

An Assessment of the Challenges Associated with the Loss of Tangible Heritage in Kenya

Ephraim W. Wahome

Department of History and Archaeology,

University of Nairobi,

Email: ewahome@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper investigates the main challenges experienced in the conservation of cultural materials in Kenya since independence. The study examines the challenges of conservation in view of environmental change, human activities and the organic nature of most of our material culture. The overall goal of this article is to isolate the primary causes of the deterioration of ethnographic materials. The study has been prompted by factors such as the progressive replacement of ethnographic materials with exotic factory substitutes and the deterioration of already stored materials in private and public repositories. Factors influencing the survival of materials in both public and private institutions including museums, galleries and private collections are highlighted. A conservator's ability to anticipate and arrest the process of deterioration helps in the preservation of material culture. This is enhanced by the enactment of laws which are sensitive to cultural heritage conservation thanks to the constitution of Kenya promulgated in 2010.

Introduction

Deterioration is a continuous process that both living and dead things go through as part of the life and death cycle. In the case of cultural materials the process can be significantly slowed down and the extended through the institution of proper conservation strategies. This can be achieved through apt estimation of the deterioration processes through research and proper identification of the agents of deterioration followed by mitigation measures. Conservation is critical for posterity and the growth of cultural heritage tourism in developed and developing nations.

The term culture, though confusing, is broadly defined as learnt human behaviour encompassing everything from how eat to how we dress and interact with our environment while heritage is that which we owe to our past in the form of cultural materials 'such as monuments, historical or architectural remains and artefacts'¹. Heritage also includes the natural environment which constantly interact with. Therefore, we can talk of cultural heritage and natural heritage. The "---core of culture consist of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of actions, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action"². Material culture therefore, encompasses all objects made by humans to enhance effective technological and economic adaptation to diverse biomes. Cultural materials have physical, morphological, artistic, historical, cultural or scientific significance, which may be lost when the materials disintegrate. For heritage materials to continue providing important information, proper preventive and interventive conservation measures must be maintained.

Cultural heritage is transmitted via learning and modification through the process of adaptive patterning. Material culture is a non-renewable resource, which is lost when exposed to aggressive natural or artificial deterioration agents. Overall, cultural materials depict an attempt by humankind to adapt to constantly changing social, cultural and environmental needs. In view of this, cultural materials facilitate the reconstruction of history, by delineating our past life-ways, and inherent cultural processes that have shaped our past and present which we can utilise for economic returns through sustainable heritage tourism³. Cultural adjustments include a very broad repertoire of knowledge covering basic areas like house construction techniques, clothing styles, subsistence technology and rituals. This implies that conservation requires one to *'---retain and repair what can be salvaged, replace what was missing and match or complement the original materials, finishes and detailings in areas of new work'*⁴.

Understanding cultural heritage equips us with skills of relating interactions between people and their environment, including their spiritual or sacred attachments leading to the concept of 'cultural landscapes'⁵. Cultural traits, such as knowledge, wisdom and aesthetics, could be preserved as important values in national development if properly harnessed⁶. Cultural heritage also encompasses gendered social and political constructions covering the temporal scope of a community⁷.

Cultural heritage is made up of intangible and tangible aspects of culture. The latter comprises artifacts, cultural structures, landscapes and sites which are the material expression of culture while the former deals with expressions and symbolism like dance and spirituality. The cultural materials investigated in this study are either organic (biotic) or inorganic (abiotic) in origin. For the materials to survive the vagaries of nature, there is need for inventive conservation with due consideration of the original manufacturing processes, uses and abuses, as well as material sensitivity to deterioration. For prehistoric materials, the depositional environment also influences the rate and severity of degradation. The level of acidity, or alkalinity, in the deposition zone impacts the survival of material remains. The process is also influenced by the duration of deposition and taphonomic processes involved. Proper conservation therefore entails due consideration of spatio-temporal location of cultural materials besides inherent physical characteristics.

Biotic materials include faunal and floral cultural items, while abiotic forms are made from non-living forms like lithics. Materials made from both forms go through a process of alteration in time due to biological, mechanical and chemical agents. The degradation process is also enhanced by human interference through archaeological excavation, agricultural activities, usage, poor handling and other forms of interaction between humans and the environment of deposition. Natural processes of degradation involve chemical and physical laws, which conform to the principle of uniformitarianism. However, where the process is influenced by human action variations are likely to be experienced due to artificial biases which may vary from one individual to another.

