

Making the Maldives: Exploring How the Body Holds Cultural Knowledge



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‘A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor...’ - Franklin D. Roosevelt

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Malsa Maaz

Date: 11.09.21

Resubmission Date: 17.05.2022

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for deposit in the University's digital repository.

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Abstract

This research explores the weaving culture of the Maldives by focusing on the islands' traditional embroidery called *kasabu viyun*. It uses ethnographic information collected during fieldwork in 2018 to explain why it is important to safeguard methods as much as the objects created. It does this by arguing that through the culturally structured physical processes involved in making *kasabu*, culture and the body are woven together to create an aspect of gendered cultural identity that is not visible in the finished items. By showing how the threads of knowing, body movements and culture tie together in practice, this research will also illustrate how anthropological methods of research can be used in other disciplines - such as heritage - to recognise these intangible elements and the importance of documenting culture for the purpose of preserving and safeguarding it.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Maldives is a small island nation that prides itself with having a unique culture. Hong (2009: 4) defines culture as ‘networks of knowledge’ which consists of learned routines of thinking, feeling and interacting with other people and is shared among a collection of interconnected individuals. The Maldives comprise a series of atoll islands situated South East of the top of India’s landmass within the Indian Ocean. This position has provided the islands with an ever-changing population as a result of their placing along some very active trade routes. Consequently, the early settlers on the islands hailed from different regions of the world. Thus Maldivian culture has been described as a ‘fusion of cultures’ (Jameel, 2012). Like all cultures, the Maldives has grown, changed, adapted and flourished with the incoming of new ideas and influences - from embracing Islam as their new faith, to adjusting to the changes brought by tourism and globalisation. However, this has also led to the younger generations of Maldivians to question their ‘true identity’ as they ask; Who are we? Where do we come from? How have we been influenced? As a result of these questions, this study explores how people in the Maldives express their culture and asserts that body performances associated with making items provides a living place where culture is held. In short, I argue that bodies hold cultural knowledge and use this as one mechanism to understand transmitted cultural expectations from one individual to another.

1.2 Research Aims and Purpose of Study

This research will discuss the significance of intangible cultural heritage in exploring how making processes contribute to cultural identities. Kaul (2014: 14) defines cultural identity as such: ‘cultural identity is derived from formal or informal membership in groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions and ways of life...it changes over time and evokes emotions as it is intertwined with power and privilege, affected by close relationships, and negotiated through communication’. I argue that culture and identity themselves are intangible as they are both continuously living and evolving (Lenzerini, 2011: 101). Thus, I reason that anthropological methods such as participant observation are crucial to understanding how cultural knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, and therefore is well placed to allow the

processes required to make artefacts to be foregrounded and made visible, which may encourage a move away from focusing heavily on the tangible or the finished material object. Here, heritage is analysed as a process of perpetual becoming in the present which would allow for a more dynamic understanding of cultural production (Kenny, 2009: 15). Following the ideas of Ingold (2013) and Marchand (2010), this research shows that the art of making is as important as the finished product in order to explore the immaterial and intangible elements of culture. By using the example of making traditional Maldivian embroidery weaving - *kasabu viyun*, this research will aim to examine how bodies hold cultural knowledge, and how that knowledge is transmitted through the repeated physical actions required to make these items. Finally, this research will aim to lay a foundation to inspire further research in Maldivian cultural heritage which is in dire need of documentation.

Literature on the Maldives

A lack of academic interest in the Maldives has been highlighted by scholars such as Andrew Forbes (1980: 70) in his article *Archives and Resources for Maldivian History* which aimed to draw wider academic interest in the Maldives. Anthropologists Clarence Maloney and Xavier Romero-Frias have written ethnographic accounts of the Maldives and its people after having lived in the country for a number of years. Xavier Romero-Frias (2013) in his book *Folk Tales of the Maldives*, has documented Maldivian folklore stories which continue to be told and therefore passed from generation to generation. These works provided a certain amount of information that manages to record some aspects of the intangible cultural heritage of the Maldives, but the literature is scant. Regardless of the quantity of information available in these books, their work was not met with much enthusiasm from the government at the time of publication and are still not available for purchase in the Maldives.

