

African-Brazilian Cultural References In National Heritage

Questions of cultural politics

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African-brazilian and Indigenous cultural references have not had a strong presence among the representations of brazilian-ness produced in the context of national heritage. However, they are highly praised in most narratives concerning Brazil as an ‘*imagined community*’, especially those constructed around the theme of “racial democracy”. This inconsistency should not be ignored. In fact, it indicates that the formation of brazilian national heritage should be examined against the grain, and that the anthropological intricacies of the issue should be explored. This is what I intend to do here, even if briefly.²

1. General remarks on cultural heritage as social practice, in the context of the formation of a global cultural public sphere³

The construction of social memory and the preservation of cultural heritage are closely related practices concerning the reproduction of social life. Both

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2 Based on a paper presented in “Culture and the State in the Lusophone Black Atlantic”, conference organized by the Centre for the Study of Brazilian Culture and Society, Kings College, London. 18-19 January, 2007.

3 This issue is further explored in Arantes, A. “Diversity, heritage and cultural politics” In: *Theory Culture & Society: annual review*, n. 78, v. 24, London, 2007, p. 290-296.

create affective and cognitive landmarks that provide shared references to historical change and continuity. However, there are important differences between them. While social memory mainly concerns agencies and actors from localised and often small scale social environments, officially protected heritage is the product of a specialised activity necessarily involving academics, experts, government institutions, NGOs as well as regional and multilateral organisations. As I have argued in previous writings⁴, heritage is not a direct product of daily life, as lived by ordinary social actors, but the result of specific social negotiations that take place within the limits of local experience and beyond. The acknowledgement of this double binding nature of heritage, submitted at once to concrete social experience and to legal and administrative regulations, is essential to understand its role and meaning in the processes of social identification that underlie the formation of hegemonies, national cultures or nation building.

The political commitments, economic priorities and values enforced by preservation agencies differ from - and sometimes are in conflict with - important structuring aspects of the social milieu from which heritage items derive. The discussions about intangible cultural heritage and about the protection of intellectual property rights, presently taking place in *fora* such as UNESCO and WIPO, clearly indicate that popular and indigenous realities sometimes do not fit - in important ways - the intellectual and legal frameworks that support institutional safeguarding policies.⁵ However, a two-way process is increasingly found: the framing of traditional cultural contexts by national and international cultural heritage agendas and the growth of popular demands concerning the protection of cultural assets and practices that may be qualified as emblematic of social identity.

Another topic that must be mentioned in these preliminary remarks is that preservation policies respond to the specific needs, constraints and timings of the contexts in which they are implemented. Although stimulated by

4 Arantes, A. "La preservación del patrimonio como práctica cultural", In R. Ceballos (org) *Antropología y políticas culturales: patrimonio e identidad*, Buenos Aires, 1986, p. 29-41. Reprinted by *Revista Folklore Americano*, 44, México, 1987, p. 63-71. Revised editions in portuguese published by *Primeira Versão*, IFCH/UNICAMP, n.1, 2 ed. 1987; *Revista de Museologia*, 1:1. São Paulo, Brasil, 1989, p.12/16. See also "Introduction" to A. A. Arantes (org) *Produzindo o Passado*. São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense /Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, 1984. 255 p.

5 Cf. M. Carneiro da Cunha (org.) *Patrimônio imaterial e biodiversidade*. *Revista do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*, 32, Brasília, DF, 2005. 373 p.

a multilateral cultural agency like UNESCO, contextual constraints may vary – and do so greatly – from one part of world to another. In fact, national and regional peculiarities clearly come to the fore at international expert meetings on this question. But it is also true that a worldwide non-governmental cultural agenda is presently maturing and that national or local institutions are progressively being challenged to respond to it, particularly in so far as it is rooted in – and feeds-back – local demands from popular organizations.

