

## Unlayering the Intangible: Post-Truth in the Post Rainbow Nation

Debbie Whelan<sup>1</sup>

In KwaZulu-Natal, a province of South Africa, intangible heritage has been a component of provincial legislation since 1997. The promulgation of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Heritage Resources Act that year recognized intangible heritage as mainstream. Indeed, whilst KwaZulu-Natal, and the country as a whole was at the forefront of including intangible heritage as a key component of legislation, its complex demographics have celebrated aspects of the intangible for many years. This paper will begin by discussing the intangible heritages of the province in general before examining its multiple facets, including site and landscape, in the interpretation of provincial heritage. Amongst other contextual information, such as contemporary celebration of grave sites, and sites of greater Zulu nationalism, it will examine the sites and practices of religious groups such as the Zulu-based Shembe. These serve to reinforce that intangible heritage is not merely the mothballing of memory, but contemporary, dynamic, and an agent of change, rather than a static concept clutched in the grasp of western thought. It will conclude by suggesting that intangible heritage is a process of authenticity. Further, the authentic is a simultaneous and immutable product of the action, the tradition, the interpretation and the immaterial, rather than a static repetition of a logical and constructed constant which views, digests and describes a system or ritual in order to understand it.

**KEYWORDS:** *intangible, cultural heritage, KwaZulu-Natal, authenticity, monument, cultural change.*

### Introduction

The *Nara Document on Authenticity* (1994) opened the heritage debate around understanding the key elements of authenticity (generally considered as tangible). This was then supplemented by the 2003 crafting of the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* which added another malleable, seemingly abstract concept to the pursuit of heritage. These issues continue to be debated at international colloquia, in which the individual cultural practices of the delegates are embedded in their understanding of both terms. However, based as they are on western absolutes of truth and evidence, charters such as the *Nara Document* have little appreciation of the non-western view of the intangible and tangible being immutable.

This paper addresses concepts of intangible heritage and authenticity, interrogating heritage as a post-colonial discourse that automatically foregrounds the intangible, although this is commonly misinterpreted by celebrating lineages and personalities. It briefly introduces the region and the Zulu people, before reflecting on the official engagement with heritage discourse-centred on the intangible. It proceeds to discuss the intangible heritage of the Zulu-based Shembe adherents in order to interrogate ideas of authenticity. The Shembe (*Ibandla lamaNazaretha*) is

<sup>1</sup> ✉ Lincoln University. DWhelan@lincoln.ac.uk

the largest African Independent Church in the Southern Hemisphere. Its followers subscribe to the teachings of Isiah Shembe (1870-1935) the founder of the Church, which teachings follow syncretic practices based on Zulu traditional beliefs, and some elements of western religions. The traditional processes and intangible world views of the Zulu have significance, reflected in the tradition of selecting Shembe successors which is negotiated in the same manner as is the choice of lineage heads, according to Zulu culture and belief systems. It follows with a discussion of 'authenticity' using a number of examples, before presenting concluding comments on its immediacy and momentary interpretation. Concluding comments imply a need to adopt a mercurial and non-rigid interpretation to multi-layered, multi-conceptual practices which themselves are immediately authentic, and suggest that authenticity develops and moves with the evolution of group practice.

### Contextual Notes

Situated on the eastern seaboard of Southern Africa, KwaZulu-Natal is a densely populated province with people of different origins. The dominant indigenous group, however, is the Southern Nguni, of which the well-known Zulu are a section. Archaeological evidence and oral histories show that the Southern Nguni migrated south from the central regions of Africa over centuries. They were predominantly pastoralists, with relatively recent indications of crop production. They constructed dwellings of natural materials, made clothing and other goods of wood, bone, and hide, and produced iron products, most notably hoes for crop production and spears for fighting and hunting. Their slow migratory lifeway therefore depended on the intangible for continuity, given that the tangible elements of their material culture had limited lifespans, and most importantly, needed to be portable. As Bender notes, for other pastoral groups, 'past and present elide'. The topographical detail-dune, hill, lake, shoreline-is the site of memory' (Bender in Layton and Ucko 1999: 41). Continuity was therefore, borne out in the interaction between generations, living and dead, and relationships with the greater cultural landscape which consisted of multiple sites enacted through iteration. Power may have been tangibly projected during the life time of prominent individuals, in the scale and purpose of homesteads (Whelan 2018), but their power lived beyond the grave, inscribed in iterative praise poems which mutated according to immediate need and context (Hadebe 1992).