Arriving at the topic

More recently, a series of projects to document the cultural heritage of the Maldives have been established. But the primary focus remains on Maldivian tangible heritage such as the coral stone mosques (see Chapter 3) and overlooks other cultural aspects. Consequently, any documentation concerning intangible cultural heritage of the Maldives still remains largely neglected. However, there has been a recent spark of interest among the younger generations as evidenced by social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. A particular interest centres on the revitalisation of traditional crafts, in which the traditional art of making contemporary products is now being taught and learnt. This offers a compelling example of how culture is lively and continues evolving.

This study uses ethnographic fieldwork methods to collect experiential information on the traditional art of weaving. The research focuses on my experience with two key weavers as interlocutors to demonstrate that how an individual's body moves during weaving enables the weaver to hold and transmit important cultural knowledge. Consequently, this study will highlight the importance of intangible cultural heritage in understanding how culture evolves and keeps on living by weaving the discipline of anthropology and heritage together.

Engaged anthropology allows anthropologists to get actively involved in current global social concerns and provides the opportunity for anthropologist to apply their knowledge in the real world by weaving theory and practice together. As an engaged anthropologist, the concern that motivated this study was the lack of documentation of Maldivian culture and heritage which has undoubtedly resulted in the neglect of its preservation and appreciation over the years. However, with the recent spark of interest in the revitalisation of Maldivian traditional crafts, I believe that engaging in its study and documentation will raise awareness about the importance of cultural documentation and preservation, and in doing so, will give back to the community. Hence, Maldivian traditional embroidery weaving, *kasabu viyun* was chosen as the main focus of this study.

1.3 Background Context

This section provides a brief historical outline of how Maldivian identity has been shaped and organised. By attending to a few key developments and events, some insight into how locals are able to construct a narrative concerning their cultural identity will be provided. According to Jameel (2012 : 2), the Maldives has been inhabited for over 3000 years, but its history remains 'shrouded in considerable mystery' (Forbes, 1979: 1). Archaeological excavations revealed that the Maldives have long possessed a rich cultural heritage that was probably established during what is known as the Buddhist Era of the country (Mohamed, 2002). With the acceptance of Islam as their new faith in 1153 A.D, the Maldives went through a major transformation to find a balance between what was the established cultural identity and the new incoming belief system.

The introduction of organised tourism in the Maldives in the 1970s, provided another significant transformation culminating in the sector becoming the essence of the Maldivian economy. Tourism soon overshadowed the cultural heritage of the country. With the main focus of the government on tourism, the preservation and documentation of Maldivian heritage was systematically neglected (Ahmed, 2018: 10). Despite being influenced by major global players (such as India and other

neighbouring countries), the Maldives remained almost always politically independent, and the culture of the small island nation remains described as ‘distinctively Maldivian’ (Litser, 2016: 14; Maloney, 1976: 654). Therefore, one might argue that the Maldives has a culture that is in need of better recognition and appreciation (Jameel, 2012: 15).

Religion & Politics

The earliest inhabitants of the Maldives did not leave any archaeological remains as the materials utilised for the construction of buildings or crafting of products would most likely have been perishable materials such as coconut palm fronds (Jameel, 2012: 3). The earliest archaeological evidence were sandstone and coral stone structures which would have been built to about fifteen to thirty feet in height, but now exist as mounds or foundations of what must once have been impressive structures (Mohamed, 2005a: 12). It was Stanley Gardiner who first noticed these mounds in his 1900 scientific expedition to the Maldives (Gardiner, 1902; Mohamed, 2005a). However, it was not until the arrival of H.C.P Bell in 1922 - the archaeological surveyor of the British government to Ceylon (now known as Sri Lanka) - that these mounds were revealed to be of Buddhist origin dating back to the first millennium A.D (Bell, 1940; Mohamed, 2005a; Jameel, 2012).