Globalisation of cultural production gives new significance to objects and ideas that convey senses of localisation and/or cultural singularity. It also raises public interest and institutional concern with the identification, inventorying and protection of cultural diversity. The implications of this shift in the field of heritage, from exceptional artistic or historic assets to emblems of diversity, go beyond the so-called creative industries, that are the object of the Convention for the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions.⁶ Traditional know-how and forms of expression, as well as exotic landscapes and representations of identity, are increasingly being used as effective cornerstones of both business projects and humanitarian, social and economic development programs, implemented in the poorer regions of the globe.

From an intellectual viewpoint, this renewed awareness of all things local stimulates a critical reflection about sociological, epistemological, ethical and legal issues related to the identification, documentation and promotion of cultural realities as heritage. The following examples can be highlighted among the topics that increasingly constitute a political and intellectual agenda on this matter: intellectual authority associated with the production of inventories; social consequences of safeguarding policies from the point of view of local economics, politics and cultural production; and the protection of traditional knowledge and cultural expressions disclosed by heritage policies.⁷ These are, indeed, some of the major themes of the current debate

6 Adopted by UNESCO's 33rd General Conference (Paris, November 2005).

7 Cf. A. A. Arantes. "A place for intangible cultural heritage in our common future". In: Workshop for Youth Participation for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Communities Development, 2007, Tsuruoka. ACCU-Asia/Pacific Cultural Center for UNESCO, 8-11 June 2007. At <http://www.accu.or.jp/ich/em/pdf/d2007Accenture.pdf>. Access 18 Ago. 2008. See also Mathias, F. and Novion, H. (orgs) *The crossroads of modernities: debates on biodiversity, technoscience and culture*. São Paulo: ISA, Documentos, 9, 2006, 383 p. Centro Nacional de Folclore e Cultura Popular. *Celebrações e saberes da cultura popular: pesquisa, inventário, crítica, perspectivas*. Rio de Janeiro: IPHAN/MinC, 2004. M.

among scholars, experts and civil society organizations in the heritage arena and can be seen as cornerstones in the current strengthening of a '*global cultural public sphere*'.

UNESCO has historically been the core institution in the formation of such political space in relation to heritage questions. WIPO plays a complementary and fast-growing role in this matter, as a forum for the negotiation of international commercial recommendations, agreements and conventions related to what is being called "*traditional knowledge and cultural expressions*". Regional governmental networks, in turn, such as the Community of the Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) and Mercosul, in relation to Latin America, as well as agencies such as the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) and networks of experts and NGOs, also contribute significantly to the formation what is becoming a worldwide issue.⁸

One very positive outcome of this process is that heritage is becoming part of an international agenda that is critical of some of the drawbacks of globalisation, such as the concentration of power and resources (both material and intellectual) in certain regions of the world. Heritage policies and programs are also becoming engaged in issues such as fighting poverty, social exclusion and racism, supporting peace and improving awareness about the cultural rights of traditional peoples and cultural minorities of all continents. This is helping to make '*the cultural question*' a legitimate global concern.

The gap between this global instance and the realities confronted within national states is another complex aspect of the issue. Norms and priorities decided upon in those supra-national arenas are not automatically applied locally. They are biased and filtered by local politics, and sometimes used in disputes concerning the formation of regional or sub-regional hegemonies. This question does not affect intergovernmental agencies alone; NGOs have to face local challenges and limitations, as do the cultural communities that appropriate, on their own terms and for their own purposes, the possibilities and resources made available by those globalized negotiations.

National experts and other social agents, such as state bureaucrats and technical staff, act as brokers and interpreters in this multifaceted

Carneiro da Cunha, "Culture" and culture: traditional knowledge and intellectual rights. Marc Bloch Lecture, 2004.

8 Cf. various contributions presented in international expert meetings promoted by UNESCO as well as reports of such meetings can be accessed in www.unesco.org.

cultural translation process. They must respond – at the required speed and in the agreed technical language - to the demands of the processes that are set in motion in this emerging global cultural sphere, and that engulf local level politics.

The questions outlined in these brief introductory remarks indicate that cultural preservation is a complex social practice, permeated by conflicts and negotiations, and that the understanding of its significance and implications depends on considering the specific historical contexts in which they are produced. For this reason, and in order to provide concrete background to this discussion, I will focus on the case of the african-brazilian cultural heritage, while suggesting that the issue has wider implications.