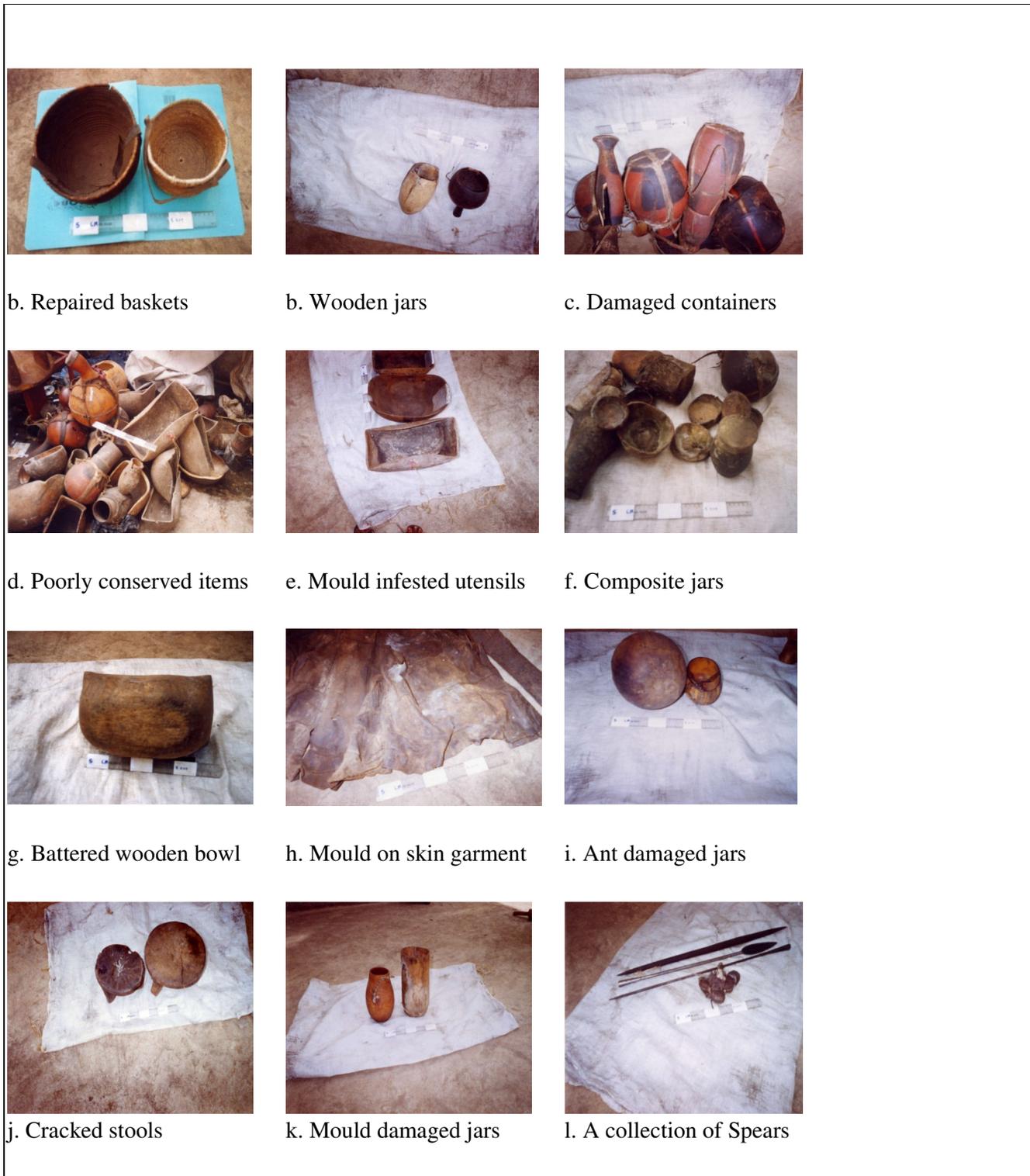


Fig. 1: A sample of cultural materials in a private transit collection (Source: Author)

Due to the complex nature of material deterioration, conservators use a multi-pronged approach in effecting preventive and interventive conservation of cultural materials. This requires a proper understanding of the inherent characteristics of cultural items involved in order to mitigate or reverse deterioration. In modern times, conservation goes beyond material treatment in laboratory environments through the use of

consolidants and sealants to due consideration of emergent challenges like pollution, global warming, tourism, terrorism and market practices in liberalised global economic systems.

Manufacture and Use of Cultural Materials

In this study, cultural materials were drawn from published literature and primary data drawn from public galleries and private collections in the hands of dealers. The latter presented the greatest challenge to conservators. Private collections made by dealers for onward transmission to international markets were poorly preserved, hence their importance in this study (Fig. 1). Records of cultural heritage in Kenya was also derived from a number of sources including the archaeological record, ethno-archaeology, historical archaeology, ethnographic evidence and early seminal works of historical significance.

