this menace. After a few days, fishermen from Kichangani found a tent pitched at the site of present day Shimoni. Inside the tent were two people, a black man and a white man. The visitors inquired from the people about their village and whether they had a 'flag' (a euphemism for whether they were under the protection of an authority). The fishermen told them about Kichangani and also replied that they had no 'flag'. The white man then asked them to come back the following day with their fellow villagers. When they met the next day, the visitors wanted to know who the owners of the land were. The villagers replied that the land belonged to them all. The visitors asked them to go home and come back after two days but this time they should be more people.

The third meeting was between the visitors, the Arabs of Wasini and the Digos. The visitors said they wanted to know who the original owners of the land were. The Arabs said the land belonged to them while the Digos said the land belonged to God. After the meeting, the Arabs went away happy and vowed that they will henceforth combine forces with the white man and subjugate the Digos. After sometime, however, the white man again called the Digos and asked them to give him land so that he can put up a house in order to protect them from the Arabs. Consequently, the British built the Shimoni administrative office and prison in order to stop the slave trade.

According to Ramtu, the Wasini people (who were Arabs) were rich and were, therefore, able to buy people. The locals were also allowed to sell people in exchange for food. But after some people began refusing to let their children be sold, raiding began. This created a war that spread into the interior as people revolted against slavery. It is at this point, according to Ramtu, that the white man came to Shimoni to help stop the war. Another interesting informant was Yusuf Hassan Khatib, a 57 year old Segeju man. He was born at Kichangani which, as already stated, was the first settlement in Shimoni. According to him, Shimoni derives its name from the existence of the cave: when visitors came to the cave, they could not see inside and thus the general area was called *kaoni* (can't see). According to Yusuf, during World War II people were sent to Galu Kinondo, about 20 km north of Shimoni for their safety. The cave, on the other hand, was used as a hiding place for people escaping the pastoral Cushitic Galla raids. He was categorical that the cave was not used for slave keeping, quipping that if it was so, the British could have written about it. It was difficult to understand how he came to know that there are no records about Shimoni in the archives. According to this informant, Wasur Arabs used to come to the Shimoni area and using dates, they could entice children and then capture them and take them into slavery. When they carried raids, they would immediately take the captured slaves into the slave ships waiting offshore. People, therefore, hid in the caves to escape this menace and it is not slaves that were hidden inside the cave.

Interestingly, Yusuf argued that to say that the cave was used as a slave pen would mean that all the Shimoni people were slaves [one can infer from this that, it is the fear of being branded as descendants of slaves, and hence slaves that make people refuse to admit that there was slavery in Shimoni]. He went on further to say that he would like the cave to be presented as a hiding place for communities when running away from raiders and not as a slave pen. Yusuf maintained that the shrine at the Shimoni cave was for everyone and Zahrani was chosen as the leader of the Kaya (shrine). After Zahrani died, his son Mohammed Zahrani took over and was in turn succeeded by his brother Ali Zahrani, who is still practicing.

Mwana Juma is a 58 year old Shirazi lady believed that the Shirazi found Digos at Kichangani. Unlike the other informants, she claimed that the Arabs used the Shimoni caves to pen slaves until they were ready to take them to Zanzibar. She further explained that the British were the first Europeans to come to Shimoni and that the British established a colony to stop slavery. She went on to say that Captain Fredrick Lawrence, the British soldier buried at Shimoni, was killed by the soldiers of the Arab slave traders. Another informant was an 80 years old Segeju man, Mohammed Bakari Hassan, whose grandfather was Mwalago Bakari Mwalago informed me that the ethnic composition of Shimoni includes the Segeju who, however, have been assimilated by the Digo.