Given the intrinsically intangible nature of much of the heritage in KwaZulu-Natal, its inclusion was inevitable. Intangible heritage was embedded in the original provincial legislation promulgated in 1997 and was revisited in subsequent amendments to this Act. Thus, the *KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Heritage Resources Act* no 4 of 2008 defines intangible heritage as '...the intangible aspects of inherited culture, and may include — (a) cultural tradition; (b) oral history; (c) performance; (d) ritual; (e) popular memory; (f) skills and technique; (g) indigenous knowledge systems; and (h) the holistic approach to nature, society and social relationships'. Intangible heritage is thus a cornerstone of heritage preservation in contemporary, post-colonial KwaZulu-Natal.

Western society has a different perspective: since Greek and Roman times, the tangible (the monument, and the urban landscape), was inscribed with stories which bore out the histories

of occupation. This western perspective of celebrating the physical fabric perpetuated symbolic layers of destruction and rebuilding, of cities and urban space in Europe. This perspective led to continual re-inscription of the importance of the physical material, and other tangible objects as representational of specific times and events. It also assisted in constructing multiple historical landscapes that reinforced possession, belonging and identity. Indeed, the deployment of the 'monument' was the first physical inscription by Europeans on the shores of Southern Africa. In 1488 Bartholomew Diaz and his crew erected a number of *padrão* during their journeys of discovery, thanking the Christian God and in the process, reinforcing tangible evidence of possession and colonization. These perspectives of heritage, the physicality, formed the material culture which centuries later was embedded in the *Venice Charter* of 1964, and formed a significant core of early South African legislation.

South Africa, with its subsequent colonizing groups of Portuguese, Dutch, German and English settlers was considered a territory of England between 1910 and 1961. It thus firmly subscribed to the nostalgia entrenched in the written 'official' history of European settlement on the southern tip of the continent. Whilst the Union of South Africa (after 1910) generally took guidance from England, the tangible protections afforded by the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882 and reinforced by organizations such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), were not considered appropriate. These English perceptions firmly considered the physical and the 'monument', not allowing for a broader context in the colony.

Thus, legislation in South Africa also embraced, as much as was socially and intellectually possible at the time perhaps, ideas of the intangible and acknowledgement of the 'other'. One of the first Acts passed by the Union Government in 1911 was the *Bushman Relics Act*. This sought to protect the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples, particularly rock art. In 1923, this legislation was expanded to include the built environments of European origin. This foregrounded the 'struggle' for land in the settlement of the Cape and Natal, using material culture as evidence. In 1934, the *Natural, Historical Monuments, Relics and Antiquities Act* formalised protection and allowed monuments and sites to be identified, inscribed and protected. Soon after, sites identified and inscribed in the then Natal included sites of intangible heritage: *Mthonjaneni Spring* was the natural water source at which Zulu King Dingane's (1795-1840) wives collected water. A plaque was erected in 1939 to commemorate this intangible value (Oberholster 1973: 268). It is a physical site evoking an intangible landscape. Similarly in 1942, the unmarked graves of the Zulu kings at the necro-landscape of the *eMakhosini*, the valley in Zululand in which a number Zulu progenitors are buried, were identified and celebrated with the erection of bronze plaques (Oberholster 1973: 272). Both sites were inscribed as National Monuments in terms of the legislation of the time; the intangible, site and landscape was thus recognised and embedded in the early declaration of heritage sites in South Africa. These layers of physical inscriptions implied permanence to a landscape, and thus 'fixed' a site within the landscape. These locally-crafted legislations which allowed for including indigenous intangible heritage on a limited scale from the 1930s, paved the way for adopting principles which were only addressed internationally by the *Burra Charter* in 1977, thus allowing for justifiable inclusion into South African heritage practice.