A total of 531 cultural items were observed and the level of damage documented (Fig. 2). Beside physical observation, and interview of the traders revealed that handling and transportation are the main causes of material damage though some are damaged in the artificial aging process.

Nature of Damage	No.	%	Signs of Damage	Sample Artefacts
No damage	90	16.9	None	
Pest Attack	63	11.9	Perforations at the base	-milking/storage jugs
Transport/ Handling	120	22.6	Lip (edge)/body breakage	-spoons/fat containers
Fungus/Mold Attack	59	11.1	White powdery surfaces	- bowls, storage jugs
Function Related	21	4.0	Battered surfaces/depressions	-wooden bowls, basketry
Weathering/Cracks	24	4.5	Cracking and edge damage	-head rests, wooden cups
Intentional Aging	39	7.3	Food residue/smoking/sheep fat	-curio/replica/recent items
Multiple Causes	52	9.8	Pests/handling/weathering/mold	-wood/gourd tools
Corrosion	20	3.8	Yellowing surface	-spear points
Repaired	43	8.1	Aluminum / sisal and plastic	-gourds, wooden bowls
TOTAL	531	100		

Figure 2: Common forms of damage observed in this study

The cultural materials from prehistoric and ethnographic contexts observed in this study have been made from diverse materials. The main materials used were clay, wood, stones, animal products, plants and metal (Fig.4). Clay materials have been primarily used for the manufacture of pottery items. Pottery is a significant measure of technological and temporal development, aesthetic values of its makers as well as intra- and inter-group relationships⁸. Ceramics mirror the subtle changes in cultural traits of a society, while reflecting changes like diffusion of human groups and transmission of behaviour from generation to generation through stylistic variations in space and time⁹. Ceramic items have also been used in elaborate exchange patterns, which has contributed to their physical damage through poor handling and methods of transportation¹⁰.

Other than making pottery, clay has also been used for the production of items like mugs, necklaces and clay tobacco pipes. For example, among the Okiek, pottery products include honey pots, snuff grinding bowls, boiling and cooking pots, cups and clay tobacco pipes¹¹. Like stone tools, clay items have been

systematically replaced by exotic substitutes in most communities to the extent that most modern pottery vessels are either made for tourists or as flowerpots for the elite members of the society. However, cultural relics still remain in a number of communities, hence the need for their conservation for posterity.

Stones have been used for the manufacture of tools for the last 2.5 million year span of human ancestry. The abundance of this raw material, and its resistance to agents of deterioration has been instrumental in their extensive usage and survival through time. In modern times, materials made of stone have been virtually replaced by iron items and other exotic products which are less cumbersome and easy to use and transport. Stone figurines have been recorded in a number of African communities in areas like northeastern Yorubaland and the Bakongo of Lower Congo¹². In Kenya, soapstone carvings among the Kisii, and stone earplugs from the Nandi are typical examples of commercial and ethnographic usage of stone. Grinding stones have retained common usage among African communities since the inception of agriculture.

Animal products have also been frequently used in cultural material production. Such products include raw hides and leather, feathers, bones, ivory, cow tails (whisks), animal hair and shells. The materials have been commonly used for the production of a wide range of items including ornaments, charms, combs, containers, saddles, shields, straps, headdresses and garments in many communities (Fig. 3). However, due to their organic origin, most animal products are highly susceptible to deterioration. Nevertheless, Mineralized bones and shells are often recovered in good condition from archaeological sites.

Since the Early Iron Age period, the use of iron products has increased significantly in Kenya. In ethnographic contexts, iron has been mainly used in the manufacture of agricultural tools like hoes, axes and sickles, which are primarily used for clearing, digging, planting and harvesting. Iron has also been used for the production of various utilitarian implements like spearheads, arrowheads and knives. Iron materials were also used for the manufacture of ornaments like leg bells, earrings, bracelets, pendants and charms. Among pastoral communities, iron has been used for basic animal husbandry chores besides weaponry. Such materials include castrating tools, bleeding equipments, branding iron and livestock bells¹³. Indeed most communities in Eastern Africa have used iron implements in one form or another through time and their usage in modern times covers almost every aspect of life.

Vegetable materials have been used in the production of a variety of items including baskets, containers, strainers, mats, ropes, beddings, bark cloth, and flutes. Plant materials have also been used in traditional medicine and the manufacture of ceremonial regalia in a number of communities. More importantly, vegetable materials have been used as food. The conservation of food remains has, in most cases, been hampered by the processing methods used.

