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*UNESCO action plans as dispositifs of canonisation.*

*The woodcrafting knowledge of the Zafimaniry of Madagascar.*

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**ABSTRACT:**

Ethnographic accounts of the implementation and impact of safeguarding measures upon the communities of practitioners in postcolonial settings are still relatively small in number. This article reports in-depth ethnographic data on the heritagisation process and plan of action for safeguarding the woodcrafting knowledge of the Zafimaniry of Madagascar, aiming to foster an empirically grounded debate on the uses of heritage in such contexts. The study argues that the inventorying and trademarking act as dispositifs of canonisation imposed upon intangible cultural heritage, and produce its social institutionalisation, whereby new bureaucratic structures are put in place to mediate the spontaneous ways 'local practitioners' define and practice their knowledge. Outlining the connective capacity of the heritagisation process to establish relationships between different fields – political, economic, cultural- the article highlights the controversial power/knowledge relations arising in the designation and management process, and the links between the UNESCO recognition and economics.

**KEYWORDS:** Postcolonial context, Heritage designation, Action plans for safeguarding, Ethnography, Commodification.

## **Introduction**

It has become commonplace in heritage studies to highlight how heritage is an integral part of globalising processes (Labadi and Long 2010; Harrison 2015). Harrison (2015, 297) describes such processes as ‘a series of material and discursive interventions, which actively remake the world in particular ways’. UNESCO normative logic for safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) represents one example of such a relationship between heritage and globalisation, as it facilitates the penetration of global ideologies of conservation and transmission – with their standard procedures and techniques validated by external experts- into the local understanding of cultural practices. These procedures operate as a form of canonisation. In *The Power of the Written Tradition* (2000), Jack Goody describes this process as a deliberate selection ratified by cultural elites who by fixing dynamics forms of expression (such as oral transmission) through written texts validate them over time. For Goody, the textual continuity represents a form of power over knowledge, imposing permanence on its ever-changing fluidity and introducing an external parameter of authority to value its transformations.

This article presents how such a process of canonisation unfolds in the case of ‘the woodcrafting knowledge of the Zafimaniry of Madagascar’, a practice inscribed on the UNESCO list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003 on the initiative of the Malagasy government, and included in the Representative List of the ICH in

2008. The analysis explores how international procedures are implemented at a local level and what kind of impact they produce. The argument seeks to disentangle the controversial power/knowledge relations arising in the designation and management process, and the links between the UNESCO recognition and economics, intended as the active encouragement of creative entrepreneurship and tourism development.

Although a rich corpus of theoretical literature has critically examined various aspects of ICH's conceptualisation, ethnographic accounts of the implementation and impacts of safeguarding measures upon the communities of practitioners in postcolonial and aid-dependent settings are still relatively small in number (De Jong 2007; 2013; Leblon 2012; Mancinelli 2017; 2019). Drawing on the ethnographic analysis of the heritagisation process and plan of action for safeguarding, the article reports in-depth ethnographic data to foster an empirically grounded debate on the uses of heritage in such contexts. The study argues that an international heritage designation serves ideological goals but also economic ones (Bendix 2018; Lixinski 2019). Heritage moves a practice across different value regimes, enhancing the international visibility of culture to intertwine it with questions of ownership and market value. Achieving this goal, however, implies privileging the dominant authorised heritage discourse (AHD) (Smith 2006) and its globalising governmentality over native ontologies of heritage. Inscribing an item to a UNESCO list entails implementing standard safeguarding measures, such as inventorying and trademarking. These practices act as dispositifs of canonisation imposed upon ICH, and produce its social institutionalisation, whereby new bureaucratic structures are put in place to mediate the spontaneous ways 'local practitioners' define and practice their knowledge (Hafstein 2018). The notion of the dispositif refers to Foucault's work on governmentality, where he defines it as 'a device or technology that specifies (and hence helps to create) a subject' (Harrison 2015, 307) with the purpose of controlling and managing it (Rabinow 2003). The implementation of a dispositif is thus strictly associated with dynamics of appropriation

and control. As highlighted by Bendix (2009, 260), ‘if ennobling a cultural practice to the status of heritage is a process of canonisation, any such process is also ultimately accompanied by an interest in utilisation’. In the case analysed in this paper, the UNESCO label creates a strategic economic resource manageable by an extended network of actors (tourism stakeholders, governmental bodies, art collectors), showing the connective capacity of heritage (Franquesa 2013) to establish relationships between different areas of interest- political, economic, and cultural. Aside of the notion of the *dispositif*, the analysis relies also on the notion of *assemblage*, which is used to explain the ways heterogeneous material and non-material entities such as institutional organisations, systems of thinking, norms, objects and cultural practices come together in the making of heritage, facilitating a constellation of power/knowledge relations.