Despite South Africa being a new, democratic 'Rainbow Nation', intangible heritage remains highly contested. Changing perceptions of respect and honour in a very fluid Zulu society, considerations of 'my culture' (Whelan 2017) and the tension between representation, monumentality and the 'panacea of tourism' (Marschall 2008), mean that intangible heritage is constantly embattled. Recent events like the #rhodesmustfall movement, which actively contested physical memorials and their content as 'white and' 'settler' driven, have repositioned memory, monumentality and inclusion, since the 2015.. Despite this political activity, and the increased impetus for remembering and notionally 'monumentalising' the intangible, the ideals of this approach are increasingly pitted against a popular need for physical monumentalisation using western forms of 'remembering' such as headstones, obelisks and monuments. This paper thus intends to interrogate this irony, situated in a sedentary, competitive society in which authenticity is constantly negotiated and repositioned by first understanding the scope of intangible heritage in Kwa-Zulu Natal (Whelan, 2017).

### **Intangible Heritage in KwaZulu-Natal**

The Zulu belief systems involve an immutable relationship between the ancestral and physical realms. This connection, particularly around death, has a direct impact: the liminality of transition between a physical and metaphysical environment involves personality (tangible), and the experience, memory and the ancestors (intangible). However, the presence of the latter is palpable, connecting physical and metaphysical.

Ethnographers in the past (Krige (1936[1963]), Berglund 1976, White 2010) described death rituals, the treatment of remains and their inscription in memory. More recently, Sabine Marschall connects contemporary traditional practices directly with the commercialization of heritage for some, and the 'modern' world for others, describing the unseen but having a direct and real relationship with the ancestors. Marschall notes that (historically) the 'deceased elders were buried inside the cattle kraal, inside funeral huts, or in community graveyards, but the grave sites are not necessarily physically marked or publicly visible'. This liminality is borne out in the affirmation of the ancestor entering into communal memory 'rehearsed and transferred through oral tradition' (Marschall 2008:248). Oral tradition acts as one of the means by which memorialisation occurs, in addition to different methods of 'moving' the ancestors when homestead locations change; a slowly mobile pastoral society venerating the intangible through poem, song and verse, rather than a physical and enduring marking of grave sites. Significantly, Marschall refers to the use of a stone cairn or *isivivane* to mark significant places such as burial sites. However, the cairn is also part of a secondary interactive landscape, in which passers-by participate in what Marschall (2008: 248) considers as 'primarily the site of ritual processes and the material result of additive performative acts'. Contrary to the European approach which is connected to Christian beliefs of resurrection 'grave observance amongst the Nguni was thus not primarily visible but rather discursive and symbolic' (Marschall 2008:248), and of a greater necro-landscape.

Thus, for the Zulu, the *isivivane* marks a site of iterative, continual ritual, rather than a physical and symbolic presence in the landscape, in which the grave and its physical marker exists, as tangible evidence of a past life and personality. The *isivivane* allows for multiple contributions

by passers-by, in a greater religious framework involving the ancestors and the intangible realm. This system of grave marking as Marschall describes, horrified early missionaries as the unkempt grave sites were 'not treated or conserved as an eternal monument but largely left to (its) own devices and the forces of nature' (Marschall 2008:248). This discussion is significant in providing background to the next section on the contemporary memorialization of the dead, in a manner which disregards the peripatetic practices of the past, centred on *isivivane*. It also ironically, negates many contemporary initiatives which interpret the intangible, and simultaneously lays the foundation for the discussion on authenticity.

After the democratic elections in 1994, South African national laws were supplemented by provincial Acts, deferring heritage management to provincial authorities. Subsequently, given that physical structures are automatically protected by the 60-year clause embedded in the current Act, a provincial-level mandate limits the proclamation of colonial-era structures as sites of heritage value in KwaZulu-Natal. This exclusion has heightened the requirements for and promotion of, intangible heritage. Thus, the ground is fertile for intangible heritage to enjoy prominence in the province.