Raw Materials	Use/Function	Ethnic Groups Where Use/Function Recorded
Plant Products	Ordinary basket	Gusii, Kamba, Tharaka, Taita, Gusii, Batooro
	Pannier basket	Pokot, Turkana
	Wooden bowl	Digo, Rendille, Kamba, Turkana, Pokot, Kuria, Kipsigis,
	Head ring (for vessels)	Luo, Kuria, Turkana
	Wooden mug	Marakwet, Turkana, Giriama, Gusii, Boran
	Headrest	Pokot, Turkana
	Plate	Samburu, Batooro
	Apron	Mbeere, Elmolo

Animal Based	Hair ornament	Maasai, Pastoral Pokot
	Ear ring	Kamba
	Ear plug	Luo, Rendille, Bajun, Swahili
	Medicine/Charm	Luo, Igembe, Kamba, Tiriki
	Mask	Kuria
	Bell (neck of a cow)	Pokot, Maasai
Iron /other metals	Iron Axe	Kamba, Tiriki
	Sickle	Luyia, Kuria, Bukusu
	Weeding tool	Chuka, Meru
	Castrating tool	Kikuyu, Turkana
	Bleeding equipment	Igembe, Kamba
	Branding iron	Samburu, Gabra, Turkana
Clay Products	Clay Bowls	Luo, Mijikenda, Okiek
	Water pots	Kikuyu, Bukusu, Okiek
	Cooking pots	Bukusu, Mijikenda
	Honey pots	Bukusu, Okiek
	Ritual pots	Bukusu
Stone Products	Ear plugs	Nandi
	Grinding stones	Kamba, Mijikenda, Embu, Sirikwa
	Stone pumice	Tharaka
	Mifingiri (burial stones)	Taita
	Soap stone carving	Kisii
	Stone structures	Swahili

Figure 3: A sample of the materials analysed in this study (Source: Author)

Wood products were probably the earliest materials used by humans. However, wood materials are less resistant to the vagaries of nature, leading to poor visibility and subsequent recovery in archaeological contexts. Items made from wood will vary from utilitarian to non-utilitarian. Wooden bowls, cups, spoons, house posts, doors, combs, stools, head rests, spear and arrowshafts, hoes, ear stretchers and sickle blades are common in the ethnographic literature. Wood digging sticks are recorded in the oral histories of a number of Kenyan communities¹⁴. Wood has also been used for the production of figurines recorded among communities like the Zulu and Makonde¹⁵.

In Kenya, wood is still used by communities like the Samburu and Turkana in the production of domestic utensils like wooden bowls, plates, headrests, spoons, cups and milking jugs. Wood is particularly ideal because it can be easily carved into a variety of shapes without breaking. It is also light and easy to transport from one place to another particularly among the highly mobile nomadic pastoralists like the Turkana.

Loss of Tangible Heritage

This research investigates the deterioration of cultural materials in various stages of conservation in Kenya. It involves an analysis of materials in the hands of private collectors and museums. Materials in private collections were poorly handled due to poor conservation skills and lack sensitization among the collectors.

Among the Samburu, selling artifacts is a practice aimed at maintaining families away from the traditional economic pursuits¹⁶. This shift to the money economy has been prompted largely by the dictates of the

tourism industry coupled with unending poverty cycles attributable to global warming, which has a direct impact on traditional pastoralist modes of production. The practice of commoditization of heritage materials normally is characterised by the sale of traditional craft items like mats, woodcarvings, beadworks, gourds and other small items which have attracted many local dealers. From such dealers, the items find their way to the international markets like South Africa, Europe, Middle East and United States¹⁷. This is an expanding market-driven practice, which threatens cultural materials due to its present haphazard nature of operation, and lack of cohesive policies for heritage preservation in Kenya. While sale of artefacts for self-sustenance is justifiable, a clear distinction should be made between replicas, curios and heritage items. These distinctions have, unfortunately, been ignored by conservators and institutions charged with heritage conservation at large. For the local communities, the much needed sensitization is generally missing. This affects both natural and cultural heritage alike.

The artifacts observed in this study had been similarly sold to middlemen for onward transmission to the outside markets. The trade involves the sale of historic materials and replicas of such materials indiscriminately. In cases where replicas fail to attract traders and tourists, by extension, they are physically altered through anaging processes, like smoking or smearing of animal fat on their surfaces, to give them an antiquated look. Private collectors also age cultural materials using chemical agents which are potential conservation hazards if their consistency and potential reaction with the objects is not properly known. The resulting antiquated look is normally associated with authenticity which determines demand and profitability of trade in heritage products. Like in other trafficking cases, be it children or animals, the end justifies the means in this trade.

