¶ Introduction

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Since UNESCO adopted the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972 (Unesco 1972), a veritable 'heritage boom' occurred in different sectors of academic, governmental, and commercial activity (Lindgren 1997). Among other things, heritage (a) has become a major matter of interest in many branches of scientific research and education, (b) features in countless governmental and non-governmental schemes of conservation and development, and (c) is the object of manifold popular and commercial ventures which hinge on notions of geodiversity, biodiversity and cultural diversity, and which find their experimentation in media and tourism. On all three accounts, 'heritage' is also very important with regard to Africa and by the choice of this theme for its first annual symposium, the Ghent Africa Platform (GAP) asserts that the time has come to asses both the outcomes and the limits of the heritage boom in Africa.

Studying, governing, possessing

Scientists have been involved in important projects of stock-taking and monitoring, description and exposition of African cultural and natural heritage. Two examples of partly Belgium-based projects are revelatory in these respects. One of the two projects is the Geographical Information System SYGIAP *(Système de Gestion d'Information pour les Aires Protégées)* which Philippe De Maeyer will talk about at this symposium and that monitors the five World Heritage properties of DR Congo. The other instance is the 2004-2006 exhibition 'Congo: Nature and Culture in the Democratic Republic of Congo' which was held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris before coming to the Royal Museum of Central Africa at Tervuren. This exhibition focused, among other things, on the links between natural and cultural heritage. Unsurprisingly, both UNESCO-supported scientific projects pay a lot of attention to the fact that much of DR Congo's natural heritage is under threat. The fact that all five of DR Congo's world heritage sites are on the 'in danger' list, is more or less in line with the figures about heritage in Africa in general. Although less than one tenth of the total number of world heritage sites are African, that continent accommodates more than one third of world heritage *in danger* (http://whc.unesco.org/en/danger/). Like in the case of DR Congo, in other places in Africa also, one can observe connections between the impossibility to safeguard and admin-

ister the heritage sites and an overall situation of 'anarchy' or multiplex power arrangements sometimes accompanied by violent strife. However, also in times of peace, heritage raises questions of governance, power-sharing and accountability (Dicks 2003).

While heritage and heritage projects – such as the two mentioned above – almost by definition include translocal, national and international actors, they cannot be conceived without firm local involvement in the form of, for instance, participatory conservation or community-based management. This may be a question of democratic control or economic redistribution, but also a matter of expertise (see African case-studies in UNESCO 2004: 58-94). Both in natural and cultural heritage programmes attention is given to 'local knowledge'. In projects all around Africa, this local expertise is 'heritagized' in its own right, as 'intangible heritage', and recognized as indigenous knowledge in the form of memories, customary practices, folk classifications, ethnobotanica, 'traditional' institutions that have participatory and/or redistributive functions, etc (Mammo 1999).

If national governments and (inter)national NGOs recast (in complexes of shared governance) local forms of organisation, performance and expertise as heritage, they may trigger processes of (self)reification which dovetail with the way media and tourism have been commodifying heritage for at least a century (Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994). Thus, heritage, whether listed by UNESCO, promoted by national public-private enterprises or commercialised by 'glocal' entrepreneurs, is an increasingly important basis of revenue for low-income countries, although not necessarily for the majority of its low-income citizens and sections of the local population (Jordan 2005). We must therefore ask ourselves to what an extent, more than two decades into the heritage boom, heritage remains for several stakeholders, particularly in Africa, the product or the onset of global intrusion and dispossession in the absence of sustainable emancipation and sovereignty (Kaneff & King 2004) .

This, in the end, raises the central issue of reproduction. While heritage is habitually defined as 'that which has come from the past into the present and with which we build the future', it remains to be seen to what an extent heritage realises the dreams of sustainability and social and cultural regeneration which it nourishes.

Reproducing heritage: assessments and critiques

The first GAP symposium offers a multidisciplinary platform for reflection on heritage in science, governance, and commerce and invites its participants to assess its outcomes and explore its limits. Beyond the traditional categories of natural and cultural, tangible and intangible heritage, contributors are invited to consider also the cross-cutting category of 'human heritage', ranging from genetic heritage to embodied knowledge, from hereditary traits to 'structures of feeling' and ethic dispositions. Perhaps more than anything else 'human heritage' provokes questions concerning heritage and/as reproduction. Not surprisingly two papers at the symposium – one presented by Kristien Michielsen and the other by Marleen Praet – deal with HIV/AIDS, a syndrome which instils deadly risks into the very act and process of human reproduction. In more general terms, the heritage and/as reproduction framework which is proposed here, invites contributors to document and problematize cases of heritage production and management.

a. First things first: taking stock of heritage in Africa

Although the call for papers insisted perhaps more on the 'problematizing' aspect rather than on the 'conservation' aspect of heritagization, many of the papers deal partly or mainly with the latter. This in itself could be taken as an indication that scholars see a considerable challenge of documenting chunks of African heritage, and seeking ways of putting these to good use, not in the least in projects related to biodiversity, sustainable development, and other contemporary and future concerns. This work of taking stock of heritage in Africa seemingly receives priority over assessing the transformations which this recategorisation (as heritage) brings about, both for its physical condition and for the way it is used, exploited or otherwise interpreted.