However, the reality is that in recent years, retrospective initiatives to celebrate specific events and their personalities have followed the Western model of physical monument and veneration of personality. Whilst the post-1994 legislation has accorded some previously declared sites such as the *eMakhosini* (Valley of the Zulu Kings) an elevated status (compared with their original nomination at the end of the 1930s), the interpretation of many sites of intangible heritage has since 1997, been based on personal and clan interests. Thus, rather than celebrating the landscape of memory and struggle, site and personality-specific interpretations proliferate. Not only do philosophical notions of redress underpin these monuments; they also serve to entrench Zulu nationalism and reinforce clan associations with Zulu leadership. For example, the Shezi clan, traditionally allied to Zulu authority, motivated for a monument to celebrate their clan ancestor Sigananda kaSokufa, who died in prison after participating in the Bhambatha Uprising against the Colonial government in 1906. An elaborate granite monument was constructed to celebrate him in 2001. Similarly, the Biyela people near Eshowe achieved the same: a physical monument to the role played by the Biyela people in Zulu history (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, 2018). In 2015, a granite headstone was erected on a farm in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. A monument to Lugagu, a progenitor of the Zuma clan, it was unveiled by the then South African President Jacob Zuma, locating firmly on a physical site, a greater territorial assumption of occupation, tenure and recolonisation.

Thus, ironically the classical notion of the Roman Monument, perpetuated by the British colonial administration, and constructed of what is locally perceived of as prestige material (black polished granite), represents cultural slippage of a need to physically represent the intangible. Whilst erecting such monuments may have been perpetuated by the custodians of heritage, and may in retrospect be considered inappropriate, the practice continues. In effect, these physical monuments are laden with much more gritty flavor: they celebrate a century of story and song involving the specific individual. At the same time they invoke a partisan social and physical, tenured landscape which elevates certain people and their ancestors above others, through

fundamentally justifying moments. Cynics may observe that the erection of these monuments constitutes physical evidence of a continued power struggle and subscription to capitalist norms in a neo-liberal age. However, the rationale may be more subtle: as Sabine Marschall describes,

Memorials are never built for the deceased; they are built for the immediate or wider community of descendants which, for whom they serve a specific purpose, such as facilitating the process of mourning or...constituting markers of dignity and pride in identification with the brave deeds of the fallen or the significance of the past leaders (Marschall 2008: 260).

Generally, design in the public realm is complex. Southern African architects have been striving for a more inclusive tool-kit of relevant iconography since the democratic elections in 1994. Designing buildings for a new, 'rainbow' nation embracing plural interpretations and foregrounding 'otherness', particularly African people such as the Zulu who were excluded in the past, is complex. Similarly, the design of monuments in the current era is theoretically presented in a multi-cultural, egalitarian manner. However, this overly academic consideration is perhaps, inappropriate for their purpose.

Zulu nationalism reflected in physical monuments to the Zulu kings dates back to the elaborate Union Period monument erected on King Shaka's 'grave' at KwaDukuza in 1932. The black granite obelisk with flanking panels constructed on the site at which his half-brother and successor King Dingane, was killed by Dlamini and Nyawo troops in 1840 has similar purpose; it was erected in 1983, purchased by the Zulu nation through public subscription. More recently, as part of the necessary reconstructions of history, and the valourisation of the 'other', monuments constructed in KwaZulu-Natal celebrate 'Zuluness', particularly foregrounding the intangible. Significantly, the construction of these new monuments, partly motivated through lobbying by the *amakhosi* (chiefs) was the provincial heritage authority. The *Monument to the Zulu Fallen* at Isandlwana (by artist Gert Swart 1999) is a carefully-crafted construction, redolent with Zulu symbolism. It's siting is part of and related to the landscape of battle, triumph and valour, epitomising the conceptual elements of the attack on the British in January 1879.