Mohammed told us that as far as he knows there were no slaves kept in the cave and that no Arabs participated in the slave trade in the area and that the Arabs only stayed in Wasini. He further said that the cave is a natural phenomenon and was used as a shrine by a Msegeju woman known as Mwambaghe wa Nguzo. Her son Zahrani inherited the practice when she died. Then his sons Mohammed and Ali Zaharani took over respectively. He also claims that the cave may have been a hiding place for the locals during the Maasai and Galla raids. As with the other informants, Mohammed says that the story of slavery and slave trade was fabricated in order to benefit from tourism and in order to get sympathy but he did not want to say who wants the sympathy and from whom. He was not willing to give an alternative opinion on how the cave should be preserved because of fears that he could be victimized by the community which is now benefiting economically from the cave. Furthermore, Mohammed claims that Captain Fredrick was killed in Pongwe and was shot with an arrow by a person who was fighting for freedom and not a slave trader. He said these stories were passed to him by his elders and he passes them on to his grandchildren and 'whoever wants to listen'.

According to Mshenge Issa Mshenge Saalim, a 70 year old Shirazi informant, the Shirazi had slaves whom they called *wachembe* who were used to build mosques along the Kenyan coast and that it was usually relatives who sold their own people to the Arab people in times of distress. He, however, said that there was no transit place for slaves in the area but those caught were taken straight to the ships that were waiting offshore. Shee Omari, an 87 year old Shirazi claimed that the Wakamadhi clan of the Segeju are in fact descendants of ex-slaves. He said that people used the cave to hide slaves, most of whom were relatives such as nieces and nephews. The traders used to come with dhows and park them at Wasini and people then used boats to take slaves to the dhows for transport to Zanzibar. According to him, people used to sell their people into slavery because of hunger and were paid with 3 kilogrammes of maize flour.

One of the slave traders was the Mazrui leader of Gasi, known as Mbaruk. The Sultan of the Shimoni area was known as Pwete who was a Digo and who colluded with the slave traders. According to Omari, Mbaruk used the cave to hide slaves. Juma Zahrani Mwalago is 80 years old and is from the village of Kichangalaweni. He is of mixed parentage (Digo and Shirazi) but prefers to call himself a Digo. He told us that the ethnic composition of Shimoni includes the Shirazi, the Digo, and other groups such as the Segeju, who are so called because they used to fold up (*sega juu*) their clothes while at sea. The first group to stay in Shimoni were the Digos and then the Arabs. Another group at Shimoni is the Wakifundi and that there are various explanations as to their name; one version is that the name derives from their profession – *fundis* (masons) while another version asserts that it is derived from the name of their village. The Vumba who are mostly found in Wasini Island, are a separate group of Arab descent. All these groups have intermarried with one another.

Juma argued that there was no slavery in Shimoni. The story that slavery was practised in Shimoni, according to him, is a fabrication by people from outside the area. The fabrication was in order to attract visitors to the area and this started in 1994. Interestingly, however, he asserts that in the old days Wasur [these are Africans who had initially been taken as slaves to the Arabian Peninsula but became Arabized] slave raiders used to come to the Shimoni area and raid for slaves. Old men would then come to the cave at Shimoni and pray for the raids to stop. One person known as Suleiman Lola was taken by the slave raiders

but again he came back and said he was happy in Arabia and that he had even married there. Juma further told us that the Wasur used to conduct lightning raids and then immediately sail away with their captives in ships that were anchored offshore; thus they had no need of a place to store the slaves.

Before the Shimoni cave was opened for tourism, it was used as a shrine by one Zahrani Mwalago (the informant's father) and the spirit he worshipped is known as *mwanangoto*. Zahrani was the first person to be appointed by the local council of elders to use the cave as a shrine. After the death of Mzee Zahrani, his son Ali Zahrani took over but after sometime as a result of being opened to the public and many 'foreigners' coming into the shrine, he stopped using this section of the cave. The hooks on the wall of the cave, according to Juma, may have been put there by one English fisherman by the name 'Bell' who is also said to have dug the well inside the cave for washing fish.

