Mafalala Walking Tour: Identity and Cultural Immersion at the Core of Maputo City

by Rui Laranjeira and Ivan Laranjeira

Rui Laranjeira holds a B.A in History from Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM), Mozambique and an M.A. in Cultural Heritage Management from Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia. Currently, he is a researcher at the Resource and Research Center (CER) of the Higher Institute of Arts and Culture (ISArC), Mozambique, and a consultant in cultural heritage. He is the author of *A Marrabenta: sua evolução e Estilização, 1950 – 2002* and co-authored the book *Mafalala: Memórias e espaços de um lugar: Uma breve perspectiva histórica da Mafalala.*

Ivan Laranjeira is a professional tour guide, with a passion for arts and culture. He is the co-founder of the Associação IVERCA Turismo, Cultura e Meio ambiente and pioneer of cultural tourism in Mozambique, one of the country's first trained tourism professionals and keen on implementing sustainable development through tourism. Currently, he directs the Mafalala Festival, Mafalala Walking Tour and leads its curatorship, and also works in social educational programmes, community libraries, environmental awareness and professional training for the youth.

he present article describes the process of creating a walking tour and a community museum in Mafalala, a highly representative and historical, yet poor and marginalised neighbourhood of Maputo, the Mozambican capital. It is the first study focusing on a civil society structure that is implementing social museology theories in Mozambique. Reporting on the experience will thus contribute to enhancing knowledge on social museology in the country, considering that tourism projects and museums in Mozambique are initiatives undertaken or managed by public bodies. Furthermore, this initiative is occurring at a very significant time in Mozambique, which saw a turning point in 1994, when the economy was liberalised and a democratisation process was undertaken, following a previous period (from 1977 to 1994) that forbade private initiative and a multiparty system. For this reason, the IVERCA experience is important because it represents a break with the past and fosters a new attitude in relation to the management of cultural heritage, which was under the control of the state for many years.[1] This new approach has marked a beginning for the telling of alternative identities and narratives.

The project was developed by IVERCA, a Community Based Organisation (CBO) formed in 2009 by tourism students, intended to promote, raise awareness of and preserve the local cultural heritage by connecting it to tourism businesses in order to provide job opportunities for the youth and women and improve the standard of living within the community. The neighbourhood counts 25,000 residents and presents high rates of unemployment, crime, drug abuse and prostitution. The implementation of this project was intended to help the local community develop self-esteem, self-knowledge and a sense of belonging to Mafalala, which was perceived as underprivileged (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Dancers from Tufo da Mafalala. © Yassmin Forte

Methodology

The methodology adopted to identify these places of historical and cultural significance was based on participatory methods and divided into several stages, namely: historical and archival document research, individual interviews, impromptu group interviews, focus group, participation observation, participated inventory and analysis. Participated inventory is the core of social museology; essentially, it is a democratic process, and with this method a number of results can be obtained, such as:

– progressive knowledge and patrimonial education, resignification, local management and validation by communities of specific cultural and natural aspects that define their identity;
– collective and individual reflection, a better knowledge and validation of cultural manifestations of the community contributing to the reinforcement of collective power through cultural identity;

– giving the knowledge created by participated inventory back to the community and thus contributing to active safeguarding of cultural assets.

In general, the method adopted allowed us to have a true vision of the concerns and expectations of the Mafalala community with the museum. Some 30 people were interviewed and involved in the early stages of the inventory process.

Historical background

According to Laranjeira (2016 quoting Pereira 1972, p. 4), Mafalala emerged as a neighbourhood in the 19th century, following the Portuguese conquest of the Gaza Empire in 1895, which led to the establishment of a colonial administration in Mozambique. This conquest sparked the exploitation and displacement of African people, which ended in 1975 with the country's independence.