Little was known about the Buddhist culture of the Maldives until these archaeological excavations. Bell’s most significant discovery was a figure of Buddha sitting in a *dharmma chakra mudra* posture which he noted to be a common feature of the Buddhas depicted in Sri Lanka (Forbes, 1979; Bell, 1940). This expedition was followed by the Kaashidhoo excavation led by Egil Mikkelsen in 1998, in which he concluded that the ruins at the site represented features of Indian monastery architecture (Mikkelsen, 2000: 9). Thus, both their studies suggest that Buddhism in the Maldives arrived from both India and Sri Lanka, thus establishing multi-cultural influences of the region (Bell, 1940; Mikkelsen, 2000; Mohamed, 2002).

It is evident that Buddhism prevailed in the Maldives until the country embraced Islam in 1153 A.D (Jameel, 2012). There are numerous stories on how the Maldives came to embrace Islam, but the most common one suggests that it was brought to the Maldives by a saint named Abul-Barakart al Barbari from Maghreb (Amir, 2011: 14). He is the main figure featured in the popular folktale, *The Rannamaari Story*, which is about a sea monster that appears once a month at night to take a young

virgin girl, to dishonour her and kill her, which terrorised the islanders (Romero-Frias, 2012: 74; Maumoon, 2002: 14). The story continues to explain that Abul-Barakat - who knew the Quran by heart - had arrived in the Maldives at this point, and decided to chant from the Quran throughout the night to keep the evil spirit of the sea monster away. This is the story:

The King was astonished. Abul-Barakat proposed to him that he embrace Islam and inspired him with a desire for it. The King Shanurazah said to him, 'Remain with us till next month, and if you do again as you have just done and escape the evil Jinn, I will be converted.

The stranger remained among the infidels and Allah disposed the heart of the King to receive the Islamic faith. Thus Shanurazah became a Muslim before the end of the month, as well as his wives, children and court.

At the beginning of the following month the saint of the Maghreb was brought again to the idol temple, but the demon did not come. Abul Barakat chanted the Quran till morning, when the King and his subjects came and found him still reciting. Then they broke the idols, and razed the temple to the ground. The people of the island embraced Islam and sent messengers to the other islands, whose inhabitants were also converted.

[Romero-Frias, 2012: 75]

The conversion to Islam is regarded by Maldivians as the most significant event in Maldivian history, and the story of *Rannamaari* remains the most popular folktale as it is still reenacted in school plays and celebratory events. Amir (2011: 4) believes that the reason for the conversion of the Maldives to Islam has been deeply romanticised. Clearly the obvious symbolism of Islamic scriptures able to overcome a lascivious demon provides a powerful metaphor. However, I argue that the continued popularity of this folk story may not be associated with the belief systems but rather demonstrates how folktales and oral traditions continue to be functional and are still deeply embedded in the Maldivian culture. Therefore, this series of events is relevant in telling the Maldivian story.

Maniku (1986/87: 80-81) argues that the adoption of Islam was an enlightened political decision along with the 'natural love for the Maldivians for detachment and isolation from his neighbours

and surroundings.’ After the Maldivians embraced Islam, all temples and Buddhist structures were systematically demolished, and mosques were built on top of them (Forbes, 1979). Despite the fact that one might be tempted to argue that Buddhist elements are still embedded in aspects of Maldivian culture, it remains a taboo and controversial topic in some quarters. Unstructured interviews during fieldwork revealed that some Maldivians reject any Buddhist connections and appear to be almost ashamed or embarrassed that Buddhism was once the predominant religion in the country before the introduction of Islam. Interviewing an older man revealed this when he said, ‘It is perhaps a good thing that the Buddhist history has not been documented well. There is no need for the younger generations to learn about it as it is irrelevant’.

In his book *The Maldivian Islanders*, Romero-Frias (2013: 1) observed similar attitudes towards any Buddhist past. ‘Maldivians, instead of acknowledging and giving due honour to their ancestral Buddhist heritage, in which most of their culture is still rooted, spared no effort to dissociate themselves as much as possible from their own past’. Oshea (2011) writes that Maldivians are not alone in finding their history uncomfortable, and gives examples from world history such as the suppression and distortion of American history concerning slavery and the attempted genocide of the Aboriginal people of Australia.