The *Monument to the Zulu Fallen* redresses the past, presenting Zulu victory, as opposed to all the other colonial monuments on the site which memorialise British death and defeat. It celebrates the triumph from a non-western point of view; the stone and concrete plinth and a strategically placed bronze Zulu bravery necklace of lion's claws contains as much of the material as the immaterial in its approach. Whilst it is a physical monument (although not in a deliberately western tradition), it also embodies symbolism and nuance, intended to connect the boundaries between the tangible form and the intangible realm of victory. Commissioned by the same authority, the monument *Spirit of the Emakhosini* (artist Peter Hall 2003) sought to do the same, crafting symbolic elements to celebrate the power of the combined graves of the necro-landscape of the ancestral Zulu kings, themselves constituting tradition and temporal continuity. As mentioned earlier, these sites were awarded specific bronze plaques in the late 1930s, but given a firmer, material inscription in the erection of the monument to the general *genus loci*, the '*Spirit of the Emakhosini*'. The intangible heritage(s) were in the above cases, interpreted and contrived

of by white men trained in the Western artistic tradition. However, the attention to detail and participation by representatives of the *amaKhosi* (chiefs) in the design process theoretically limited the lip service paid to both the material and immaterial, aspects of the place and event. This public participation process thus partly served to reduce the image of political imperative, through the dramatically limited potential for pastiche, or other forms of Western monument 'cut and paste' in the design and construction of these monuments.

As Marschall (2008) notes, the void between the tangible (as political, 'touristic' and evident) and the intangible (as a replication of space and place and practice), is constantly widening. The intangible in the above examples addresses memory and site, rather than celebrating practice and tradition, although they are to large degree, perpetuating nationalism through tradition. This suggests that the intangibility of the historic and cultural landscape, consisting of sites, routes, symbols, song and dance and ritual, offers much richer opportunity for the study of the intangible amongst Zulu people, rather than the ill-considered erection of colonial-style monuments. Thus, interrogating this gap, between the tangible representation of the personality through monument and the intangible interpretation of landscape through monument, allows for focus on a lived and widely reinforced practice of worship. Being 'Shembe' is a continued daily existence for millions of Southern African adherents and in itself is a totality of intangible heritage.

In order to further understand the complexity of these mobile and mercurial intangible heritages and their practice, the next section will discuss the primary site of the Shembe African Independent Church at Ekuphakameni north of the coastal city of Durban. Perhaps simplistically, Shembe is a combination of Zulu traditional ancestral religion and Christianity, and as such is one of the largest African Independent Churches on the continent. Its doctrine relies on the interpretation, configuration and continued promotion of a mixture of modified traditional and Christian rituals, practice, and understanding which have mutated over the last century. This constant change, all of which is at individual points in time, authentic, contributes to the discussion of the concept of layered and temporally fixed authenticity, specifically in the intangible realm. This discussion assists in the understanding as to how 'authenticity' could be understood, valourised and interpreted by heritage practitioners, using a series of traditions and practices that have mutated and evolved in the last century.

### **Using the Shembe Church to Understand Ideas of Authenticity**

Whilst the abovementioned intangible landscapes of grave sites, events or places use a physical element to interpret story and personality, other intangible landscapes exist such as the creation and veneration of place, story, ritual, and tradition which are inextricably connected to personality. In order to discuss this more fully, and to situate the western absolute of 'authenticity' when addressing intangible heritage, the Shembe African Independent Church is presented. It is briefly described, and then used to assess elements of authenticity, its continuity and change. As context, the internationally crafted *Nara Document* (1994) describes authenticity as,

Conservation of cultural heritage in all its forms and historical periods is rooted in the values attributed to the heritage. Our ability to understand these values depends, in part,

on the degree to which information sources about these values may be understood as credible or truthful (UNESCO 1994)

For *Nara* signatories, knowledge and understanding of the context of information, in relation to both original and subsequently practiced characteristics of cultural heritage and their meaning, is requisite in assessing all aspects of authenticity. This is problematic in non-western contexts in which the polarity of western 'truth' has different interpretations in the immutable realm between the sacred and the profane.