In its theoretical model, the notion of ICH pinpoints a significant transformation in the consideration of cultural heritage, expanding it from a universe of monuments to non-material elements of culture, such as language, music, dance, types of craft and other performative practices. Embracing cultural relativism (Harrison and Rose 2010), ICH addresses heritage in a processual and anthropological way (Bortolotto 2007; 2011), as a dynamic and diverse resource that people consider important to establish their sense of identity. One of the cornerstone of this broadened notion of heritage is the valorisation of ‘mental categories’ (Bendix 2011, 101), a set of performative intellectual activities recreated over time, which are concisely summed up in article 2.1 of the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2003). Previous studies (Nas 2002; Amselle 2004; van Zanten 2004) highlight, however, how the measures for ICH safeguarding contradict this approach to human knowledge and creativity as ever changing and constantly re-created through practice. The lists and action plans can result in the fossilisation of cultural practices (Smith 2006) on

the one hand, while on the other hand inevitably lead to focus on issues of intellectual property (Bendix 2011).

The notion of ICH also serves political ends, as it responds to the need to balance the North-South divide on the world heritage map (Maguet 2011), mostly concentrated in Europe. Understanding how this intention to exit European cultural colonialism is put into practice, however, calls to critically investigate the agency of the social actors involved in the heritagisation process to demonstrate to what extent it actually empowers traditional owners, or if, on the contrary, it serves hegemonic intentions. The power/knowledge relations that underpin the making of heritage can be usefully explored through the analytical lens of assemblage and the *dispositif*. As argued by Harrison (2015, 307) ‘recent approaches to the globalisation of heritage have sought to show how it might be understood as a strategic sociotechnical and/or biopolitical assemblage composed of various people, institutions, apparatuses (*dispositifs*) and the relations between them’. Thinking of heritage in these terms, he continues, allows one to observe how agency is distributed across different collectives, while simultaneously evaluating the ‘governmental capacities’ of such sociotechnical components. With this array of theoretical orientations in mind, this article will start by looking at the dominant ideology of conservation applied to nature, to show how it contrasts with a native ontology of heritage. The analysis then moves to examine the colonial narrative about Zafimaniry woodcarving, highlighting how it introduces a focus on their material culture and produces its first industrialisation. The following sections delve in the different measures of the action plan for safeguarding, exposing the tensions between institutional intentions and local needs. The final discussion highlights the controversies of safeguarding the intangible, observing its explicit connection with economic ideologies and entrepreneurial strategies.

The study builds on a diversified corpus of data acquired during three field studies lasting a total duration of 12 months (2008-2012). In addition to participant observation in three

Zafimaniry villages, I conducted approximately 40 in-depth interviews on a local, regional and national level, soliciting the resource persons and various other agents who participated in the designation process. Simultaneously, I carried out archival research at the Direction of Cultural Heritage (DCH), where I analysed the application materials and meeting reports, focusing on the processual part of the designation and the data produced by a team of experts. Interviews were conducted in French and Malagasy, in part with the help of a local translator, while the textual materials analysed were written in French and, on occasion, in Malagasy. Since conducting fieldwork, I have followed up on the periodic report submitted to UNESCO by Madagascar in 2012 and reviewed similar cases from different geographical contexts, corroborating that the process described outlines controversies that might be recurrent in the management of ICH.

### **Madagascar on the global map of heritage conservation: contrasting ontologies**

The forest is the basis for the definition of the Zafimaniry [...] Therefore, as it is the forest that defines our identity, once it has disappeared, we will no longer be Zafimaniry (Rakoto, local tour-guide and farmer, personal communication).

The Zafimaniry inhabit an isolated mountainous region in the central highlands of Madagascar and are related to the Merina and the Betsileo, the major ethnic groups of this area (Coulaud 1973; Bloch 1975). They count approximately 30.000 people living in some 50 villages and hamlets. Traditionally swidden cultivators, the close relation with the forest has historically helped them to develop abilities and practical knowledge revolving around the multiple uses of wood for everyday living. The unique architecture of their traditional houses (*tranomena*) and perched granaries, entirely assembled with mortise and tenon joints without the use of nails or other metal hardware, constitute the most visible embodiment of this knowledge. Originally,

the houses were made to be eventually dismantled and built elsewhere, following the nomadic patterns of shifting cultivation. The surfaces of their structures (walls, window frames, posts and beams) display elaborate bas-relief ornamentations, characterised by the repetition of simple and minute geometric motifs (*sokitra*).