Trade in heritage materials is rampant in the country beyond the study area. In some cases, direct theft and trafficking of materials from the past has been recorded. A pathetic case is the extraction and recycling of materials from ancient monuments for use in the construction of modern houses in Pate and Shanga Islands or the removal of vigango burial carvings from their original ritual sites among the Giriama into the hands of museums, universities, private collectors and tourists through an elaborately executed illicit trade¹⁸. Materials moved in this manner are decontextualised and difficult to recover thereafter (Fig.5).

Many shortcomings were also observed in the handling, movement and storage of the cultural materials. The displacement of materials from their *in situ* position, for example, translates into a loss of context and cultural meaning. It was extremely difficult to trace the origins of some of the materials because of decontextualization and virtual lack of documentation other than word of mouth. In a discussion with the collectors, it became apparent that materials from Southern Sudan and those from northern Kenya had been mixed and they could not tell them apart.

(a) Types of Raw Materials			
Plant Materials	Animal Products	Inorganic Materials	
Wood	Bone materials	Ferrous iron	
Building materials	Leather products	Ceramic products	
Fabrics	Horns	Lithic materials	
Paints and pigments	Feathers	Glass/shell beads	
Food plants	Paints and pigments		
(b) General causes and nature of damage			
Plant Products	Animal Products	Iron Materials	Clay Items
Cellulose collapse	Loss of bone porosity/density	Air moisture	Weathering
Leaching of starch/ sugar	Organic/inorganic Breakdown	Water Corrosion	Organic sulphides
Fluctuations in RH	Petrification	Sulphate- reducing bacteria	Biotic/pest attack
Fungus and mould	Hydrolysis and leaching	Soil Corrosion	Salt contamination
Insect attacks- woodborers	Variations in Soil PH levels	Light and pigments	
Temperature fluctuations	Microorganism and biotic attack	Pollutants	
Air pollution	Display methods and U-V radiation	Mishandling/use	
Poor display/handling	High RH (warping and cracking)	RH and pigments	
Dirt and dust	Low RH causing embrittlement	Repair methods	
Water absorption	Pollutants and soluble salts		
Exposure to UV radiation	Poor handling		

Figure 4: Common sources of materials and nature of damage (source Author)

Financial resources available to the individual collectors normally influence collection procedures. In the cases observed, little or no attention was given to the actual origin or context of the materials, as, for most dealers, what mattered was the end profit. This reduces the cultural value of such materials as *ex situ* exhibits. This scenario doesn't seem to deter potential buyers who are more interested in a piece of heritage from Africa irrespective of its specific origin.

Financial constraints also contribute to poor material storage. Most materials in the hands of private collectors are usually lumped together without due consideration of variations in age, material resistance to deterioration and micro-environmental fluctuations. Ideally, this means that materials are exposed to similar conditions in the storage facility, even in cases where their sensitivity varies. The varying densities of cultural materials in storage are at times ignored to the detriment of lighter materials (Fig. 1d).

Treatment of cultural materials is also influenced by financial considerations with more expensive and effective conservation materials being ignored for cheap products like paraffin in the protection against pests while sawdust and super glue are used as sealants and consolidants. The stability of these cultural materials is in most cases ignored. In tropical environments, where weather fluctuations are significant, the implications are quite serious. This is further complicated by exposure to direct sunlight and uncontrolled fluctuations in relative humidity within poorly maintained display areas like open-air markets with little or no environmental controls. This leads to uncontrolled weathering of cultural materials. Such problems were not observed in public galleries and museums where government funding and donations are used to alleviate the problem.



Fig. 5: Recycling of cultural materials from ancient monuments in Pate Island, Lamu(source: Author).

Fig. 5 shows massive destruction of an ancient city wall in Pate Island where ancient materials are recycled in the construction of new houses. The pointed pile of coral rag was extracted from the ancient and was awaiting transport to the new construction site for a private house. In most communities, the value of heritage has not been fully appreciated due to poor sensitization by conserving institutions. Private collectors are also not conversant with the basic methods of cultural material handling. Materials whose actual age is unknown are likely to suffer significantly from uncontrolled collection and handling. In case of Lamu, the listing of the Old Town led to virtual neglect of all other sites and well known sand dunes. Pate has been on the receiving end of 'increased economic environmental and social pressure on heritage sites' which is a global challenge¹⁹.

The Antiquities and Monuments Act(1984),The National Museums and Heritage Act (2009),identified two classes of antiquity materials as "objects of archaeological or palaeontological interest" which were in existence before the year 1800 and "objects of historical interest" which came into existence in or after the year 1800. This is a rather broad and confusing classification has been continually exploited by dealers in cultural materials. Replicas should have been clearly defined in the act not to be confused with cultural heritage. There should also be an attempt to patent original cultural items as a remedy against their duplication outside the producing community for increased benefits.