Mafalala is located about 15 minutes from the city centre of Maputo, and grew as a result of Portuguese segregationist policies that forbade black people from living in urban areas. Areas such as Mafalala were thus inhabited by a majority of Africans and working-class people, such as railway and harbour employees, drawn by its location and cheap rents (Laranjeira 2016). They were of different races, origins and religions, and encompassed blacks, whites, Chinese and Indians from Portuguese India—Goa, Damão and Dio. The Africans were of multi-ethnic origins, hailing from diverse provinces of Mozambique and beyond, including the Comoros and Reunion Islands, Madagascar and Zanzibar. Harmony reigned in terms of sociocultural practices and religion, and residents were seeking out improved living conditions (Laranjeira 2016).

This multi-ethnic, multicultural environment produced a cosmopolitan community that was able to resist Portuguese oppression and develop a conscience of its condition as a colonised and exploited people over time. This conscience was expressed through journalistic articles in newspapers such as *Brado Africano*, where the Albasini brothers, João and José, led the process during the 1920s and 1930s (Moreira 1997). The following decade was characterised by the emergence of rebel poetry, with poets such as Rui de Noronha, Noémia de Sousa and José Craveirinha denouncing the situation of black people and raising their voices to support the need for cultural and political emancipation. Furthermore, the adoption of Négritude by local intellectuals during the same period contributed to the development of a common identity and goal (Sousa 2008).[1]

Negritude influenced urbanised Africans to develop a movement for a return to origins, consisting of the revalorisation of African culture through the promotion and consumption of African music, gastronomy and fine arts (Laranjeira 2014). These ideas were reinforced by movements such as Pan-Africanism, which later evolved to nationalism, and were embraced by Mozambican intellectuals, who began advocating for the cause of African liberation. Some of them were able to go to Tanzania and became founders and members of FRELIMO, the Mozambique Liberation Front, and those who remained initiated a clandestine movement to recruit FRELIMO members and promote ideas of independence.

Mafalala's cultural diversity is reflected in the local cultural heritage, and furthermore contributes to the peculiarity and originality of its people and their identity. Cabral (2011) defines identity as the degree of identification and solidarity that an individual has with his or her group, based on the shared perception of a homogenised community of 'us' in opposition to 'them'. This perception comes across when locals proudly affirm that Mafalala is a blessed land because the neighbourhood was able to produce extraordinary figures, including two Mozambican presidents (Samora Machel and Joaquim Chissano), an iconic Portuguese footballer (Eusébio da Silva Ferreira), the first black bullfighter in the world (Ricardo Chibanga) and a number of other important Mozambican personalities, including writers and artists (Fig. 2). Over the course of the guided tour that was developed, residents from the community were able to interrupt the guide to provide comments derived from their own history, revealing through this attitude a strong sense of belonging to the place.

In the process of creating the *Mafalala Walking Tour*, the connection between cultural heritage, memory and identity was evident and particularly, the notion that identity is not something stable and unchanging, but rather, is constantly recreated by communities and groups of people according to the environment, their interactions with nature and their own history (Cabral 2011). The same author defends the idea that the main characteristic of cultural heritage is the capacity to symbolically represent the identity of a group, with efficacy that varies according to the contextualised pertinence of symbols in practices and speeches, the degree of consensus of referents and meanings. This project makes it possible to understand how people managed their personal histories and experiences in a context of exclusion during the non-party system.

Fig. 2. Street art: a portrait of iconic footballer Eusébio da Silva Ferreira. © N. Laranjeira

Mafalala as a place of heritage

According to Nasser, a place of heritage represents layers of evolving traditional forms of architecture and city buildings that have together created a 'sense of place' (Nasser 2003, p. 468). These places have a link to the past and hold influence over the 'sense of place', strengthening local identity, contributing to investment and retaining communities. The author furthermore affirms that any sustainable future for historic contexts must therefore be intrinsically linked to its past, not only in the continuity of the built heritage and urban spaces but also in the living culture that created and continues to shape the distinctive townscape that characterises heritage places (Nasser 2003, p. 468).