**FIG. 1.**

**FIG. 2.**

Over the past three decades, Zafimaniry's mode of life has undergone great changes: deforestation for land clearing, creation of natural reserves and demographic growth have brought irrigated rice farming to play an increasingly important role in their livelihood, loosening up their connection with the forest. As the interview extract at the beginning of the paragraph illustrates, as the forest disappears, Zafimaniry identity as a social group is brought to question. Zafimaniry 'become Betsileo' (Bloch 1995) that is, a group living in a humanized territory and who relies on a more permanent agricultural system, like their neighbours of the highlands. My interlocutors talked calmly about this process, which they described as a 'transition period' caused by the change of their environment.

The inclusion of the woodcarving knowledge in UNESCO's list takes place in a context influenced by two apparently conflicting circumstances: the heritagisation of Malagasy nature (Goedefroit 2002) and the elaboration of a Madagascar Action Plan (MAP) under the Ravalomanana presidency (2002-2009). This latter indicated tourism development as one of the Millennium Goals to stimulate rapid economic growth for the country. Although the promotion of tourism is not a primary goal for the designation of new heritage elements, 'a country's inclusion on UNESCO's list enhances promises of boosting tourism development and triggering more private and public developments (Bendix *et al.* 2013)<sup>1</sup>.

The implementation of the ideology of ‘nature as heritage’ followed a similar logic. Enforced since 1984, ‘nature as heritage’ was first conditioned by the World Bank’s policies for the management of development aids and responded to the imperatives of conservation and economic valorisation of Madagascar’s unique biodiversity (Moreau 2002; Goedefroit 2002). Introducing the environment into a global regime of value, national environmental policies privilege conservation to the detriment of local uses of land and natural resources (Goedefroit and Revéret 2007). In doing so, this global ideology clashes with the local notion of heritage-making (Evers and Seagle 2012), which emphasises the transformative nature of transmission, rather than an ontology of permanence and conservation. Pointing to the wealth received from the ancestors, the Malagasy notion of heritage (*lova*) is primarily linked to the land and the forest (Keller 2008; Evers and Seagle 2012), as an array of rights - access, usage and transmission – holding a sense of cultural identity. This heritage, for rural households, is ‘considered to be *tany fivelomana*- land where one can create a livelihood’ (Scales 2014, 114). The very notion of *fivelomana* (enabling life) (see Raharijaona and Kus 1987; Keller 2008) is thus central to understanding the cultural dimension of Malagasy views of heritage and ethnicity, as closely entangled dimensions. *Fivelomana* refers to the fact that the Malagasy conceive the forest as a space whose transformation allows subsistence, as the broad range of resources it provides ensures the social and economic growth of future generations (Moreau 2005; Keller 2008). When I discussed woodcrafting as heritage with local participants, they consistently spoke about the importance of the forest, their burial grounds, their fields, seamlessly blending the references to the ancestors and the land. Bringing forth the Malagasy term used in UNESCO’s materials (*lovantsain’ny*) in these conversations did not lead to relevant outcomes, even among educated members of the community. I came to realise that although we might share the same words, we were not sharing the same meanings. Yet, when talking about the importance of the forest, their discourses highlighted an ambiguity: source of



identity on the one hand, its transformation appeared necessary to guarantee their survival, as shown in the following interview extract:

The Zafimaniry are the people who live close to the forest, but now the forest is finished, terminated. Before the Zafimaniry had a lot of wealth, many cultures. They cut the forest, they burned [for land clearing], they planted easily: maize, beans... they produced a lot. Now there is no more forest and they must plough the land (Lalaina, town hall secretary, personal communication).

As Lalaina contrasts the past - when the forest was rich of resources -, with the present – where hard labour is necessary to guarantee survival-, his words connect the ontology of ethnicity illustrated in the interview extract at the beginning of the section, with the local understanding of the environment as something that must be used in order to facilitate human life. In this apparent contradiction lies the Zafimaniry ontology of identity, which is not a fixed construct determined by descent, but it is determined by the way they live and respond to a changing environment. Such an adaptive notion of ethnicity excludes any duality between nature and culture and replaces it by a relationship of mutual belonging, where people's identity is deeply entangled with the environment where it develops, and cannot therefore be transmitted independently from it. In a similar way, while the global heritage regime focuses on permanence and conservation, the native perspective proposes a philosophy of 'becoming' (Harrison and Rose 2010), a non-static vision where place and living beings interact to project a continuity of generations to the future.

### **The colonial gaze: 'An ethnic group of sculptors'**

Before, every Zafimaniry carved. The practice of the sculpture was the house.  
(Rasolo, mayor of A. village).