Islam was stipulated as the state religion in 1997 under the rule of Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom, and in 1996 the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs was established, which is now known as Ministry of Islamic Affairs since 2008 (Ningthoujam, 2015: 3). Democracy was introduced to the country in 2008 when Mohamed Nasheed became the first democratically elected president. However, he was widely criticised for his pragmatic approaches which were dismissed as anti-Islamic ideals by hardline Salafists (Ningthoujam, 2015: 4). Over the last decade, there has been an increase in religious extremism around the world and the Maldives is no exception. In 2012, a group of so-called extremists stormed into the Malé National Museum in an attempt to destroy all artefacts that represented Buddhism to be the former faith of the country (Bajaj, 2012). The director at the Malé National Museum announced that all but two of thirty Buddha statues were smashed and damaged beyond repair (Bajaj, 2012). This incident is similar to the cultural genocide carried out by the Taliban in 2001 in their destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan (AFP, 2012). The reasoning behind this attack was that these Buddha statues were said to be idols of worship, which is forbidden in Islam. However, despite these sentiments, Maldivian law continues to protect the ancient figures as they are held to be an important part of the history and culture (Bajaj, 2012).

Although the attack was condemned by the heads of state, it has resulted in the loss of a huge part of Maldivian pre-Islamic material cultural history. It is important to acknowledge the history of religion in the Maldives to understand the tension between Buddhism and Islam when documenting culture. It shows insight into how Maldivians are coming to terms with the former faith after accepting a new one and what this would mean for their identity.

Tourism in the Maldives

As the tourism industry plays an instrumental role in shaping the Maldives, it has to be addressed here. Tourism began in the Maldives in 1972 with the concept of 'one island-one resort' which was allowed by the unique geography of the Maldives (Rasheeda, 2012: 8; Amir, 2011: 44). Tourism brought in a culture of Westernisation which resulted in a huge wave of internal migration to the capital Malé as people were in search of better education and employment opportunities (Amir, 2011: 1). It brought numerous advantages to the country such as being renowned as one of the most popular tourist destinations and having the highest literacy rate, highest currency value and highest per capita income in South Asia (Maumoon, 2002: 20; Romero-Frias, 2003).

However, these advantages came at a cost. For instance, the concept of 'one island-one resort' by the First Tourism Masterplan of 1982, kept the local islanders and tourists at a strict distance. It seemed like a calculated decision by the government to avoid any negative influences on the religious and cultural values of the Maldives (Rasheeda, 2012; Amir, 2011: 44). Although this decision was made by the government in the interest of protecting the locals, it alienated many as their surroundings were objectified and commoditised. Thus, this left the locals with a 'sense of separation' in which they had little control over the ongoing activities (Carrier, 1992: 540).

C. Michael Hall (2009: 109) writing about the tourist image of the Pacific states that it is always presented as the image of paradise where there are 'swaying tropical palm trees, white sandy beaches and crystal clear waters'. This is certainly true of the Maldives; as a consequence of the perfect tropical paradise image portrayed, one might argue that the country was exoticised, even by the locals themselves. During his first visit to the Maldives in 1979, Romero Frias (2003: 1) noted that the 'country had been described, but not understood' as the few documents written were simplified reports and glossy tourist guides. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, as tourism grew and became the main focus of the Maldivian government, there was no commitment to preserve and document the culture (Ahmed, 2018: 10). Ahmad & Jameel (2015: 1) argue that

‘developing countries like that Maldives reject cultural heritage in the wake of globalisation as it is seen as symbol of backwardness’. Consequently, the cultural heritage of the Maldives remained largely neglected.