With the Mafalala Walking Tour and community museum, IVERCA is striving to obtain economic gain from this past. Asworth (1992) argues that heritage is marketable—while Schouten (1995) similarly considers heritage as a product and, as a product, its value and interpretation changes according to the historical process itself. Heritage changes over time in terms of how it is presented as well as how the public reacts to its presentation. Since heritage cannot exist logically without a consumer, then, in effect, the consumer defines heritage and the process in which selection is central.

Furthermore, Newby (1994) identifies a complex relationship between heritage and tourism, in which culture evolves from being a shared entity to being exploited, and in extreme cases, created. When culture is shared, tourism and heritage coexist in such a way that tourism revenues can be used to sustain and conserve environments of heritage value. The Mafalala project seems to fit into this category, given that in its statutes, IVERCA defends sustainability in all of its activities. Nevertheless, the creation of a tourist destination such as Mafalala poses challenges to IVERCA, an organisation without the resources to make a massive investment in the development of the neighbourhood as a destination.

Some tourism theorists argue that destination by nature is a problematic concept. It refers to a broad range of spatial scales (i.e. levels of representation) in tourism: continents, states, provinces, municipalities and other administrative units, tourist resorts or even single tourist products. Thus, tourist destinations are historical units that evolve in interaction with other socio-spatial units and scales; they are socio-spatial realities that are produced and represented in a specific manner (Saarinen 2003, p. 165). To conclude, Saarinen affirms that the destination and other spaces of tourism are open to signification and to struggles over their representation and social meaning (Saarinen 2003, p. 165). Furthermore, tourist destinations are symbolically characterised spaces, and their identities also impact, construct and attract certain kinds of tourism activities and tourists.

Transforming Mafalala into a walking tour

To achieve its goal of transforming Mafalala into a tourist destination, a number of actions must be performed by IVERCA. According to Saarinen, discourses are important in this process, as socially and historically produced coherent meaning systems and practices, which both manifest and are power structures at the same time (Saarinen 2003, p. 166). They are constructed in social practices, and at the same time they construct and transform social reality and the physical environment by virtue of the practices and pol'icies attached to them.

A discourse never consists of only one statement or action concerning our knowledge of certain objects, but several, and these multiple statements and actions create a discursive formation, constructing both knowledge and practices defining specific issues such as the representation of a tourist destination or the limits of acceptable touristic changes at destination (Saarinen 2003, p. 166). On a pragmatic level, discourses include the immaterial and material production of reality. This dual nature of discursive processes implies both the idea of tourist destination and the actions constructing the physical and symbolic landscape based on that idea(s), which can be conceptualised through a discourse of region and discourse of development.

The discourse of region (or place) refers to our knowledge and meanings related to tourist destinations (the idea), and the discourse of development (or action) aims to represent the practices and larger processes constructing destinations. The discourse of region reflects the social and cultural aspects and materials of tourist destinations. The main factors comprising the discourse of region that produces the (immaterial) idea of tourist destination include travel, tourism and regional literature, tourist maps, guide books, tourist advertisements, the Internet, films, TV shows and the media in general, all of which both produce and reflect local geographies defining the tourist destinations (Saarinen 2004, p. 168).

On the other hand, the discourse of development is manifested by practices and outcomes of organisations and institutions set up for tourism development, planning and marketing, and in the consumption of goods, ideas and services. These practices and institutions operate in the destinations and are spatially contingent manifestations of various social and historical processes, but they are not necessarily physically located in the destinations. Tourist destinations are situated within the sphere of power and practices of the discourse of development and different organisations and institutions (Saarinen 2003, p. 168).

In this respect, IVERCA's is a result of the political changes that have occurred in the country over the last 20 years, namely, the adoption of democracy, which allowed citizens to become more involved in discussions of the country's main issues, and the development of entrepreneurship. Public history is part of this process. For many years, the nation's state-building project did not allow for alternative narratives, and by promoting Mafalala as a tourist destination, IVERCA is breaking with the 'one history and one nation' approach that was the main feature of the Socialist era (1977-1994).