As a source of their way of life and ethnic identity, the forest is the origin of Zafimaniry woodcarving expertise, a necessary skill to transform nature for self-sufficiency and future growth. The house, which condenses the best of their woodcarving abilities (Bloch 1998), embodies the transcendence of this relationship. As the above extract highlights, woodcarving ultimately equates to the ability to build a house, which for the Zafimaniry is an extension of the environment. The house represents the ‘living beings transformed into permanent features of the land’ (Bloch 1995, 72). Building a house and decorating it over time celebrates a fruitful marriage and symbolises the social bonds between present and future generations, as well as between human beings and nature. As such, the building is not a mere support for the carvings, but the reason they exist (Bloch 1995). The house is a means to honour the hardness of the wood, which embodies permanence and transcendence, the same qualities wished for a successful marital union. This is the true meaning of the motifs: a tangible celebration of the immateriality of a transcendent social relationship (see Bloch 1998; Bloch 2005).

The local consideration of the carvings undergoes a subtle shift under the effects of the colonial gaze, which focus on the most visible aspect of Zafimaniry culture – the woodcarving skills- overlooking the humans-nature relation that sustains them. This shift can be traced back to 1960, when European missionaries and French ethnologists arrived in the region. The missionaries fostered the first industrialisation and commodification of the carvings as a complement to subsistence farming. They started to commission furniture and religious trinkets that they would channel to commercial outlets in the neighbouring town and the capital. Zafimaniry traditional crafts reached beyond the boundaries of the region, attracting a forerunner tourism industry of European friends of the mission, who ventured in this remote region in quest of an ‘authentic’ piece of local art (Coulaud 1973). The missionary activity transformed Zafimaniry woodcarving to suit the tastes of a larger market economy. A

‘commercial traditional’ (Graburn 1984), coming in miniaturised and easily portable forms of tourist art, such as trinkets and other decorative objects, joined the ‘functional traditional’, crafted for domestic use. For some villagers, mostly from Catholic hamlets, carving became a profession. This transformation diverted woodwork from its original purpose, when carving was mainly a ‘distraction’, a leisurely way to fill the time left free by the main agricultural chores, as some of my interlocutors told me. The quote heading the section illustrates how woodcarving started and ended in the private, domestic world. This fundamental transformation is recorded at a semantic level with the local use of the French expression *Art Zafimaniry* to refer to the industrialised handicrafts for sale, differentiated from the *sokitra*, the noun for carvings on objects of their everyday life.

French ethnologists, who arrived a few years after the missionaries, intensified an essentialist gaze on the woodcarving abilities as the pivotal element of identity. Their reports described the Zafimaniry as a ‘forest group continuing an unknown Malagasy aesthetic tradition’ (Vérin 1964). They equally emphasised the ‘archaism’ (Coulaud 1973, 90) of their mode of civilisation, considering the region as a ‘living museum’ for studying the history of Malagasy highlands (Vérin 1972; Coulaud 1973; 1989). An ethnographic exhibition-sale held in Antananarivo in 1964 boosted the popularity of Zafimaniry crafts. Fashioned on the essentialist European gaze on local culture, the definition of the Zafimaniry as a group of sculptors becomes the master narrative of the UNESCO application prepared by the Ministerial experts. Accordingly, the safeguarding measures, which will be analysed in the next sections, conflate to intensify the professionalisation and industrialisation of the woodcarving skills.

### **An action plan for safeguarding the woodcrafting knowledge**

The application of the woodcrafting knowledge of the Zafimaniry for UNESCO designation is an institutional initiative launched in 2002 by the Direction of Cultural Heritage of the Malagasy

Ministry of Culture and Tourism (DCH), which managed both the candidacy and the implementation of the following plan of action. The application was prepared over a period of six months through field missions and documentary research, carried out by a team of technicians lead by a Malagasy anthropologist appointed by the Ministry, in collaboration with selected resource persons at a national and local level.

Collated under the supervision of an external UNESCO expert, the candidacy dossier institutionalises the French colonial narrative about Zafimaniry woodcarving skills, relying their patrimonial value as a living testimony of the history of the civilisation of the Malagasy highlands (DCH 2003, 3). The dossier proposes urgent measures of different nature to mitigate the risk of disappearance of the practice<sup>2</sup>. On a short-term basis, it establishes the designation of two of the villages as National Heritage and the juridical protection of the knowledge through a registered trademark. On the long-term, the goal is to break the isolation of Zafimaniry villages and foster stronger community ties (DCH 2003, 25). Cultural transmission is explicitly associated to the activation of an economic strategy relying on tourism development and intellectual property.