According to the The National Museums and Heritage Act (2009), the excavation, removal, possession or sale of such objects must be authorised by the Minister concerned while the custodianship is with the National Museums²⁰. With increasing levels of poverty and the haphazard development of cultural tourism, this rule is not strictly adhered to. This calls for harmonization on the issues of cultural conservation with due consideration of the communities in which the cultural materials are made for patenting in recognition of human and cultural rights. The current practice of gazettelement of cultural property in private land should be revisited with a view to providing technical and financial support for such land owners for the protection of

monuments in their custody. Traditionally, the past practices tended to alienate individuals and communities from custodial heritage property ownership thereby making heritage discovery a cause for fear and dissent. The provision for county governments and the decentralization of museums in the current constitution, when fully implemented, will be a step in the right direction.

Most private collectors invest in material culture as a venture which is entirely dependent on profit from tourism. For developing countries, this would be an opportunity cost given that tourism is not usually dependable, particularly due to insecurity and travel warnings, while other income-generating projects would require less conspicuous space for similar or better returns. However, poverty motivates communities to engage in such activities. The most ideal locations for the display of cultural materials for business purposes would have to be easily accessible. This has led to the development of Village Tourist Centres (VTC) in urban areas. There are enormous challenges associated with space in urban centres. Space is usually limited, expensive and susceptible to pollution, which facilitates the process of deterioration.

Policies on the acquisition and sale of cultural materials make it difficult for private collectors to use orthodox means in removing materials from their *in situ* context, as there are no proper guidelines on what can and cannot be sold. The public should, therefore, be fully sensitized on the significance of cultural materials at all levels from acquisition to disposal. Proper guidance and policies would ensure that damage is significantly reduced. Professional conservators can sensitize the public and amateur collectors on the need for discipline in handling such materials. Through discipline, the true value of cultural materials, their proper documentation, and environmental considerations as well as ethics of conservation and treatment can be appreciated. With proper policies in place, the public becomes more responsive to conservation thereby ensuring continued enjoyment of cultural heritage.

The mixing of small and large objects with varying densities in packaging has been a major challenge in the transportation of materials by private collectors from one point to another. For the materials studied in this project, transportation usually takes place in rough terrains and the mode of transportation may vary from the use of camels and donkeys to motorized forms, like lorries and buses. Each of these modes is chosen on the basis of the nature of the terrain, distance and resources available. Most of the breakages observed in ethnographic materials emanated from poor transportation and handling procedures. This was particularly severe among large objects with thin outer walls like gourds and wooden vessels. Generally, mixing of objects of differing densities on transit facilitates attrition leading to high levels of damage, particularly on low-density materials. A number of materials required liberal use of protective padding and shockproof boxes for safe transportation. For the middleman, who source and transport the materials, this is considered to be an unnecessary expense partly due to ignorance and financial implications of such a move. For the collector, the amount of revenue accruing from the trade in an unpredictable and competitive tourist market may not warrant the extra expense. In a nutshell therefore, poor transport methods combined with pathetic storage conditions, lack of material support systems, poor display, poor sanitary conditions, inadequate storage facility and poor maintenance tend to shorten the life of cultural materials significantly.

The proper collection and storage of cultural materials is usually hampered by virtual lack of standardized professional procedures, inadequate legal structures, insufficient training in conservation policies and lack of resources. Expertise is, therefore, necessary for proper conservation of cultural materials. Proper conservation can only be achieved through proper documentation, examination and interpretation of materials for treatment when necessary. The value of heritage items has often eluded private collectors and

traffickers in Kenya, thereby leading to the progressive loss of the artistic, physical, socio-cultural and economic significance of monuments and antiquities. Strict implementation of the current constitution in areas of cultural rights is likely to reverse the situation.

Discussions

Ethno-archaeological and ethnographic studies have shown that traditional crafts are usually the preserve of poor members of the community who use them as sources of income and subsistence. This has been observed among potters from different parts of the world including the Kikuyu of Central Kenya²¹. Among the Zorumawa Fulani, potting was mainly the work of impoverished widows, who lacked alternative sources of income²². Traditions from the area indicate that in the past potters were mainly slaves or freed slaves, an indication that potting was the profession of the poor and helpless who had no other alternative source of income²³. Similarly, Fulani potters of North Cameroon were poor women who lacked family and especially husband's external support and who were ready to quit the craft whenever their fortune changed²⁴.