Mafalala: a paving stone for the future

It is important to highlight that Mafalala Walking Tour is the first project of its kind in the country, whereby a civil society organisation is implementing social museology theories in a poor and marginalised community. IVERCA started a project for the promotion, awareness and preservation of the local cultural heritage by connecting it to tourism businesses—a fundamental step to ensure cultural sustainability, which includes the maintenance and preservation of social relations and meanings that reinforce cultural systems. Specifically, it refers to maintaining and enhancing the diverse histories, values and relationships of contemporary populations (Low 2008).

Seven places of historical and cultural significance to local people were identified and are the backbone of the tour, namely: the Noémia de Sousa and Samora Machel houses; the primary school Unidade 23, which was a police station during the colonial period; the mosques Iti Faque and Baraza, where people originating from the Comoros, Madagascar, Reunion Island and Zanzibar gather to worship; Campinho, the playground where important local sportsmen played football; and Tufo's, a traditional dance house where the tour ends, and where tourists can attend performances by Makhuwa women from the northern province of Nampula.

In 2015, six years after the project was launched, the neighbourhood was recognised as a protected area by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Mozambique through the Mozambican Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage: Law 10/88 of 22 December 1988. Mafalala is currently considered by Maputo City Hall as a protected area. The second phase of the project encompasses the construction of a community museum that will function as a cultural centre promoting cultural activities such as concerts and art exhibitions and will house a library for locals and visitors alike. The idea is to improve the quality of life of the Mafalala residents, improving their self-esteem and self-knowledge (Fig. 3a and 3b).

Fig. 3a. Mural on cultural diversity representing women at play. © Yassmin Forte

The Mafalala Walking Tour is a landmark project in Mozambique. The first of its kind, it is a Community Based Organisation set up by young people, allowing for a new way of managing cultural heritage to emerge, giving voice to the excluded, and breaking with the former system of state monopoly over this activity. The project used participatory methodologies that involved some 30 people in all stages, from the inventory process to the definition of the Mafalala Walking Tour route and the building of a community museum.

The project was an opportunity for people to express their feelings, their understanding and expectations of Mozambique's historical process, which in most cases was permeated with desolation and disenchantment of the country's political, economic and social situation. However, the democratisation of the country has enabled the emergence of public history projects, creating a conducive environment for such endeavours.

The methodology used enabled the identification of perceptions, expectations and finding of solutions regarding heritage in focus groups, impromptu interviews, life histories, formal and informal meetings. Of prime importance was the openness of the Mafalala people who were eager to collaborate with testimonies or through the identification and localisation of important sources related with specific issues of their history or events. The participatory methodology allowed them to bring up a number of issues related to recent Mozambican history which were going to be lost due to exclusion.

Fig. 3b. Mural depicting a street scene. © Yassmin Forte

Nevertheless, the project faces challenges. IVERCA is a CBO with limited resources. The exercise is daunting. In Mozambique, such activities were previously performed by public bodies and this initiative has provided an opportunity and a space for people to recount and place value on their own experiences and histories, and build their own narratives. The number of people involved is growing, with participants starting to understand the purpose of the project due to the campaigns for advocacy, explanation and participated inventory developed by IVERCA. The project has taken hold in Mafalala and people believe that it has the potential to make their community a better place and contribute to the education of their children.

Notes

1 *Négritude* was both a literary and ideological movement that came into being in the 1930s. It was led by French-speaking black intellectuals from the French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. The movement is known for its vehement rejection of European colonisation and the role colonisation in the African diaspora, for upholding pride in blackness and traditional African values and culture, mixed with an undercurrent of Marxist ideals. *Négritude* was born from a shared experience of discrimination and oppression, and an attempt to dispel stereotypes and create a new black consciousness (see *A Brief Guide to Négritude*, an online resource made available by the Academy of American Poets). This movement was introduced in lusophone Africa following the publication of the journal *L'Etudiant Noir* by Sorbonne students, which influenced a number of African Portuguese writers such as Francisco Jose Tenreiro, who published Ilha de Nome Santo (1942) and Mario de Andrade with *Poesia de expressão Portuguesa,* published in 1953 (Gomes undated, p. 4).

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