Nevertheless, the heritage designation connects also to political strategies, as it can legitimize cultural hegemonies, a process that is highly controversial in postcolonial societies, composed by different ethnic groups. Heritage is a powerful tool to tell a story and build national mythologies, which are, in their turn, always informed by politicised formulations of identity (Prats 1998). Whose identity comes to be represented is a process enmeshed in relations of power and control that lead to dynamics of appropriation, exclusion and domination. As a resource person from the DCH told me, the Zafimaniry were valued as ‘a forgotten national identity [that we wanted] to rediscover’. Their heritagisation appoints them as symbolic referents of a pan-Malagasy identity, surviving ancestors for building an official history of the country. This narrative is not neutral, however, as it privileges the highlands and Merina culture

(Domenichini 2010), stemming a controversy in regard to the composite nature of Malagasy ethnic identity<sup>3</sup>. Simultaneously, the UNESCO label conveys this narrative to the world, showing that Madagascar had ‘a cultural potential that deserves to be considered on a global scale’<sup>4</sup>, a process defined by De Jong (2007) as the making of a global subjectivity through cultural visibility. Madagascar cultural exposure through a pioneer presence on the ICH’s list vouches for the political accountability that comes with showing commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage. This is particularly important for an aid-dependent country, as it can bring material consequences, such as the auspices of tourism and economic development.

The centrality of the institutional initiative and the top-down nature of the process lead us to scrutinise the agency of the local population. One of the innovative aspects of the UNESCO ICH’s Convention is the emphasis on knowledge-bearers’ involvement in heritage designation (UNESCO 2003, art. 15). Somehow contradictorily however, UNESCO normative establishes that only State parties can submit a candidature. In the Zafimaniry case, the choice to initiate the application is an institutional project devised unilaterally by the DCH. In a fashion similar to other UNESCO designations in African contexts (Leblon 2013), the majority of local practitioners was involved only once the project agendas were already crafted. This marginalisation lead to a generalised sentiment of suspicion towards the role of the government in the process, which was shared by several research participants during the course of the fieldwork. ‘We have heard that they [the government] are announcing worldwide that Zafimaniry know woodcarving. Everybody is aware, except the Zafimaniry themselves’ (local elder, fieldnote). An attitude shared also by an artisan of a different village, who commented about the plan of action: ‘It is not something we can rely on, because the artisans were “the first concerned but the least informed”<sup>5</sup>’.

In order to understand the causes of these negative reactions, the following sections will analyse the measures of the action plan for safeguarding (December 2004-February 2008).

Funded by the Japanese Fund in Trust for the Preservation and Promotion of ICH, this plan included three phases, each one corresponding to a core task: 1) inventorying the knowledge and establishing a management structure; 2) organising capacity building workshops; 3) creating a registered collective trademark.

### **3.1 Phase I: the inventory**

Some anthropologists who have studied the issue insist that the carvings are purely ornamental and we should not search any magical or religious significance. From our point of view, on the other hand, we believe that they go far beyond mere decoration: they are indeed a representation of Zafimaniry beliefs and cultural and social values (...) It is a language imbued of superstition and specific social codes (...) (Freland 2009, 124).

Phase I is primarily concerned with putting together an inventory of the woodcarving knowledge, an operation carried out by a team of technicians of the ministry, led by a Malagasy anthropologist through fieldwork and interviews in the villages, which lead to identify 32 carved motifs which were later examined by an expert committee, which included four local experts. The selection of these experts is significant: they are all male, seniors, primarily literate, only one actually practicing woodcarving on a regular basis. As declared by the DCH spokesperson, their choice was determined partially by their knowledge of traditions, partially by their good command of French. Considering their life-stories, they appear as ‘brokers’ between native and external systems of thinking: all of them had lived outside of the villages at some point in their lives, and had worked in either education or development projects, being exposed to governmental logics and discourses.

Out of the 32 patterns, the Committee validated 21, valued for their aesthetics and for their relevance as representations of the Zafimaniry cultural vision of the world. Through brainstorming sessions, the Committee encouraged a symbolic interpretation of the patterns, turning them into a grammar of Zafimaniry social values, gravitating around concepts such as ‘union’, ‘solidarity’, ‘mutual trust’, ‘social cohesion’. The pattern called ‘spider’s web’ (*tanamparoratra*) signifies family ties, the ‘honeycomb’ (*papintantely*) the sweetness of community life etc.