Another informant was Ali Zahrani, Juma's brother and sons of Hassan Mwalago Zahrani, the first person to use the cave as a shrine, who in turn was the son of Hassan who in turn was the son of Mpiga Bao. Interestingly unlike his brother Juma, Ali identifies himself as Shirazi. He says his father Mwalago was Shirazi but Mpiga Bao, his great grandfather, was Digo and married a Shirazi woman. This is interesting bearing in mind that the Shirazis are patrilineal and not matrilineal. There must be another explanation as to why the informant decided to follow the mother's and not the father's lineage. More intriguing is that his brother, Juma Zahrani, whom we have already described above, refers to himself as a Digo and not Shirazi. Here then is one family claiming different parts of their lineage.

Ali agrees that slavery existed and that once bought, slaves would not run as they were kept in the cave until night time when the dhows would come to take them to Arabia. They were chained to the cave so that they could not escape. Ali further asserts that Captain Fredrick was killed by an arrow of a Digo man who was a soldier of an Arab slave trader. Ali is currently the shrine keeper at the caves and says that though he has moved the shrine to another section of the cave – away from the gazing eyes of visitors, he occasionally comes to this section of the cave depending on the requirement of the client. Shee is a Bajun [Bajun are Bantu speakers who live in the Pate Island of the Lamu archipelago in the northern Kenya coast, who however identify themselves as Arab] says that his ancestors came from Medina, in Oman. Within the Bajun he is of the Al Bauri clan and belongs to the Fumo family.

According to Shee, it is not true that the cave was used to store slaves but rather the cave is a natural formation. He claimed that the idea that the cave was used to store slaves is a mere gimmick meant to promote tourism to the area. It is not possible that the place was used to store slaves as they were considered goods to be sold thus there was no need of storing them. He agreed, however, that it was common for relatives to sell their relatives into slavery and those who bought slaves included powerful families among the Digo, Wavumba and Wasegeju who used the slaves to cultivate their crops, cut trees such as house beams that were sold to the Arabs. He said that even his grandfather and father had slaves but they treated them humanely; that they considered them as part of their family members and not property, unlike some Wasisni families that treated slaves inhumanely. These slaves eventually became the Wasur Arabs. He gave a saying that people of the area used to say regarding slavery:

'Mtengo na Renge wako Muscat wanarinda tende' (Mtengo and Renge are in Muscat looking after dates). [It is instructive that the names Mtengo and Renge are Digo names, meaning that in actual sense Digos were enslaved].

According to this informant, the cave started to be referred to as a 'slave cave' when the issue of tourism came about. He said that it all started when a Wasini entrepreneur, a late Masoud entered into the tourism industry together with a white man called Mr Bell who had been sold some land in Shimoni. Bell would take tourists swimming and snorkelling while Masoud had a restaurant where the tourists would come for lunch. The swimming area eventually became the present day Kisite National Marine Park. In my opinion, though this assertion may be true, it does not explain whether the tourists were also taken into the cave and, if it was so, why most tour operators are no longer taking tourists into the cave but instead prefer the Marine Park only.

This version of events was, however, refuted by the chairman of the Slave Cave Committee, Pat Hemphill, who said that it was not true that Bell and Masoud started tourism in the cave and, that it was he, Pat Hemphill, who first came up with the idea in the 1990s. Prior to that, the cave was mostly used as a toilet and dump site. Hemphill, a Kenyan of British origin who came to Shimoni in 1962, further said that the hooks in the cave were not put by Bell and none of the locals could explain how they came to be. He also said that when cleaning the cave in order to open it to the public, some old bits of iron chain, similar to the ones I excavated in 2003 (Fig.2) and also similar to those used to chain slaves were found on the cave surface (Kiriama 2005, 2009b).

According to an informant at Wasini, it is demeaning to say that the cave was used as a slave pen and that the best way to present it is just to say that the cave has been there for a long time. We also talked to Mwajuma Swere, who approximates her age to be 80 years. She claimed that their forefathers found the Shimoni cave when they came into the area and have continued to use it, especially in times of trouble such as when sickness attacks; it is therefore like a hospital where they seek treatment. To her, it is not right to worship in the cave and Islam does not allow what she called 'satanic worship'. Mwajuma Swere told us that slavery was everywhere and that it was a difficult time for those enslaved. Whoever had power would sell the weak in exchange for food. She also claimed that there was no particular place where the slaves were stored as they were taken to the dhows directly. Saidi Pando who claimed to be 110 years old and is Shirazi agreed that there was slavery at Shimoni but said that the slaves came from the interior to the cave awaiting shipment. They did not stay for long and were not chained.