The author conducted a Heritage Impact Assessment at the Ekuphakameni Shembe Church site in 2011. The framework for the assessment examined the impact of making the site accessible to Shembe adherents and non-Shembe visitors, and ensured the continued survival of both tangible and intangible heritage resources. The report provided guidelines for the protection of a sacred landscape for both leaders and adherents with constantly evolving philosophies, perceptions and ritual practices, in addition to catering for the needs of non-Shembe visitors.

The original Shembe Church was founded in 1910 after a meteorite from the passing Halley's Comet fell at Inanda close to the site of Ekuphakameni. , (Figure 1). Its founder, Isiah Shembe, preached doctrine which combined African perceptions of space, place and ritual, and interpretations of early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial culture. The Church practices include ritual, pilgrimage, identity (clothing), dance, song, taboos, gender association and symbol (Figure 2). The Shembe identify strongly with a locally-derived form of the Christian cross (Figure 3), in addition to a series of old motor vehicles driven by previous Shembe church leaders, which are retained and revered (Figure 4). Buildings on the site are vernacular and utilitarian, rather than ecclesiastical. Thus, the western forms of integrity of 'building' and its 'ecclesiastical authenticity' have little meaning apart from shelter for Shembe adherents.



Figure 1: One of the meteorite sites to the east of Ekuphakameni (Author: 2011)



Figure 2: Shembe procession (Sundkler 1961:193)



Figure 3: A Shembe cross (Author 2011).

A Shembe informant noted 'The centre ring is the body, the top ring is the head and the side rings the hands of Christ, with the holes in the side rings representing the holes made by the nails driven through Christ's hands when he was crucified. The holes in the centre and the top rings represent the emptiness of the body after the spirit had risen (Reitz 1989:42). Reitz noted that 'the form and location of these symbols would appear to the Shembes in their dreams, the true meaning of which is no longer known by their followers' (Reitz 1989:41).



Figure 4: An old car owned by one of the Shembe leaders (Author: 2011)

The most significant material marker of the Shembe is the use of white painted stones: not only do these line the processional ways but they also bound the most sacred part of the site, a central, open space set in a glade of trees, known as ‘Paradise’ (Figure 5). Situated in Paradise is an *isivivane*; a cairn as described earlier. It ensures a lived and present connection between the ancestors and adherents, as well as a constant activation of this connection through ‘additive’ practice (Marschall 2008: 246). Further, it is a material vestige of the intense succession battle which has dominated the Shembe Church for decades. White-painted stone-bounded ‘Paradise’ serves as the template for Shembe ‘temples’ all over Southern Africa. Significantly, for the Western visitor, these white stones may be perceived as notional, rather than prohibitive boundaries. However, for the Shembe, the act of stepping over these lines is considered highly offensive, thus indigenous knowledge systems and their interpretation are inherently bound in the approach to and use of site and landscape. White stones are also set into the sites at which the meteorite fell, extending the metaphor to the origin myth, the celestial realm and contemporary practice, and subverting interpretations of space, sacred and profane, and internal and external.



Figure 5: View of Paradise on the left (Author: 2011)

The modest tangible and utilitarian landscape is evident, and intimately connected to the intangible. The old cars previously driven by Shembe leaders located across the site are tools for continued evocation by adherents. Whilst they are at face value, whimsical remnants of a bygone era, they have hallowed symbolic value as representations of the late Shembe leaders and are preserved almost as the material extension of the physical person (Reitz 1989:11). They thus form a significant part of the procession and are part of a religious process of memory. Given that many Shembe adherents, certainly those in the past, were illiterate, these evocations provide the same teaching functions as did stained windows in Gothic Churches for medieval congregants.

This physical site is extended to the greater religious landscape; Ekuphakameni Shembe adherents annually visit iNhlankazi Mountain, on a ritual pilgrimage. This event serves to cement Shembe identity, in addition to casting the intangible heritage across space, including landscape as the sacred realm. Significantly, whilst the original Shembe site is based at Ekuphakameni, succession battles in the Church have meant that three break-away factions have been formed, each with their own modified versions of authenticity and practice. This dissolution follows similar fragmentation amongst the Zulu, both at a homestead (domestic) level in which sons move away to form their own homestead, but also in the construction of new sub-clans breaking away from the main clan section.