### **FIG. 3.**

For the DCH, it is the signification of the patterns that ‘establishes the value of the knowledge for UNESCO’ (DCH spokesperson, personal communication, December 2009). This orientation, summed up in the quote heading the section, openly invalidates the numerous studies carried out over the years over the possible meanings of the carvings (Peretti della Rocca 1948; Vérin 1964; Razafindrabe 1968; Coulaud 1973; Bloch 2005), all of them concluding that the patterns were purely ornamental. According to Maurice Bloch, whose fieldwork in the region spanned over the course of two decades, the designs are named after the phenomena they reproduce and do not have any hidden metaphorical meaning (Bloch 2005). My own conversations with the woodcarvers confirmed this vision, highlighting how for them the goal of the ornamentation was ‘to make beautiful’ the wood. Although the patterns are repetitive and share a certain degree of formalisation, the artisans I spoke to emphasized how they were subjective interpretations of what ‘each one would see around him’, in nature (artisan, personal communication), ‘a free thought fixed in the wood’ (artisan, personal communication) rather than a form of shared code following specific norms. By encouraging a symbolic interpretation of the motifs, the DCH’s Committee strives for their ‘cosmological authentication’ (Weiner 1992), an intention to bestow them of transcendent, universal value which validate the need to preserve them. Yet, narrowing down the diversity of Zafimaniry’s expressions to a specific

‘approved’ vocabulary, the inventory frames the way people practice their culture within external criteria of conformity and authenticity. This process, which we could define an infusion (Haftstein 2018) of normative approach revealing one of the mechanisms of the dispositif, drips into local views through the influence of the brokers. On this matter, one of them insisted on the importance of respecting the ‘approved’ motifs:

The traditional patterns must be respected, safeguarded, without adding or removing anything. That is our wealth, our heritage, the legacy of our ancestors. Beyond that, it is not an authentic Zafimaniry. The local committees have to be strict about norms, quality and type of patterns that have already been registered (Local broker, personal communication).

Phase I also establishes the layers of the project management, articulated at a national, regional and local level. A highly bureaucratic apparatus whose decisional power is concentrated in the capital and local craftsmen are involved only in the regional committee, where they account for less than half. A larger number is expected to participate in the different actions, which are channelled through ‘Village communities associations’ (*ACV- Associations Communautaires Villageoises*). There are 50 ACVs disseminated on a vast and poorly connected region, one for each of the villages involved in the process, each one formally counting 5 members.

The analysis of the archival materials highlighted a discrepancy between local and national priorities. While in the application stage, local experts insisted on reforestation and access to raw materials as primary measures to revitalise the knowledge (DCH 2003, 26), these demands remained unacknowledged in the financed measures, which prioritised workshops to foster local entrepreneurship instead.



### **3.2 Phase II: capacity-building workshops**

Phase II consists in the organisation of a creative contest and various training workshops, intended to encourage ‘Zafimaniry creative spirit and predisposition to woodworking’<sup>6</sup>. ACVs, through their coordinators, are the real beneficiaries of these activities, two of which specifically target the artisans. A first training involves 20 of them on ‘ISO 9000 quality norms and standards’, international guidelines to standardize products’ quality management. A second instructs 60 young practitioners (age 18-25) on the patterns and their meanings, distributing working tools. Two other workshops prepare local tour-guides to explain the carvings to foreign visitors. In a much similar way to the inventory, this second area of intervention also highlights an ‘infusion’ process (Haftstein 2018) in the knowledge-transmission, which is traditionally acquired through non-verbal, practical and playful forms of learning typical of a young age, based on the imitation of adults’ behaviour (Bloch 1991; Bloch 1998a). As it was explained to me, carving was not a skill devoted to particularly talented members of the community, but part of the basic apprenticeship of life. Still, in the context of the action plan, the transmission becomes part of a professionalising process, standardized through the specific norms imposed by the inventory. More significantly, the learning process shifts from oral informality and experiential learning to a formal and structured one, from practical to intellectual knowledge. This reformulation can be regarded as a part of the ‘canonisation’ process (Goody 2000), which consists in transcribing an evolving practice into a fixed model, which becomes the only reference or, in the best scenario, the stable parameter to judge any variation that can occur within a tradition (Allovio 2011).