Analysis of the Oral Traditions

It should be noted that all informants are in agreement that slavery and slave trading was practiced in Shimoni. The point of disagreement is whether the cave was used to pen captured slaves. Indeed worth noting is the remark by one of the informants that if the cave was used to store slaves, then it means all the present inhabitants of Shimoni are slaves. Could this be the reason that they do not want to accept the fact that they may be descendants of slaves? More telling is the informants' assertion that those taken as slaves were sold by their relatives. Herein lies the core of the contestation. It can be surmised that those who suspect or know that their relatives were engaged in the practice, want to hide their families' alleged culpability and thus see it as appropriate to accept that the cave was

not used to store slaves. It is not feasible that slave traders could just come to the place and run amok, in a foreign country, to capture whoever they wanted. They must have been assured of a ready and steady supply of cargo before embarking on the journey to Shimoni. The people of Shimoni, or at least some of them, must have condoned or cooperated in slave capture. Many in the community are therefore deliberately mis-remembering in order to preserve the dignity of their families.

The current religious leader of the cave is Ali Zahrani. This may give credence to the first version of the information we collected to the effect that his family may have for a long time been associated with the cave. The story about the hunter may also be true, but cannot be verified. However, what these two versions show us is the tension that exists between the various communities living in Shimoni. Zahrani belongs to the half-cast group – the Wakifundi – those who have Digo and Shirazi ancestry but who align themselves more to the Shirazi lineage. They want to show that they have been in the area long enough and claim attachment and indeed, ownership of the cave. It is interesting to note that Ali Zahrani says resentfully that the fair skinned Shirazis look down upon the dark skinned from their own clan. It appears then that there is an identity crisis here; there is one group that wants to belong but it is denied this identity by the other. This may be the reason why some of the people are strenuously making stories that will make them fit in, while others are forgetting those stories that would compromise their positions in society. Indeed according to Chivallon (2001: 349), social identities generally produce a chronicle in which the past is made comprehensible in order to serve the present by allowing the incorporation of individuals through an account of common origins while laying the basis for an order of permanence beyond transient individual lives. The constitution of representations concerning a shared past can activate what Namer (1991) has called the ‘vertical bond’, a term denoting the relation between today’s living and yesterday’s dead, as well as that between the membership group and the reference group. The social bonds of today stand justified through its rootedness in time. By most Shimoni inhabitants tracing their origin to Shirazi, Digo or the intermarriage between these two groups, they are trying to achieve this vertical bond, that they are not only related in the present, but have antecedents in the past of Shimoni.

Mzee Ramtu’s narrative tries to show that the Digo are the true owners of the place and thus nobody else should claim any attachment to it. Indeed, Ramtu claims that after the establishment of British rule, the Digo came up with a song ridiculing the Arabs and informing them that the Digo now had a protector and could not be harassed by the Arabs slavers. The British were thus seen as saviours from the Arabs and the natural thinking then is that whatever structures that the British constructed will be held in high esteem by the Digos, as they can be seen as the instruments that rescued them from slavery. Ramtu’s claims that no slaves were stored in the Shimoni cave may be for two reasons; one, either his family was among the Digo families engaged in the trade and he does not want this revealed or because he is Muslim and he wants to cover the activities of his fellow Muslims. This view is reinforced by the fact that Ramtu calls the spirit of *mwanangoto* satan. This is not the view of the people who go to the shrine, who view *mwanangoto* as a benevolent spirit that enables them to overcome their problems. Ramtu, therefore, has divorced himself from tradition and his worldview is shaped by his Islamic faith. His memory of local events, whether from events he witnessed or has been told, is shaped by his beliefs. Ramtu’s testimony reinforces the idea of heritage as discourse which is not permanent but under construction all the time.