Living in the liminal world between the profane and the sacred is part of 'being Shembe'. Discourses of near-death experience are for the Shembe, a vital component of their belief. These stories, poems and hymns may be written down, and translated (Gunner 2002;, Oosthuizen 1981, amongst others) but essentially, they remain lodged as 'fact', constantly being overwritten and re-

inscribed. Nkosinathi Sithole addresses the oral traditions of the breakaway Ebuhleni faction and presents this aspect as an enduring characteristic of the whole Shembe world view. He also describes that these stories lose their impact through interpretation and translation. However, they retain value as fundamental justifying moments (2005, 2010). Sithole emphasizes the value of near-death experiences as ‘narratives (which) are important because they serve as proof that Shembe is not just an ordinary human being, he is the one sent from above’. Many near-death experiences testify that they have met Shembe on their spiritual journeys’ (Sithole 2005). Furthermore, Sithole connects this enduring liminality as contributing to the formation of identity amongst the Shembe. Vilakazi *et al* reinforces identity formation in that Shembe dance is a characteristic (Vilakazi et al 1986:86) and suggests that ‘being Shembe’ involves a continual re-inscription, a process of identity, which is authentic in its own hybridity and authentic at each moment.

This continual acculturation and the fluidity of change amongst the Shembe is reflected in chronologically-spaced works by Roberts (1936), Sundkler (1958) Becken (ca1978) and Vilakazi *et al* (1986), all of whom tell of different experiences in the changing tradition. Given that many Shembe worshipers, certainly those in the past, were illiterate, oral tradition is central for the perpetuation of tradition. At the same time, as noted earlier by Selby Hadebe (1992), oral histories are subject to constant change and reconfiguration. It is this malleability that is vital in understanding a constantly reregistered, re-inscribed authenticity as part of contemporary intangible heritages. In order to consider the multi-faceted Shembe intangible heritage, it is important to understand the discourse of authenticity, and the need for a broader understanding of its function in rapidly changing non-Western societies.

## Authenticity

Organizations such as the *Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings* (SPAB), first convened in England in 1877 by William Morris, Philip Webb and others, seriously considered ‘authenticity’ as the central philosophy behind the repair to old buildings. SPAB considered that the Victorian trend of over-restoration was inappropriate, and that all the layers from different periods that comprise a building contribute to its integrity. Whilst this holistic viewpoint was based on Pre-Raphaelite nostalgia, it is significant SPAB’s approach to understanding the building fabric comprised its history and the evidence of change over time; thus, authenticity was relative and layered with repairs and change that the building comprised. The *Venice Charter* (1964) reinforced SPAB: Article II records that ‘The valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected, since unity of style is not the aim of a restoration’. This document also relied heavily on nostalgic emotion, absent of any definitions or concrete guidelines.

Thus, definitions of authenticity required to assess layers for retention and repair in terms of the *Venice Charter*, were only crafted in 1994 with the *Nara Document*. Appendix II agrees that authenticity changes and that ‘efforts to update authenticity assessments (should be considered) in light of changing values and circumstances.’ However, this follows the idea of layers of change and does not allow for authenticity being malleable and dynamic, constantly presented and

reinterpreted. Shembe practice which is continually authentic, infers that authenticity for the West is tangible and fixed, whilst authenticity for non-western societies may be much more fluid, present and interpretive. Such descriptions and definitions serve to understand authenticity in the physical realm. In the space of the cultural and the intangible, authenticity is actively evolving, changing and being constantly reinterpreted. This mercurial process perhaps stupefies Western evidence-based thinking, relying on an academic nostalgia related to the physical which is simultaneously, often devoid of reflexivity.

### **Authenticity and Intangible Heritage**

Intangible heritage exists in a non-material realm, in terms of its pure definition. It is generally considered as practice, and at the same time may have a strongly present material realm which operates to support or stimulate the ritual or practice. This material realm itself is not necessarily considered as a 'thing' of authentic origin, but rather a vehicle to the immaterial, and the relationships that exist in the metaphysical.