After the boom in tourism, there was an increase in souvenir shops in Malé that sold products exhibiting items sold as traditional Maldivian culture. However, the biggest problem lies in the fact that these products were not made in the Maldives; they were in fact mass produced in East Asian countries, but labeled and sold as being made in the Maldives (Rasheeda, 2012: 25). The Maldivian Authentic Handicraft project identified that due to a lack of regulatory policy framework, the production and continuation of local arts and crafts had been threatened and further to that, it failed to protect the local craftspeople of the Maldives. In the process of developing tourism as a core industry, elements of Maldivian intangible cultural heritage are packaged in a certain way to attract tourists which consequently distorts the nature of culture, and has the potential to eventually lead to the loss of the original meaning (Zhang et al, 2015: 278). Therefore, for my purposes here, it is crucial to consider authenticity in terms of intangible cultural heritage, as it has a strong connection with the cultural identity of its creators and bearers (Lenzerini, 2011: 113).

The increasing production of the inauthentic images created about the Maldives can be seen as a direct consequence of a world that is becoming more and more globalised, which in turn boosts tourism (Burns, 1999: 127). However, while it might boost one area of the economy, the production and selling of these inauthentic products has alienated and discouraged the Maldivian craftspeople from practicing in their own field of work. For instance, in the context of this research, interviews with older generations of weavers based in islands revealed that they were especially discouraged from continuing to weave. Although they valued the art of weaving, they did not see a point in ‘breaking their backs weaving’ all week to produce the braids for just one *libaas* neckline when ‘ready-to-wear’ *libaas* are being purchased at the souvenir shops for much cheaper prices instead. The handmade *libaas* are expensive due to the amount of work which goes into them (see Chapter 4), but it is evident that the hours of intricate work that goes into weaving a neckline has been undervalued even within the local community itself.

The Third Master Plan between 2007-2011 introduced a new concept of guest-house businesses in the Maldives. This plan promoted decentralisation and planned to focus on community based tourism (Ministry of Tourism, 2013). The establishment of this new arm of tourism offered locals

the opportunity to own these businesses. Undergraduate fieldwork was carried out in the island of Baa Kihadhoo in 2017, when the island was still relatively new to the concept. In the original proposal drafted by members working at the island council, the notion of Maldivian culture was incorporated into the document as much as possible with the slogan ‘eat, sleep and live local’ (Maaz, 2018: 29). Participatory mapping revealed that this island was well known for its *fangi vinun* (coconut thatch weaving), and household products crafted with coconut palm fibre such as *baiypolhi* (winnowing fan) and *goshi* (food cover). As part of the incorporation strategy, workshops in which the traditional art of making these products were planned to be taught to the interested younger generations and tourists who come for the local island experience (Maaz, 2018: 29). Furthermore, this new business concept was met with enthusiasm from locals who were encouraged to establish their own brands to value the elements of Maldivian culture which had been ignored for a long time. This section has provided a brief overview of salient features of how the Maldives has developed and how the making of cultural artefacts has played a role in creating the Maldives of today.

1.4 Chapter Outlines

This document is divided into a series of chapters that work to explain the data and how it was collected. Following this introduction, the methods section will outline the primary methods of data collection that I used for this research. Qualitative research methods such as participant observation will be discussed to highlight its significance in anthropology. The research was done in accordance with the *Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice* by the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) of the UK and Ireland, and the importance of conforming to these ethical standards in anthropological research will also be discussed.

In Chapter 3, light will be shed on a few recent projects initiating the revitalisation of elements of Maldivian intangible cultural heritage. Although these projects have proved to be significant in bringing attention to lost or dying cultures, I argue that academic documentation is necessary for the long term preservation of Maldivian culture. Following the discussion that locates intangible cultural heritage in the Maldives, Chapter 4 will provide ethnographic details so as to show the ways in which the physical processes involved in making actively shape the body, both physically and culturally. Thus, the body is shown to hold, enact and transmit culture through performing the movements required to make cultural objects but also offers another dimension that can be used to

capture or realise the intangible. Thus, the chapter will offer a discussion on the transmission of embodied knowledge using my experiences to support the argument. Lastly, Chapter 5, the concluding chapter will summarise the research, discussing its limitations and potential for further research.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the methods used in exploring the research questions of this study:

- How do bodies hold culture and identity?
- How is cultural knowledge learnt and transmitted?
- How can anthropological research methods be used to explore the significance of intangible cultural heritage and embodied knowledge?