Within the same interview, Ramtu subtly assumes several identities and therefore several heritages. First, he is a Digo and as a Digo, he claims that the cave, a natural phenomenon, was used by the Digo elders as a Kaya, a shrine, for the common good of the people. On the other hand, Ramtu is a Muslim and as a good Muslim who abhors spirit worship, the cave ceremonies are satanic worship. As a good Muslim, Ramtu defends his fellow Muslims from being identified as slavers. Ramtu is, therefore, using heritage as a means through which he can navigate his social position and 'place' within both the Digo and Islamic community. Indeed Ramtu's position affirms Smith and Waterton's (2009: 293) argument that, 'heritage is...a tool that societies and individuals use in facilitating their self-identity and belonging. It is also a social framework of dealing with the present and it is highly emotional and powerful'. Thus depending on circumstances, Ramtu and indeed most people create and recreate their heritage and identity using narratives, the landscape or mnemonics within the landscape such as the cave, as aids in this process. Ramtu and indeed the other people in Shimoni give their past a diversity of meaning and it is this variety that makes the Shimoni heritage contested

The various oral testimonies also show that the area of operation of heritage, that is the landscape, is not a bounded entity. It is not the physical state, but it is 'the world as it is known to those who dwell in it, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them' (Ingold 1993: 156). That is why something like a single cave can enable people in Shimoni to construct multiple identities of themselves and their communities in order to make meaning to the present life. The natural phenomenon of the cave starts a process of not only remembering the past but also of making their present life meaningful within the present cultural landscape. To these people, therefore, the Shimoni landscape is not only the physical entity, the geographically bounded area, but it is that 'cultural process that brings together the cultural meaning of landscape with the concrete actuality of everyday life' (Hirsch 1995:3). As said above, the physical landscape is an aid, a mnemonic, to this process.

Spirit of the Place

I argue in previous publications (2009a; 2009b) that heritage construction is a narrative and that the tangibility of heritage is intertwined with its intangibility; that both, tangible and intangible are sides of the same coin. Some of the Shimoni informants have also said that the cave was a shrine, as it is up to the moment. What role does this intangibility play in the construction of the Shimoni landscape – both physical and mental and of the identity of the Shimoni people? How is the immateriality of the cave linked with its materiality/physicality?

The concept, *genius loci*, has been used in a number of ways ranging from the special atmosphere of a place, through human cultural responses to a place, to notions of the guardian spirit of a place. So what is the 'spirit of place' of Shimoni according to these informants? What are the distinctive and cherished aspects of Shimoni that make it different from other places? From the informants, one can say that Shimoni has an invisible weave of culture apart from the physical attributes of the cave and the colonial buildings. These are the stories, memories and beliefs on the usage of the cave as well as the construction of the colonial buildings and the belief that the cave and surrounding forest are the abode of the *mwanangoto* spirit. For the Shimoni cave, *mwanangoto* is usually seen by the locals as a

guardian spirit, the Spirit of Place for the Shimoni cave. Among the demands of the *mwanagoto* spirit are that people entering this place should not have had recent sexual contact and a woman in her menses should not venture near it. It is believed that *mwanangoto* can sometimes appear in the form of a monitor lizard or large snake, which harms nobody – one informant is said to have seen the giant spirit snake in the groves. Therefore when one encounters any such animal in the cave, they should not touch it because *ni mwenyewe* (it's the owner) of the place.

Recently, however, the shrine priest, Ali Zahrani moved the shrine to another section of the cave because *mwanangoto* ordered him to do so as the many visitors coming to the cave had violated the rules of the place and *mwanangoto* was disturbed. It is worth noting that the shrine did not move out of the cave, but to another section where tourists are not allowed. The former shrine with all the paraphernalia is intact and indeed some people still come there to offer thanksgiving to the spirit. The spirit of place is reflected in the rules and regulations that are to be observed when coming not only to the cave but also within its vicinity. For instance, because of reverence for the place, no local can cut any tree in the vicinity of the cave. The forest, as already alluded to above, is the garden of the spirit and because of that, the area around the cave is the only one in the southern Kenya coast that is remaining with the original tropical rainforest that originally covered most of coastal Kenya and Tanzania. The 'physical' presence of *mwanangoto* inside the cave is also shown by tying red, black and white pieces of cloth as well as putting bottles of the fine Arabian perfumes and sea water in the shrine. These are believed to make the spirit happy.