The *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Paris 2003) indicates the definition of intangible heritage as being

‘...intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.’ (UNESCO: 2003).

The utterances of a static 'my culture' are common in a contemporary Zulu society as response to myriad socio-political issues; yet as with all cultures, Zulu culture is fluid and ever-changing, as are the worshippers of Shembe. In other articles, the author has noted that it is the intangible which is the cultural constant, and not the physicality of form; the form merely represents the intangible (Whelan 2017). Further, as with historic practice, continued evolutionary negotiations implicit in traditional law perpetuate, meaning that factions break off the main lineage, with disagreements on points of sacred principle, allowing the Shembe to display a constant process of an 'authentic' present. This fragmentation allows for reinterpreted practices, with each faction pursuing its own meaningful doctrine as a mixture of the tangible and intangible. Thus, for the author authenticity is change, and a process of creating.

The old cars of Shembe leaders which act as accessible triggers to recraft memory and 'tradition, are continuous symbolic indicators of a physical person who has entered the realm of the ancestors, who are present and real. They are reiterated in oral traditions, which themselves are malleable. Thus it is suggested, intangible heritage is located between the physical, the oral, the ritual and the material, rather than just a 'memory' of practice. Authenticity is, therefore, an irrelevantly imposed Western concept of empirical measurement imposed upon a system which itself, is continually changing and evolving.

### **Conclusion**

The Nara Document states that,

Conservation of cultural heritage in all its forms and historical periods is rooted in the values attributed to the heritage. Our ability to understand these values depends, in part, on the degree to which information sources about these values may be understood as credible or truthful (UNESCO 1994).

Such polarised ideas of ideas of interpretation, truth and non-truth are essentially Western, and have little value in understanding non-western ideas. The Oxford English Dictionary defines post-truth as being 'Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). Whilst one could question the nature of 'objective fact' in itself, 'objective fact' in the context of this definition and of this, paper refers to the empirical and the tangible – effectively a western evocation of memory.

This paper described the pre-democratic government's approach as largely canonical, whilst elements protecting indigenous cultures existed, focus was on memorialising the tangible and reinforcing the immigrant settler discourse. The colloquially-named 'Rainbow Nation', democratic government mandated rewriting heritage legislation to allow for more inclusivity. Intangible heritage, indigenous knowledge systems and orality are now substantial components of contemporary heritage discourse and practice.

More recently, the *Nara+20* statement (ICOMOS Japan 2014) reinforced the definitions of the earlier 1994 declaration, and specifically related authenticity to people, noting that it is,

'A culturally contingent quality associated with a heritage place, practice, or object that conveys cultural value; is recognized as a meaningful expression of an evolving cultural tradition; and/or evokes among individuals the social and emotional resonance of group identity.'

Authenticity (itself intangible) thus moved from the realms of the tangible, into that of the intangible. Whilst this is welcomed, it is still objectified, being connected to a thing or idea. However, what this paper argues is that authenticity is a process of continual making, rather than being connected to a point in time.

This article has positioned the mercurial nature of authenticity within a constantly evolving series of practices and 'traditions' in Southern Africa, particularly those of adherents to the Zulu-centred Shembe African Independent Church. It has argued that authenticity for the Shembe is connected to some degree, to the physical (the old Shembe cars) which are accessible and quotidian, and thus subjects of continued orality and transfer of 'memory'. It has also recognized that the Shembe religion is fundamentally oral in nature, that this changes with time, and that officially sanctioned memories are reworked for political and economic reasons, all of which are authentic in their transfer and understanding at that specific point in time.

Thus, intangible heritage should be considered as a continual process of 'authenticity making', and that the authentic is a combined product of the tradition, the action, the interpretation and the immaterial, rather than a staid repetition of a constant externally understood framework of logical definitions which intend to view, digest and describe a system or ritual in order to understand it. It is thus an agent of change, as the authentic drives the practice.

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