Perhaps one of the least expected forms of natural heritage that are being discussed at the symposium is that of 'marine sediment', which Dirk Verschuren in his paper uses as evidence of paleoenvironmental evolution (read: climate change) on the African continent. A related ecological concern can be read in the way Christine Cocquyt *et al.* deal with a very different kind of natural heritage: a historical collection of algae. The latter serves as a basis for assessing contemporary biodiversity. Further in the sense of exploiting Africa's biodiversity Patrick Van Damme and Céline Termote delve into "botanical heritage" and explore possibilities for the development of new crops and their introduction into global markets. Guy Haegeman presents a concrete instance of identifying and assessing new compounds from a Namibian desert plant. It concerns the extraction of an anti-inflammatory compound from 'salt bush' (Salsola) plants which San women have been using as an oral contraceptive. Finding new uses for known plants is what Roland Verhé does by proposing to produce biodiesel from palm oil. Anticipating a possible critique of sustainability, Verhé explains that in this case biofuel does not impinge on human nutrition as the palm oil fractions which are used are not very suitable for human consumption.

In the register of cultural heritage, Johan Lagae's paper on colonial architecture concerns the category of built heritage, while Mena Lafkioui focuses on orality as intangible heritage. Excitingly enough neither of them stay within these heritage categories. While Johan Lagae opens his considerations regarding colonial heritage to present-day memories, and oral and written recollections, Mena Lafkioui brings in new media and looks at how the Internet, for instance, functions in the mediation of orality.

b. Heritage ambivalently combines notions of perpetuation and change.

In the same way that in genetics, the problematic of perpetuation and change in genetic transmission is not exhausted by the distinction between 'tenacious' mitochondrial DNA and more 'volatile' nuclear DNA, also in the social and cultural domain the issues surrounding tradition and renewal are particularly intricate. More often than not, natural and cultural heritage are understood in terms of 'timelessness': of what has survived from the remote past in the sense that it has remained more or less the same beyond the ravages of time. Conversely, heritage can also be considered as the relics of history, consisting of mere disfigured traces and dumb vestiges of an illegible past which is being revamped in the hegemonic present. Above all, heritage is best understood as what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls 'meta-

cultural production': "despite a discourse of conservation, [...] re-creation, recuperation, revitalization, and regeneration, heritage produces something new in the present that has recourse to the past" (1998: 149).

For that reason, contributors to this symposium had been called upon to situate heritage in concrete political histories and political economies of the exploration/exploitation, in other words, the production, of history, tradition, custom, remnants, sediments, heritage, or whatever other label is used to designate tangible and intangible instances of 'the past'. More than theoretical or classificatory attempts to disambiguate the old and the new in heritage, the call for papers suggested that heritage studies would profit from case-studies which document and analyse how, in concrete settings in Africa, perpetuation and change are dealt with, for instance in situations of restoration/reconstruction of buildings or biotopes, or in situations of extracting and applying indigenous knowledge in agricultural projects.

Several papers take up the challenge of dealing with the issues of perpetuation and change. With respect to natural heritage, Patrick Van Damme & Céline Termote look into the trajectory that leads from ethnobotanical know-how to new crop development, while Christine Cocquyt et al. assess changes in biodiversity based on early 20th century collections of diatom flora. A similar concern with change and potential decline underlies the SYGIAP project which, as Philippe De Maeyer explains, basically consists in monitoring five Congolese natural parks using, among other things, satellite images. By bringing in also historical data which are kept in several Belgian scientific institutes, it is also possible to detect more long-term alterations and possible threats to the five Congolese parks which are also listed as World Heritage sites. While the above dynamics of change – commoditisation of useful plants or the shifts in, and general degradation of, biodiversity, and the war or chaos-driven threat to natural reserves – can be rather far going, among the most publicized developments are climate change and the ICT revolution. The latter is taken into account by Mena Lafkioui in her survey of orality in local and transnational Berber communication. The former is directly addressed by Dirk Verschuren who sets out to look at the veritable *longue-durée* of climate change in Africa. Indirectly, also Roland Verhé takes up the problem of climate change, petroleum shortage and CO2 emissions, by proposing a new source of sustainable biodiesel.

c. Heritage ambivalently combines processes of possession and dispossession.

World heritage objects and sites are not fortuitously called world heritage 'possessions'. Due to 'cultural objectification' (Thomas 1992), reification and even essentialization often accompanied by processes of commoditisation, heritage readily invokes matters of ownership and custody. 'Owning' heritage certainly brings particular responsibilities in the form of stewardship, sustainable management, scientific documentation, etc. At least for some groups, this may have an immediate return in the form of material profits (cultural industry, tourism) or in terms of identity-building endeavours. Heritage ownership is always collective in a multiscalar way: it may provide the local community with a sense of belonging and identity, but it also to some extent belongs to wider communities, not in the least world heritage which is claimed to be part of humanity's eternal legacy.

The call for papers invited participants to present case-studies for instance of natural parks management in combination with indigenous peoples' land claims, in order to shed some light on how heritage projects, because of their inherent 'glocal' character, walk the thin line between possession and dispossession. Although several papers touch upon this issue, one paper – by Johan Lagae – explicitly thematises the issue of (symbolic) ownership in pointing to built heritage in former colonial territories as 'shared' and, indeed, 'repossessed'. Critical in this respect is the issue of re-appropriation of urban places and of history through local 'memory work'.

'Heritage' again

Beyond documenting, analysing and questioning heritage and/as reproduction in Africa, the call for papers invited contributors to submit the concept of heritage as well as concrete heritage projects to cultural critiques. In its hegemonic discourse and homogenising gesture, 'heritage' may obscure the historically and culturally specific way in which people live with the past and prepare for the future. Although none of the papers addresses these issues directly, I can only hope that in the discussions among participants of the symposium questions of ethnocentricity are raised. In these debates, one is not so much looking for scientifically, culturally or historically alternative ways of dealing with 'heritage', as reaching for alternatives *to* 'heritage' – for 'alterheritage' ways of dealing with the presence and future of the African past.

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