2. African-brazilian references as national cultural heritage

The brazilian federal preservation institution, the Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN), was created in 1937,⁹ through the fissures of the populist and nationalist regime known as the Vargas Period. The practice developed by this institution may have strengthened the official ideology implemented by the Vargas' regime, but was surely not instrumental to it, as it was strongly rooted in a cultural movement of much wider and plural significance.¹⁰ Summarised bluntly, the main question faced by the preservation agenda in the early days of IPHAN was to identify, protect and promote the documents of brazilian art and history, as well as the country's cultural contribution to western civilisation, rather than celebrating local symbols for the sake of their being national.¹¹

9 Federal Decree 25, November 30, 1937. Provides for the protection of national historic and artistic heritage in Brazil.

10 A. A. Arantes. "Patrimônio cultural e nação". In: A. Araujo (org) Trabalho, cultura e cidadania, São Paulo: Scritta, 1997, p. 275-290. Idem, "Documentos históricos, documentos de cultura". In: Revista do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, 22. Brasília, DF, 1987, p. 48-55.

11 The formation of IPHAN and its significance to brazilian cultural politics has been focused by several academic research projects and dissertations such as, for example, S. B. Rubino *As fachadas da história: os antecedentes, a criação e os trabalhos do IPHAN (1936-1967)*. Unpublished master's dissertation. State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), 1992. M.V. Motta Santos, *O tecido do tempo: a idéia de patrimônio cultural no Brasil (1920-1970)*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Brasília, 1992. J. R. Gonçalves, *A retórica da perda: os discursos do patrimônio cultural no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: IPHAN/Ed. UFRJ. 2 ed. 2003. M. C. Londres Fonseca, *Patrimônio em processo: a trajetória da política federal de preservação*. Rio de Janeiro: IPHAN/Editora UFRJ. 2005. See also A.A.Arantes (org) *Cidadania. Revista do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*, 24, Brasília, DF 1996. 303 p.

Historic landmarks, ethnographic and archaeological evidence, art works, built structures and natural landscapes of exceptional value – particularly those produced before the first decades of the 20th Century - have been the focus of IPHAN's actions until very recently. Despite the clearly elitist bias of the criteria adopted in the selection of representations of Brazilian national culture, artefacts from non-hegemonic sectors of national society were also included in the scope of that institution's activities, particularly due to their ethnographic value. One example is the *tombamento* - inscription in the registry books of national heritage for protection by the public authority - of Mestre Ataíde's portrayal of a black Madonna and black angels on the ceiling of the São Francisco Church, in Ouro Preto, praised as an outstanding representation of distinctively Brazilian baroque painting. Another example is the inscription of a set of *candomblé* objects¹² apprehended by the police in Rio de Janeiro. This one was the first items inscribed in the National Heritage Registry Book dedicated to Archaeology, Ethnography and Landscapes, as early as 1938.¹³

However, the inclusion of such works in the national heritage lists¹⁴ was not a seriously debatable issue until the 1980's when the broader concept of cultural heritage overcame the established practices of heritage identification based on aesthetic and historic values, as defined by Western academic standards. Indeed, in the late 1970's and 1980's there was significant growth in social movements that focused on claims of civil and cultural rights. Brazilian preservation agencies began to face demands for the protection of landmarks related to popular classes, particularly African-Brazilians and indigenous peoples. Such demands progressively motivated a critical review of the values embedded in the heritage policy, and promoted by it.

In 1984 and in 1986, respectively, the *candomblé* shrine *Terreiro da Casa Branca* and the remaining trench stones of the *Quilombo dos Palmares*

12 Cf. Y. Maggie, *O Medo do feitiço: relações entre magia e poder no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1992. Idem "Coisas de bruxaria: as coleções de objetos de feitiçaria criadas pela dura repressão policial". In: *Revista de História da Biblioteca Nacional*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 1, n. 6, 2005.