### **3.3 Phase III: registration of a collective trademark**

The final phase of the action plan establishes the creation of a trademark, registered in 2007 at the Malagasy Office for Intellectual Property (OMAPI) in Antananarivo. The trademark aims to ensure the legal protection of the motifs and the handicraft, a measure considered necessary to contain the effects of globalization and improve the marketing of the cultural resource (DCH spokesperson, personal communication). So, as the trademark cannot be registered under a geographic denomination, the DCH drives the creation of a juridical subject responsible for it, an association of artisans, *Fikambananan'ny Zafimaniry Mpiangaly Hazo* (FI.ZA.MPI.TA.HA). In theory, the association should gather Zafimaniry practitioners and members of the ACVs without distinction; in practice though, the adhesion is reserved solely to the Zafimaniry residents within the region and 'practicing the sculpture of the motifs (...)'<sup>7</sup>. FI.ZA.MPI.TA.HA is responsible for managing the trademark and marketing the crafts to external outlets. These are not its only objectives, however, as the DCH hopes that its creation will foster cooperation and solidarity within Zafimaniry society. Its structure and form of operating resound a strategy of entrepreneurship, in line with the World Bank strategy to reduce poverty (Bruton *et al.* 2013).

The 21 geometric patterns are registered as the core of the trademark, and their application is restricted to a specific list of objects<sup>8</sup> and criteria of conformity:

Wooden objects carved with one or a combination of the 21 motifs identified and defined as conforming to the expertise and the tradition. Only the motifs appearing in the appendix and reviewed and approved by the Committee can be carved. (Regulation 2007, art.3).

The artisans refused to apply the brand, as they were requested to pay a duty<sup>9</sup> for its use (Regulation 2007, art.9). As of 2012, none of the 600 OMAPI branded stamps had been distributed. Local dissent toward this externally imposed measure was marked at a semantic level through the neologism *birendy*, modelled on the English word 'brand', used to refer to the

trademark. Critiques to the plan of action quickly surfaced. Several members of the civil society, from the local catholic priest to the Head of the region, wrote to the DCH claiming a larger local involvement in the decision-making processes, increased participation of young generations, and a reduction of administrative expenditures to the advantage of higher impacts activities such as ‘the construction, equipment and functioning of apprenticeship workshops in the villages’<sup>10</sup>. Few months after the end of the action plan, the artisans felt ‘abandoned’, and bemoaned a misspending of the funding to sustain an administrative organization without any real benefit for the population. In 2012, the association FI.ZA.MPI.TA.HA remained inactive and its president lamented over the lack of financial support and orientation by the DCH, in a situation where a highly centralised structure had to work with members dispersed in a large region, which made difficult to organise meetings and take shared decisions.

### **Producing intangible heritage as an economic resource**

The examination of the measures established by the action plan for safeguarding Zafimaniry’s ICH draws me to make two observations, related to the limits of institutional approach and the ambiguity of an intangible heritage that produces tangible objects.

The application of the UNESCO protocol in this context configures an arborescent model of assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), characterized by bureaucracy and a rigid top-down approach (Horowitz 2016). Acting as a form of power over the knowledge, this assemblage uses a variety of sociotechnical components – the norms and the association- to fashion a dispositif that imposes specific standard criteria on the practice. The assemblage and dispositifs produce the practice –an aspect of culture lived on the everyday- as an element that can be classified according to homogeneous and standard criteria and that can also be used/promoted outside of the context where it originates. The ‘canonisation’ of the knowledge and the creation of a management structure are the tools deployed for this production.

The inventorying and trademarking crystallize a moment in the ever-changing dynamism of the knowledge. The steps necessary to unfold this process - the authentication of the patterns, the intellectualisation of the transmission process and the creation of an association of knowledge-bearers – lead to the social institutionalisation of the heritage, whereby new collective bureaucratic structures are introduced to manage such practices. Such apparatus – the national and regional committee, the association of practitioners- replace the spontaneous community, inducing a ‘proliferation of the social’ (Hafstein 2011).

In his study of conservation of Kankurang masked performances, De Jong observes how ‘the conservation of cultural practices inevitably requires their objectification according to some globally recognized bureaucratic format’ (De Jong 2007, 161). Looking at the assemblage created in this particular context allows us to observe the constellation of power/knowledge it creates (Harrison 2015), calling us to ask to which extent the issue of community empowerment is taken seriously.

The second stance refers to the ambiguous relationships between heritage and commodification of culture. As a form of knowledge that materialises into crafts, Zafimaniry woodcarving skills muddle up the dichotomy tangible/intangible (Allovio 2011), as it is not the woodwork that is registered, but the knowledge. As such, there is a constant ambiguity between the practice and its support (the wooden objects), the intangible mental categories and their tangible outcomes, that must be commodified in order to favour the sustainability of the practice over time. So, the conservation of Zafimaniry knowledge is rife with contradictions, that were evident to the promoters of the candidature themselves, who feared imitation and cultural appropriation.

