Unit 43

Hand-out 1:

examples of summaries

Aalst Carnival

Inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List

Country: Belgium

The Aalst Carnival takes place each year on the Sunday before the Christian period of Lent. The three-day festivities are the culmination of a year of preparation by the inhabitants of this city in East Flanders, northern Belgium. Exuberant and satirical, the carnival attracts over 60,000 spectators and celebrates the unity of people in Aalst, across all social classes. A Prince of the Carnival symbolically becomes mayor and receives the key to the city in a ceremony marked by ridicule of the city’s actual politicians. A procession goes through the streets of the town, comprising effigies of giants and ‘Bayard’, the horse from the Charlemagne legends; a broom dance in the central market to chase away the ghosts of winter; and a parade of young men dressed as women wearing corsets, pushing prams and carrying broken umbrellas. In addition to the carefully prepared floats of official entrants, informal groups offer mocking interpretations of current local and world events. As the procession ends, the Carnival effigies are burned; spectators shout that the feast will go on for another night. Carnival is recreated every year, but it has a long history in Aalst, as the oldest written evidence dates from 1432. Carnivals held everywhere in Flanders seemed to be dying out around 1900, but in Aalst people started experimenting with a new Carnival format to stimulate the economy of the town. With the help of a special committee to organize it after 1923, the Aalst Carnival soon flourished anew. Banned during WWII, Carnival again flourished and grew after 1946. (256)

Baul Songs

Inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (first proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005)

Country: Bangladesh (and, in fact, India)

The Bauls are minstrels in rural Bangladesh and West Bengal (India) who live near a village, or travel from place to place to earn their living from singing, accompanied by the one-stringed ektara and other instruments. Bauls are admired for their freedom from convention as well as their music and poetry. Baul singing and dancing can be traced back to the fifteenth century when they first appeared in Bengali literature. Although always a relatively marginalized group, the minstrels are welcomed and supported by the rural population. Their music and way of life have influenced a large part of Bengali culture, including the compositions of Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Their songs have remained accessible, as their language has been constantly modernized. Bauls belong to a syncretic devotional tradition, influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, Vasinavism and Sufi Islam. They neither identify with organized religion, temples and sacred places, nor with the caste system. Their emphasis lies on the human body as the place where God resides. Baul poetry, music, song and dance are devoted to finding humankind’s relationship to God, and to achieving spiritual liberation. The songs are also used by spiritual leaders to instruct disciples. The Baul movement was at its peak in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the situation of the Baul minstrels has worsened in recent decades due to the general impoverishment of rural Bangladesh. (227)

The Ifa Divination System

Inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (first proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005)

Country: Nigeria

The Ifa divination system is practised among Yoruba communities and by the African diaspora communities in the Americas and the Caribbean whenever an important individual or collective decision has to be made. Ifa divination relies on a system of signs that are interpreted by a diviner, the Ifa priest or babalawo, literally ‘the priest’s father’. The word Ifa refers to the mystical figure Ifa or Orunmila, regarded by the Yoruba as the deity of wisdom and intellectual development.

The Ifa divination system makes use of an extensive corpus of texts and mathematical formulas transmitted between Ifa priests. The Ifa literary corpus, called odu, consists of 256 parts subdivided into verses called ese, whose number is constantly increasing (there are around 800 ese per odu). Each of the 256 odu has its specific divination signature, which is determined by the babalawo using sacred palm-nuts and a divination chain. The ese, considered the most important part of Ifa divination, are chanted by the priests. The ese reflect Yoruba history, language, beliefs, cosmology and contemporary social issues.

Traditional Ifa beliefs and practices suffered discrimination under the influence of colonial rule and religious pressures. The Ifa priests, most of whom are quite old, have only modest means to maintain the tradition, transmit their complex knowledge and train future practitioners. The youth and the Yoruba people are losing interest in practising and consulting Ifa divination, which goes hand-in-hand with growing intolerance towards traditional divination systems in general. (242)

Katta Ashula

Inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Country: Uzbekistan (and, in fact, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan)

Katta Ashula (‘great song’) is a type of traditional song that forms part of the identity of Uzbeks and other groups such as Tajiks, Uyghurs and Turks, living in the Ferghana Valley. It is also performed in neighbouring regions of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. A classical genre, Katta Ashula, combines performing arts, singing, instrumental music, poetry and rites. The songs, which are normally not accompanied by instruments, are performed by two to five singers and cover a wide range of subjects, lyrical, philosophical and theological. Many texts originate from classical and also more modern poets, while leaving some room for improvisation. Traditionally, the required skills were transmitted from master to pupil during a demanding apprenticeship, but new recruits to the profession are dwindling. Performances of Katta Ashula on television and radio have helped to raise awareness about it. Central government, local authorities and various other bodies organized festivals, contests and other activities to provide opportunities for performances. Katta Ashula is now taught at institutions of various levels all over the country. This work is supported by research (creation of a database, organization of conferences, publications, etc.) and through the introduction of programmes for transmitting the tradition to young people. Katta Ashula is an important expression of the identity of all Uzbeks today. (218)