13 These objects, held by the Museu da Polícia Civil, Rio de Janeiro, were inscribed in the History Registry Book and in the Book of Archaeology, Ethnography and Landscapes of National Heritage, under Register no. 001, dated May 5, 1938. (Process 0035-T-38)

14 The following statistics indicate the magnitude of the heritage items accumulated by the Brazilian federal preservation institution until 2005: 79 urban sites (8 of which are inscribed by UNESCO on the World Heritage List), implying circa 21.000 buildings in approximately 61 cities; 18 natural and 7 archaeological sites (8 and 2, respectively, inscribed by UNESCO on the World Heritage List); and 802 individually registered buildings and monuments, among other items.

were inscribed in the National Heritage Registry Books amidst considerable polemic. In addition to the difficulties caused by questioning from conservative elements rooted in the national preservation agency, the inscription of *candomblé* shrines raised two political questions presented in technical disguise.¹⁵

One was the question of aesthetic exceptionality, since these built structures do not fit the criteria set by the history of Western art and architecture. Given the great number of existing *terreiros*, how should it be decided which ones to preserve and proclaim as national heritage. The other question had to do with cultural dynamics. Once listed as a national heritage, built structures cannot be changed, except for conservation and restoration works undertaken in accord with internationally established criteria. *Candomblé* shrines are living sites with structures that continuously change with the practices performed by the religious communities. In the eyes of the public authority, the registration of such structures could jeopardise the more conservative and established views about the preservation of monuments and sites. As to *quilombos* the objects selected by the preservation agency were archaeological remains, so their declaration as monuments was not questioned.

The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 determined a democratic approach to issues related to cultural rights (including intangible heritage), environmental conservation and socio-biodiversity. From the perspective of cultural heritage, the new constitution was innovative in several important aspects.¹⁶ First, it enshrined the notion that the nation is a plural, internally diversified and socially heterogeneous reality. Second, it included both material and immaterial cultural goods within the domain of heritage, opening the way to public policies that could better respond to social diversity and stratification. Third, it highlighted not only the exceptional, historic or aesthetic quality of cultural items, but also their social significance in relation to the identity, action and memory of the various groups that constitute national community.

Thus, the legitimate beneficiaries of the rights established by this legal text were no longer exclusively the intellectual hegemonic elites and their

15 See also G. Velho "Patrimônio, negociação e conflito". In: *Mana*, vol.12, no.1, Rio de Janeiro, Apr. 2006, p. 237-248.

16 Constitution of Brazil, 1988, Article 216.

outstanding artworks, but a politically welcome social entity - albeit difficult for policy makers to handle - referred to in the Constitution as “*the various groups that form brazilian society*”. Among these, indigenous peoples and brazilians of african descent are specifically mentioned.. This created an opening for demands based on the perception and affirmation of social and political difference, now grounded in cultural rights.

The brazilian Constitution of 1988 declares as national heritage all documents and sites bearing reference to the territories of *quilombos*, and grants ownership rights to the communities which historically have had consistent social bonds with them.

The institutional interpretation of *quilombo* previous to the 1988 Constitution was that of an archaeological site and this justified, the registration in 1986 of the *Quilombo dos Palmares*, mentioned above. The same approach was used in 2002, i.e., after the Constitutional reform and wittingly in conformity with the new legal text, when another *quilombo*¹⁷ and the written records about it were registered as national heritage. Again, empty ruins and archival documents - artefacts that did not threaten the established preservation canons - were the objects legally protected.

Almost two decades have passed since these legal changes. Some steps have been taken in relation to the preservation of *terreiros*. An anthropological inventory of previously declared monuments and sites¹⁸ was carried out in the city of Salvador between 1982 and 1987. This produced a baseline for the project still being realised by the preservation agency to indicate from among the more than 2.000 identified *terreiros*, those worth preserving for their historical and cultural singularity (not aesthetic exceptionality). In addition, more flexible conservation norms have been formulated to cope with the dynamics proper to the living reality of *candomblé* shrines. As a result of those changes, 6 *terreiros*¹⁹ were listed between 1984 and 2005, both for their historical and ethnographic values; others are in the process of becoming part of the protected national heritage.