These examples demonstrate that cultural heritage is prone to demise in the face of profitable alternative modes of income generation. The introduction of cash crops and substitute exotic factory products has been instrumental in the demise of traditional material culture production since the onset of colonial rule. The new modes of globally liberalized income generation and resource exploitation coupled with worldwide preference for less statism and political boundaries makes it easier for the trafficking of cultural materials in lieu of proper policy guidelines²⁵. However, using the same avenue, communities could be empowered to make a decent income through the sale of cultural heritage replicas - in the form of curios - both locally and internationally. This requires the implementation of appropriate legal procedures and policies that are geared towards recognition of artists, heritage protection and poverty alleviation among genuine custodians of culture.

There is need to appreciate that culture is part of a transnational commodity in the neo-liberal economic system which can be positively nurtured for income generation. Cultural heritage is also a unique indicator of ethnic identity and expression of life experiences. Failure to appreciate this would lead to virtual loss of national identity in a multicultural world dominated by the western culture. Conversely, cultural heritage, if poorly exhibited, can coalesce into cultural domination of one group by another²⁶. Proper exhibition of culture must take cognizance of the fact that Kenyan cultural identity is a fusion of diverse past experiences including traditional belief systems, modern religious beliefs, colonial heritage and western ideologies and taste.

The concept of museums in former colonial states is a western creation aimed at highlighting curious objects of art, or curios, emanating from different ethnic groups at different periods in time²⁷. To a large extent this involved a reasonable degree of prejudice against colonized communities and the idea was thereafter embraced by newly emerging independent states to enhance social cohesion or to propel individual leaders to power and perpetrate their rule through cultural dominance²⁸. In Kenya, traditional dances became the preserve of leaders, only performed to entertain them during special occasions especially during the reigns of the first two presidents. Similarly, expressive and material heritage were converted into instruments of entertainment for tourists in major urban hotels and centres of attraction close to wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and game reserves. This essentially led to individualization and commercialization of national heritage thereby alienating the stakeholders at community level. This transforms culture from an *in situ* to *ex situ* environment, leading to potential loss of message, content and the object itself. The emergence of

Village Tourist Centres (VTCs) in urban areas like Bomas of Kenya enhanced the process of alienation of culture from genuine custodians.

Poor exhibition of material culture leads to fossilisation or museumisation of 'living culture', which is detrimental to the organic and evolutionary nature of cultural heritage²⁹. This is particularly the case when national heritage is biased and, therefore, not reflective of the cultural complexity and aspirations of a given nation. Individual items are usually part of a complex living culture and their removal from the natural setting is detrimental as they cease to perform in tandem with the socio-cultural needs of the community.

Communities, where cultural materials are selectively exhibited or conserved, tend to be stereotyped on the basis of single or disjointed out of context items and in the long run what people see as genuine or authentic heritage is based on the intuitive of the conservator or the needs of tourists³⁰. In most cases, evolution of material culture is usually ignored in the name of "authentication", based on biased selection. Authentication of cultural heritage should accommodate historical process to be relevant to emergent and non-traditional tourist markets.

For cultural heritage to survive the onslaught of neo-liberalism, there is an urgent need to reconsider our approach to cultural conservation. This involves more community participation in the identification and interpretation of cultural heritage for the sake of posterity. Ignoring the importance of custodians is tantamount to alienating the main stakeholders in national heritage conservation.

With the never-ending travel advisories and threats of terrorism, potential tourists will largely remain domestic. Such domestic tourists can only appreciate their culture, if it is a true representation of the traditional heritage and national aspirations. Museums must address this issue in order to exploit the large market of domestic travellers and cultural enthusiasts that remains untapped.

The demise of cultural property through vandalism could be permanently arrested, if the communities were encouraged to be co-owners and joint beneficiaries of cultural conservation projects. This should be sanctified as one of the moral obligations of conservators of cultural heritage. Museums, universities, private collectors and dealers have to a large extent been responsible for the extensive removal of materials from their traditional settings to distant repositories. This method of removing cultural materials from their '*in situ*' context ignores the contribution of communities as potential conservators. Conservation of immovable objects, at times, involves restriction of communities from monuments that they have always lived with. Co-existence should be encouraged as a form of conservation, through the initiation of village based museums without turning villages into museums which is equally counterproductive³¹.

As the level of disposable incomes among developing nations increases and information technology advances, as is the case among Asian countries, future international travelers are more likely to be non-traditional, Europeans and Americans, and keenly interested in cultural ecology than individual anthropological items that have no authentic contextual value³². The colonial linkage which has, in the past, served as a key motivator for tourists is threatened by generational change. The older generation of 'colonial' tourists is being systematically outnumbered by the youthful ones who see the world differently³³.