According to Villalon (2008), the spirit of place is an elusive, intangible, non-physical quality difficult to define but easy to perceive. It is a personal reaction, one that recognizes an unmistakable identity that sets one place apart from others. Spirit of place gives a special feel and even mystique to a place, the intangible qualities that assist in designating the place as unique. For Shimoni therefore, one can say that the 'spirit of place' is firmly in the realm of the everyday world of the residents. Perhaps it is the same spirit that anchors the booming tourism industry that now earns Shimoni a major part of its income. Another form of 'spirit of place', are the horrors of the slave trade that make people go quiet when they view the hooks on the walls of the cave. It is that feeling of it being there within the walls that Roger Whittaker captures in his song 'Shimoni' when he sings:

Listen as a million slaves tell you
how they walked so far,
how many died in misery, while the rest
were sold in Zanzibar

The presence of slaves is felt through the material remains still in the cave. The material is inseparable from the immaterial and one cannot exist without the other. The landscape takes its form not only from nature, but also from the manner in which the inhabitants of Shimoni have shaped their natural environment by not cutting the forest outside the cave, in order to keep the cave and the surroundings of the cave (the abode of *mwanangoto*, the guardian spirit), green and serene (Villalon 2008). Can it be then that because of the presence of this 'spirit of place', *mwanangoto*, which most people in Shimoni

go to the cave to consult, people do not want to accept that the cave, the abode of *mwanangoto*, was used for the heinous act of keeping human beings as slaves? Or can it be that because nearly all the people of Shimoni are Muslims and nearly all the slave traders were Muslims, they do not want to implicate their fellow believers in the now unpopular vice?

According to Nadel-Klein (2003:204), quoting Huby (1992), the informants we interview about heritage places 'teach us what heritage is really about: it is not just about what has been handed down from the past, but about how to live in the present, as well as about what to leave for the future'. Therefore, memories can be re-organized in order to preserve current and future relationships. More importantly, however, what we learn is that heritage and landscape are processes that are both tangible and intangible. I could go further and argue that it is the intangible that makes the tangible meaningful. In spite of what they think of the usage of the cave, the Shimoni inhabitants revere it because of its association with the spirit of *mwanangoto*, whether or not they believe in spirits.

Identity and Politics of the Shimoni Cave

The Shimoni cave as it is, now displays local memories that have external links. The cave like other heritage sites elsewhere embodies multiple, contested and mutually constituted meanings, linking local people to national and international communities as well as locally instantiated, transnationally based economic processes (Nadel-Klein 2003:211). Slavery and the slave trade was both local and international; it was conducted by the local people – who were selling their people to slavery – and was conducted by international traders, all who benefited from it. In the end, slavery spawned the African diaspora in Asia. As shown from the oral testimonies, the slave heritage of Shimoni is not a coherent identity; rather it is an ongoing discourse that is endemic with ambivalence and disagreement. As Rapport (1993) says, it has 'conversations' that take place in a variety of significant contexts. That is why two brothers (Ali and Juma Zahrani) can claim two different identities – one Digo another one Shirazi. It can be said that these brothers are in conversation as to their true identity: are they Digo because of paternal lineage or Shirazi because of the maternal lineage, or do they become Digo in order to get goodies from the government?