17 Quilombo do Ambrósio, Ibiá, Minas Gerais.

18 Ordep Serra and Olympio Serra. *Projeto Mammba* (Mapeamento de Sítios e Monumentos Religiosos Negros da Bahia), Fundação Nacional Pró-Memória and Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador, 1982 e 1987.

19 Casa Branca (Salvador, Ba), Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá (Salvador, Ba), Gantois (Salvador, Ba), Bate-Folha (Salvador, Ba), Casa das Minas (São Luís, Ma), Alaketu (Salvador, Ba). Listed in the History Registry Book and in the Book of Archaeology, Ethnography and Landscapes of National Heritage.

A federal decree of 2003²⁰ established a more complex definition of *quilombo*. It describes the beneficiaries of the land rights established by the Constitution as self-defined racial-ethnic groups descending from ancestors who resisted slavery and developed traceable historical bonds with specific territories. Based on this wider definition, the Palmares Foundation has officially recognised more than 1.000 *quilombo* communities entitled to land rights. A task force was created in 2005 by Iphan and Palmares, to prepare procedures to implement the rights granted by the Constitution: both land ownership rights and the distinction and benefits derived from their inscription in the national cultural heritage books.

The issue is still very polemical. The dominant interpretation of *quilombo* as a historic site is questioned by the understanding that what is important about *quilombos* is not so much – or not only – the testimony of past events, but the territorialisation of identities and social networks that were re-built by diaspora peoples whose social organisation was decimated by the colonial regime.

In that sense, *quilombos* and *terreiros* can be interpreted as structurally similar realities. Both promote social practices and experiences, feed territorial bonds and provide continuity to local histories in terms of beliefs and values that refer to *mother Africa*, coded by kinship or religious affiliation, or sometimes by a combination of both. This is, for example, the case of the centenary fraternity called *Irmandade da Boa Morte*, whose governing body is constituted by a network of venerable *mães de santo*, the key figures of *terreiros* that claim to be the successors of former *quilombos* both in the urban and rural areas of Cachoeira, Bahia. The construction of such social agencies and the practices that have historically supported them are important elements of cultural history and deserve protection in the name of public interest.

The recent implementation of policy relating to intangible cultural heritage opens new opportunities for overcoming the predicament posed by the confrontation between the Constitution and the ideology embedded in institutional preservation practice. The specific legal instrument for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Brazil dates from 2000²¹. It creates the administrative processes required for conducting

20 Decree 4.887, dated 20 November 2003, article 2º.

21 Federal Decree 3551, dated August 4, 2000.

inventories and establishing a registry as well as a national protection program for intangible cultural heritage, under the following domains: (1) knowledge and traditional practices, (2) forms of expression, (3) celebrations, and (4) places.

These are defined by Brazilian legislation as well as by UNESCO's 2003 Convention as objects worth safeguarding because they are living realities, processes not products, to which specific social groups assign distinctive value. The institutional experience in this matter is still incipient, but becomes gradually effective²².

It is noteworthy that 4 out of the 8 items protected under Decree 3551 until now (*samba de roda* and *jongo* music and dance, *samba carioca* and the culinary knowledge of the *baianas*) as well as the probable next in line (*capoeira*) are cultural practices that are national in scope and recognized as being of African descent, or inspiration. They derive from recognizable African matrices (choreographic, musical, and cosmological) reworked and transformed into singular cultural phenomena in the Brazilian cultural context. Similarly, the two items submitted by the Brazilian government to UNESCO and proclaimed as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity were two non-hegemonic forms of expression: one indigenous (Wajãpi graphic language), and the other clearly associated with African-Brazilian culture, *samba de roda*.²³

As for *places*, the first in the list are the sacred sites of a multiethnic indigenous region on the Upper Negro River, on Brazil's Colombian border. In addition to its relevance to the ethnic groups directly involved, this specific category of heritage opens new conceptual perspectives and a precedent for the protection of *terreiros* and *quilombos*, since similarly to indigenous sacred sites, they are not just physical spaces but socially constructed places.