The woodcrafting knowledge is an intangible heritage expressed through a variety of tangible forms [...].The risk is the confusion between the intangible heritage and the commodities it produces [...]. It is a complex case, as the tangible

outcomes of the knowledge are easy to imitate. We need to control it  
(Anthropologist appointed by the DCH, personal communication).

Heritage-making and commodification are in obvious tension, a paradox labelled by Franquesa (2013) as the 'keeping-for-selling', which sheds light on two characteristics of heritage: its double nature of object and process, and its ambiguous claims to simultaneously resist and support market expansion. If, on the one hand, protecting Zafimaniry knowledge is an attempt to avoid its reduction to mere commodity (DCH 2003, 11), the measures chosen to revitalize the practice emphasize its commodification as a strategic resource for economic development, fostering local entrepreneurship for its industrialisation. Clearly, commodification is nowadays part of the dynamics inherent to the social life of things and it does not diminish, by itself alone, the cultural value of an object (Bendix 2011). What seems central in my opinion are the logics, intentions and agencies that guide the commodification process, and how they are negotiated within local realities. Analysing the Zafimaniry case, we see how the creation of an association of knowledge-bearers and the choice of capacity-building workshops of Phase II clearly do not respond to local visions and desires. Their local dissent towards the heritagization process testified how their concerns about the transformations of their lived environment had little in common with the priorities of international and national cultural administration. The approved measures stem from a globalised vision of development, which facilitates the trickling into local understanding of that assemblage of technologies, techniques and practices that fashion the economising logics of neoliberalism (Coombe and Weiss 2015). An approach that is partially inherent to the UNESCO dispositif for defining and controlling heritage, but that could be better managed, at a local level, through a consultative approach ensuring greater community agency and a shared roadmap about the benefits of using their heritage.

## Conclusions

This article has sought to explain heritage-making processes in postcolonial settings as an arena of connection between political, economic and cultural regimes of values influenced by global and hegemonic intentions. I have drawn on the concept of infusion (Haftstein 2018) and canonisation (Goody 2000) to describe the assemblage and dispositifs that fashion a standardisation of a cultural practice, an outcome that contradicts the idea of dynamism and protection of cultural diversity implicit in the theoretical notion of ICH. The analysis of the action plan has provided interesting material to reflect on the ambiguous relationships between heritage and the market, as while the heritage designation claims to protect from the reduction of cultural practice to commodity, the measures for safeguarding can on the contrary intensify the process of commodification. A paradox particularly evident in developing countries, where the cultural exposure guaranteed by UNESCO labelling is a potential lever for attracting investments and stimulate tourism and economic development. A future research agenda needs to explore alternative ways to conceptualize and safeguard heritage through management plans that truly respond to the logics and needs of the practitioners.

## Notes

1. Shortly after the recognition, in fact, the area benefited of a large investment for the development of an ecotourism infrastructure financed by the European agency A.C.O.R.D.S.
2. The dossier lists endogenous factors, such as the consistent exodus of younger generations; the uncontrolled tourism development; the increasing deforestation; the plagiarism and commercial exploitation of Zafimaniry crafts (DCH 2003: 88). At the same time, it points to globalisation as an exogenous trigger of cultural assimilation.
3. Merina are the largest ethnic group of Madagascar, accounting for about 30% of the entire population, as well as the most urbanized, affluent and politically visible. Curiously, but in line with a political interpretation of the dispositive of heritage, the only other Malagasy site to appear on UNESCO's list (World Heritage) is the hill of Ambohimanga, which is also connected to the history of Imerina. Inscribed on the list in 2001, this royal citadel and necropolis is one of the most important places of worship in Madagascar, is defined on the UNESCO website as 'the cradle of the kingdom and the dynasty that has made Madagascar a modern state, internationally acknowledged since 1817' (see Saretzky and May 2015).

4. Statement of the Malagasy Minister of Culture for the celebration of Zafimaniry designation. Source: Doc.1, Mai 4, 2004. Archives of the Direction of Cultural Heritage.
5. The artisan used the Malagasy expression *tompotrano mihono*, which refers to the landlord who is not aware of what happens in his own house.
6. Source: Meeting Report Coordination Office, September 12, 2006. Archives of the Direction of Cultural Heritage.
7. Source: Statute of FI.ZAM.PI.TA.HA, ch.IV, art.17, Archives of the Direction of Heritage.
8. E.g. chairs, tables, windows, doors etc. as well as objects of the everyday as plates, spoons and other trinkets.
9. Between 300 and 1.000 Ariary (around 1 € in 2009). The sum would finance other communal activities.
10. Source: Letter signed by the *Collectif des natifs Zafimaniry*, September 7, 2005, Archives of the Direction of Cultural Heritage.

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