Indonesian Batik: production and use

Inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Country: Indonesia

The craftspeople making hand-dyed cotton and silk garments known as Indonesian Batik hand down their knowledge and skills within families over generations. The artisans draw designs on fabric using dots and lines of hot wax, which resist vegetable and other dyes and therefore allows selective colouring by soaking the cloth in one colour, removing the wax with boiling water and repeating if multiple colours are desired.

Designs and motifs show regional variation, but also reflect a variety of influences, ranging from Arabic calligraphy, European bouquets and Chinese phoenixes to Japanese cherry blossoms and Indian or Persian peacocks. The symbolism and cultural practices surrounding batik permeate the lives of many Indonesians: infants are carried in batik slings decorated with symbols designed to bring luck, and the dead are shrouded in funerary batik. Clothes with everyday designs are worn regularly in business and academic settings, while special items are incorporated into celebrations of marriage and pregnancy, into puppet theatre and other art forms. The garments also play a central role in rituals, such as the ceremonial casting of royal batik into a volcano. The craft and use of batik is intertwined with the cultural identity of the Indonesian people, expressing their creativity and spirituality. (198). The wide diversity of patterns reflects a variety of influences, ranging from Arabic calligraphy, European bouquets and Chinese phoenixes to Japanese cherry blossoms and Indian or Persian peacocks. Often handed down within families for generations, the craft of batik is intertwined with the cultural identity of the Indonesian people and, through the symbolic meanings of its colours and designs, expresses their creativity and spirituality. (267)

The Cantu in paghjella: a secular and liturgical oral tradition of Corsica

Inscribed in 2009 on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding

Country(ies): France

The cantu in paghjella is a male Corsican singing tradition sung a capella in a variety of languages including Corsican, Sardinian, Latin and Greek. It combines three vocal registers that always enter the song in the same order: a segonda, which begins, gives the pitch and carries the main melody; u bassu, which follows, accompanies and supports it, and finally a terza, the highest placed, which enriches the song. Paghjella makes substantial use of echo. As both a secular and liturgical tradition, it is performed in the bar or village square, as part of liturgical masses and processions and during agricultural fairs. Traditionally the paghjella has been concentrated in the more rural and pastoral areas of northern Corsica; since the 1970s the practice also extended to other regions of the Island.

The principle mode of transmission is oral, largely through observation and listening, imitation and immersion, commencing first as part of young boys’ daily liturgical offices and then later at adolescence through the local church choir. Despite the efforts of its practitioners to revitalize its repertoires, paghjella has gradually diminished in vitality and suffered impoverishment of its repertoire, due to a sharp decline in intergenerational transmission caused by emigration of the younger generation. Unless action is taken, paghjella will cease to exist in its current form, surviving only as a tourist product devoid of the community links that give it real meaning. (232)

Novruz, Nowrouz, Nooruz, Navruz, Nauroz, Nevruz: New Year and Spring celebrations across West and South Asia

Inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Countries: Azerbaijan – India – Iran – Kyrgyzstan – Pakistan – Turkey – Uzbekistan

Novruz, as the tradition is called in Iran, and Nowrouz, Nooruz, Navruz, Nauroz or Nevruz as it is called in the other participating countries, means ‘New year’. Beginning on 21 March every year, it marks the New Year and the beginning of spring across a vast area covering, inter alia, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Novruz is associated with various local traditions, such as the evocation of Jamshid, a mythological king of Iran, and other tales and legends. The rites that accompany the festivity vary from place to place, ranging from leaping over fires and streams in Iran to tightrope walking, leaving lit candles at house doors, and traditional games such as horse racing or traditional wrestling in Kyrgyzstan. Songs and dances are common to almost all the regions, as are semi-sacred family or public meals. In the Kyrgyz Republic, for example, contests of Akyns improvisers, epic storytellers, are organized in which they compete in greeting the arrival of the New Year. Other activities include performances of Akyns. In Uzbekistan, the songs of Navruz have also been preserved as part of the repertoire of folk tellers. Children are the primary focus of the festivities and take part in special activities, such as decorating hard-boiled eggs. Women play a key role in organizing Novruz and passing on its traditions. Novruz promotes peace and solidarity between generations and within families, as well as reconciliation and neighbourliness, thus contributing to good relations within and between various communities. (247)