22 Cf. C. Londres Fonseca (org) Patrimônio imaterial. Tempo Brasileiro, 147, Rio de Janeiro, Out. Dez. 2001, 222 p. R. Abreu; M. Chagas (orgs.) Memória e patrimônio: ensaios contemporâneos. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 2003.

23 An excellent example of the social complexities involved in the proclamation of cultural practices as heritage is provided by the candidature files produced by Dominique Tilkin Gallois for the submission of Oral and Graphic Expressions of the Wajãpi to IPHAN and to UNESCO, published as Wajãpi. Dossiê IPHAN, 2, Brasília, 2006, 136p. ISBN 85-7334-025-8.

3. Culture as officially protected heritage: from diversity to difference

The new legal parameters have produced – and are producing – significant consequences for the formulation and implementation of public policies in the field of heritage. One important social and political outcome is that these changes affect the value attributed to what is identified as worthy of official protection, and, perhaps most importantly, the relative position and authority of local communities in the identification of what should officially become heritage and in the implementation of specific protection practices.

This question has become highly politicised. In the case of the Brazilian legislation, as in the UNESCO convention of 2003 and of a recent international experts meeting²⁴, the local cultural communities' authority over the knowledge about their own cultural formations, in building political strategies and determining priorities - in other words, their role in safeguarding plans - have been explicitly and officially reinforced.

It is particularly in the case of intangible cultural heritage that the process leading to heritage building results from complex and often tense negotiations involving cultural mediators who are both internal and external to the social groups to which the safeguarded cultural item is primarily relevant. Examples of such intermediaries are the communities' own representatives; office holders and cultural custodians; the technical and administrative institutional personnel; independent experts and political activists that participate in the institutional practices; as well as the entrepreneurs and marketing experts interested in developing business opportunities on the basis of such assets. Whatever is submitted to the preservation Councils' decision is, in one way or another, permeated by such negotiations. As the items proposed for preservation became less orthodox, i.e. including not only artefacts, but also intangible items - and not only referred to 'high culture' but also to an increasing number of elements primarily related to popular cultures - the more passionate became the discussions regarding their inclusion in the heritage lists.

The example analyzed in this paper clearly illustrates that heritage – intangible items as well as artefacts, monuments and sites - belongs to communities and is embedded in the social and cultural processes by which their

24 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO's 32nd General Assembly in 2003; UNESCO-ACCU Expert Meeting on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural heritage, Tokyo 13-15 March 2006.

social lives are produced and transformed. Thus, it must be recognised that safeguarding *as a public policy* directly interferes with social processes that (1) take place in the present, not in the past, and (2) are developed by real and specific human communities, not by nations in the abstract.

The examples chosen for the present text, as well as the recently accumulated institutional experience in these matters, might misleadingly suggest that there exists an intrinsic and natural association between intangible cultural heritage and popular cultures. Immaterial heritage is not exclusively associated with popular classes and ethnic groups, just as monuments and sites are not distinctive to the elites and high culture. There are some questions in this area that call for urgent discussion.

In Brazil, as well as in other parts of the world, precedence is now inevitably given to the protection of popular cultures. In the first place, it is an historical responsibility in the face of to the accumulated bias of the policies that have so effectively empowered the ruling elites by treasuring their monuments and works of art, and promoting them as national symbols. Another reason is the fragile condition of so much knowledge and human experience that lies unregistered and precariously safeguarded by community custodians and practitioners who frequently live in adverse circumstances and extreme poverty. Safeguarding culture, in these situations, may also be a form of humanitarian action. These reasons become still more pressing and convincing if one is reminded that social cohesion, self esteem and senses of identification with wider political communities such as the ethnic group or the nation are very deeply rooted and dependant on aspects of heritage where the local, the popular, the national – and sometimes the global - meet.