The colonial perception of cultural heritage as a set of anthropological items (curios) will have to be revised if potential future tourists are to enjoy it. The cultural ecology, hence eco-tourism, is likely to be more

attractive as travellers become more inclined towards 'living culture'. This requires that the field of conservation is re-engineered to meet emerging tastes with due consideration of the local content, through community involvement, and a redefinition of heritage to include outstanding interactions between people and the environment, attachment to places, or 'cultural landscapes', and recognition of traditional methods of conservation³⁴.

The commercialization of copies of cultural heritage should be encouraged if proper marketing strategies are observed to protect communities from exploitation. Creation of village repositories, representing a whole spectrum of cultural heritage, constitutes a better form of cultural material exhibition for tourism purposes than centralized museums or Village Tourist Centres. This spirit is entrenched in the new constitution which has the potential of transforming cultural heritage into a fruitful income-generating venture at community level. This should be done in such a way that communities benefit directly from the emerging trends of eco-tourism. For conservators, the concept of eco-tourism necessitates proper documentation of materials that symbolize the cultural heritage of respective communities free from western conception of culture deep-rooted in the colonial history³⁵. This creates a living culture far from the static cultural displays traditionally associated with our museums and galleries.

The current trend of global warming characterised by an increase in carbon emissions in the biosphere is likely to impact negatively on cultural heritage materials. A rise in sea level, resulting from global warming, is expected to inundate some of the barrier islands and alter the East African coastal cultural landscape by 2030 if temperatures increase by an average of 1 degree as projected³⁶. Ancient monuments would not be spared in such events. Such changes would create an ideal environment for micro-organisms and fungus which would increase aggression towards heritage³⁷. Increase in biotic attacks and chemical weathering of cultural materials, if not outright destruction, would lead to further loss assuming that the projected scenarios prevail. Conservators should heighten the state of preparedness through proper disaster management strategies and information sharing among stakeholders, both locally and internationally.

With the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya in 2010 and the revision of the National Museums and Heritage Act Cap 216 in 2009, heritage conservation has a brighter future in Kenya than ever before. It has also stipulated higher fines and jail terms for offences associated with heritage. The Act also provides a more candid definition of cultural heritage to include monuments, architectural works, sculpture, paintings, archaeological sites and

*'..... combined works of nature and humanity that are considered to be of outstanding value from a historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view'*³⁸.

The recognition of culture as the foundation of the nation in Chapter 2 of the constitution, and the inclusion of language and culture in the bill of rights, together with explicit commitment by the state to promote and protect heritage is a notable accomplishment³⁹. With the implementation of the new constitution, it is expected that loss of heritage through illicit trade and neglect will be brought under tight control. One would also expect that the complicated process of retrieval of lost heritage materials can be initiated through legal procedures. The problem of lost heritage is, however, not unique to Kenya but a global one with severe repercussions on former colonies like the Pacific Islands⁴⁰. This is complicated by the 'haphazard manner' in which museums were developed to accommodate decontextualised collections made by individuals as

'residues' or curious objects from the past⁴¹. This way, the historical context of heritage was systematically lost. Incidentally, the cycle of loss has been re-ignited in the process of closer global integration as the demand for 'well preserved antiquities for the international arts markets' increases⁴².

Conclusions

For cultural heritage to be of national significance, conservators and stakeholders in heritage conservation must develop policies that would preserve and directly benefit communities, or the rightful custodians of culture. Patenting of the local heritage under the intellectual property rights should be considered seriously by developing nations like Kenya.

Cultural heritage preservation should be done through proper ethical considerations and professionalism. This requires close cooperation between the public and the private sector in the promotion of culture for posterity and national development. If professionally interpreted and conserved, cultural heritage can enhance social cohesion and economic development. Where appropriate, the National Museums and Heritage Act (2009) should be updated and strengthened to protect against illicit trafficking of material culture, which has a long history, through stiffer penalties. The current emphasis on control rather than management of cultural resources seems to perpetuate colonial attitude towards Africans, in general, and African cultural heritage, in particular. Communities must be given an upper hand in the management of their resources.

In the face of globalization and multi-culturalism, however, modern cultural forms are likely to be multifaceted in character, as a reflection of socio-spatial interactions in space, which has its own unique appeal. Such forms of arts should also be promoted and allowed to systematically evolve in a multicultural environment without interference. Conservators should use appropriate modes of communication to raise public awareness on the importance of cultural heritage for continued relevance of cultural assets. Failure to do this would make cultural heritage alien to potential beneficiaries, our progenitors.

Endnotes

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