As Herzfeld (1991) argues in his analysis of time, place and power in Crete, contests and debates draw upon larger issues of identity. Identities are produced in part by the ways in which different groups perceive each other. Collective or individual identities are never simply received; they are learned, lived, transmitted and always contextualised. Juma Zaharani, realising that identifying himself as Digo earns him a place in contemporary Kenya, has decided to take that identity and he has contextualised himself within his society. Thus identity should be regarded neither as a rigid blueprint nor as an imprisoning constraint; identity is by necessity creative, and the mutual subjectivities that produce it are pliable and permeable and may be strategical, even combatively deployed (Herzfeld 1991: 94). It may be argued that is why the two Zahrani brothers have different identities; each of them wants inclusion into a certain group while excluding himself from another.

The people of Shimoni, at least the so-called indigenes, are Muslims and nearly all of them are fishermen. But they are suspicious of each other because of kinship lineage. These differences were aptly captured in the General Elections of December 2007. Though most of the people supported the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), the various

candidates, however, were more popular within their lineages. One candidate from Wasini Island, who had assisted the local people regardless of their background and was popular with the people, but was not considered for election because he was of Arab descent (a Vumba). Another candidate, who was of Indian and Shirazi origin, was also denied as a candidate even though his grandmother lived in the village and he had constructed a house in the village. In a society which is patrilineal, he was identified Indian even though he had lived among the Shirazi all his life. Heritage and identity are thus not closed but open cupboards, whose contents will change according to the socio-political circumstances of the time.

Conclusion

This paper has presented results of the interviews that were carried out in Shimoni. We have seen that the different groups have different memories on the usage of the cave and I have tried to argue that this may be as a result of the circumstances that each of the informants finds themselves in. I thus agree with the argument of Zerubavel (2003:11) that memory is neither a simple mental reproduction of the past nor is it a random process. Much of it is patterned and structured in a manner that both shapes and distorts what people actually come to mentally retain from the past. Remembering is not spontaneous but is an act governed by what Zerubavel (2003:5) calls 'social norms of remembrance that tell a person what should be remembered and what should be forgotten.' It thus follows that we remember much of what we do only as members of particular communities (Zerubavel 2003:3). This is why the testimonies of brothers Ali and Juma are different. They claim different identities (Ali as a Shirazi, and Juma as a Digo) and also give different uses for the Shimoni Caves based on their identities. For Ali, the caves were used to keep captured slaves whereas for Juma the cave was never used for slavery.

The paper argues that heritage reconstruction is a narrative, with the landscape as the arena where this discussion takes place. Heritage and landscape, therefore, are not only physically represented, but are also constructed and perceived in people's minds. It is this intangibility and the spirit of the place that gives meaning to the Shimoni landscape and especially the cave. The contestation between the boat operators and the cave committee is interesting as it shows that the construction of identity is multifaceted; that 'it is not defined by the singular but rather by multiple elements even though one might be ascribed precedence, which can alter depending on context and audience... identities are not static, but rather are actively constructed... they are "complex, dynamic and profoundly mixed constructions' (Insoll 2006:6). The boat operators take multiple identities during the course of the day. One time they are members of the local group who actively benefit from the cave proceeds and therefore inadvertently concur with the cave narrative; another time, they are members of the boat operators group who do not identify with this narrative.

Memory is a form of discourse which is socially constructed. Remembering is not a matter of simply recalling past experiences, rather, it is a complex and continuing process of selection, negotiation and struggle over what will be remembered and what will be forgotten, taking into account the collective experience of the group or community and based on the concerns of the present (Olick 2007). The presentation of the Shimoni cave largely confirms that a construction of heritage or a past is based on the concerns of the present and the collective experience that individuals in a given group have undergone. The Shimoni people,

lacking facilities such as good roads, health care facilities and access to land, feel excluded from the national narrative. Consequently, they have used the collective memories of a past in which slavery played a huge part in shaping their present identities. The Shimoni cave is used not only to market those memories and earn income but to also develop a counter-memory of the slave trade as a challenge to the existing power elite. A remembered past, as part of a discursive heritage, can thus be used in challenging the existing political and social order.

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How to Cite: Kiriama, H.O., (2017). Memory, Identity and Heritage in the south Kenya Coast: Case of Shimoni Slave caves. *Journal of African Cultural Heritage Studies*. 1(1), pp.4–18. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22599/jachs.10>