Hence, the protection of intangible aspects of “popular culture” empowers historically marginalised segments of society which, on the basis of the authority granted by the proclamation of their culture as heritage, can put forward claims to territorial rights, to the protection of shrines and other sacred places threatened by agri-business, real estate business and unplanned economic and urban growth.

What was called in Brazil “the national-popular question”, and hotly debated in the 1960’s, has returned with new contours. The politics of popular culture must confront a tension that arises from the fact that knowledge, forms of expression, places, festivities, artefacts of various kinds – from archaeological finds to artworks, buildings and public monuments – as well as

landscapes are recognised as relevant both as identity icons and as economic assets. This tension between political and economic values permeate heritage as a multi-faceted reality – be it popular or elitist, tangible or intangible – and must be dealt with by academic experts, local leaders and public servants engaged in reinterpreting them, both textually and in the practical decisions that – once implemented – will affect their reproduction and change.

The underlying political premise of the queries and disputes that occur in this field is that the *raison d'être* of such policies should be to contribute towards a creative and dynamic cultural diversity. From an anthropological point of view, on the other hand, it is not surprising that social movements, particularly those rooted in the struggle for cultural rights, have stepped forward to discuss which and whose “cultural references” (to name the object under discussion according to the Brazilian Constitution) would be safeguarded and how they would be inventoried, identified and protected.

Recalling Foucault, it is worthwhile mentioning at this point the thesis that the enforcement of power generates counter-powers and that customary cultural practices do not passively absorb the realities imposed from the outside as would be the case, in the present context, of the values and legitimacy attributed to external preservation institutions. Cultural communities tend to reinterpret and appropriate outside inputs in terms of their internal cultural dynamics, often transforming signs of cultural diversity into manifestations of difference in the political sphere. I draw this distinction from H. Bhabha's argument²⁵. Cultural difference, he writes, “is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorise the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity. (...) The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority; the attempt to dominate in the *name* of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation”. This issue should be kept in mind in the evaluation of the consequences of these policies at the local level.

It follows from my argument that since safeguarding practices motivate and, at their limit, set in motion cultural changes that are neither totally predictable nor controllable, one crucial challenge to preservation is to

25 H. Bhabha. ‘The commitment to theory’. *New Formations* 5, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988, pp.18-19.

create mechanisms of community participation in the allocation of financial resources, as well as in designing and evaluating safeguarding policies and programs. This shift means taking a decisive step forward in relation to “participation”, the *motto* that in the 1980’s mobilised the cultural political debate in Brazil. The question then was to provide access to the popular classes to a decision making process that, by definition, was external to them. Today, what is at stake is recognition of the popular strata as legitimate protagonists of cultural policy, side-by-side with governmental and elite institutional agents. The key issue regarding the efficacy of heritage policies today is the nature and quality of the relationship established between governmental and local agencies.

There is currently more consensus around acceptance of those changes, both in public opinion and among preservationists. However, the conflict and negotiations between the agencies involved (internal and external, governmental or not) should still be considered as embedded characteristics of cultural heritage. This is a constitutive tension of this reality, which necessarily should be considered and dealt with both by heritage policy makers and so called “cultural communities”.

I do not want to suggest - in this brief and perhaps rather optimistic review of the recent developments of the preservation policies in Brazil - that all the problems have been resolved. The implementation of these new perspectives and instruments - such as legal standards, methods and work routines - still finds strong opposition and are faced with perplexity by the adepts of the ideologies and cultures that are still dominant in many contexts. Furthermore, the availability of financial and political resources needed for their implementation and continuity is very uncertain, erratic and, to a great extent, a matter of *ad hoc* decisions and situational negotiations within the State apparatus. This is an important obstacle since the effectiveness of a social or cultural policy, when evaluated from the point of view of the public to whom it is addressed, depends on setting in motion long term processes within cultural dynamics.

What I am suggesting in these notes is that the 20-year process briefly outlined in this presentation has opened the way to the development of democratic cultural heritage policies in Brazil. But their becoming a reality is something that depends on the consolidation of democracy - not populism - in the country.