By exploring mixed qualitative methods, this study will also argue how these methods can be interdisciplinary when woven together with other disciplines such as heritage. This argument was inspired by the module '*Key Debates in Anthropology*' taken in the taught element of the postgraduate program in Engaged Anthropology. In the book by Tim Ingold (1996) of the same name, he states in the preface that the purpose of the book was to 'promote a continuing dialogue between the many and divergent viewpoints that make up contemporary anthropology'. The debates hoped to address the issues faced by anthropology as a discipline, from its troubled history associated with colonialism to questioning the very nature of the discipline. The debates in the book helped me to question methods and how these methods can then be used and applied. It was at this point that I began to realise the value of being present and the importance of doing for understanding how culture might work and how methods too are a process and can be useful in various contexts in different ways.

The discipline of anthropology and its methods have evolved overtime, from armchair anthropology to fieldwork becoming the basis of primary data collection. Mixed qualitative methods such as participant observation, structured and unstructured interviewing are the mainstay of fieldworkers and were used for the purpose of this study. Their advantages and limitations will be discussed in relevance to this research. A detailed account of the fieldwork process will be given which includes reflexive writing to demonstrate the challenges faced by anthropologists in the field. Okely (1992: 15) highlights the importance of experience to anthropological writing as what is learnt in the field is achieved holistically - through a total process which includes all the senses, including through movement and the body of the anthropologist.

2.2 Anthropological Research Methods in Context

To understand anthropology as a discipline and how its methods have changed and developed overtime, its background history must be taken into consideration. In the nineteenth century, anthropology emerged in Europe and North America as a discipline devoted to the systematic observation and analysis of human variation (Welsch & Vivanco, 2016: 2). Armchair anthropologists discussed ‘others’ and some travelled to ‘exotic’ places in search of people who were thought to be at an earlier stage of mental and social evolution (Okely, 2012: 17). Indeed, it is common knowledge that much scholarship including this discipline has its roots in colonialism (Schneegg, 2015: 26) and emerged from scholarship that was institutionally racist.

Bronisław Malinowski, a Polish anthropologist working first at LSE is credited for revolutionising research methods in anthropology by describing it as a way of knowing from the inside. He was stranded (through internship) on the Trobriand Islands during the First World War, where he developed what is now known as participant observation - the lengthy and immersive method of data collection now called doing fieldwork (Nelson & Braff, 2020: 39).

After Malinowski published the description of his approach to doing fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, a Malinowskian template was formed for the basis of doing anthropological fieldwork: (1) documentation i.e field notes; (2) observe and take part in the daily lives of the locals; (3) the recording of spoken statements emphasising the importance of the native language (DeWalt, 2015: 251; Nader, 2011: 214, Schengg, 2015: 27). It was evident that the lived, sensed, experienced and emotional worlds are better understood by participating with others (Watson & Till, 2010: 34). ‘Anthropology is studying with and learning from’, suggests Ingold (2013: 3), as he argues that ‘the only way we can really know things is through a process of self-discovery’. It is participant observation that gave anthropologists a privilege of knowledge and skills to understand the course of people’s practical involvements with one another and with their environments in everyday lives (Ingold, 1996: 1).

According to Bernard & Gravlee (2015: 4), anthropologists did not invent it, nor is it exclusive to the discipline anymore, but anthropologists do continue to make consistent use of participant observation in fieldwork and use the term as an overarching label for their methods. This has then led to discussions about human communication and knowledge (Bloch, 2017: 40) which has also paved the way for the innovation and diversity of methods we can see today. Consequently, methods of data collection have developed. Therefore, some might argue that they have improved

with the discipline's requirement for transparency of relationships, and with regards to communication which have then become some of the hallmarks and the tenets of participant observation and the ethnographies that follow (Schnegg, 2015: 26).

Mckerrell & Pfeiffer (2020: 24) argue that in order to understand the embodied and somatic agency of intangible cultural practices, the performance of those practices need to be understood through ethnographic interviews and participant observation. They suggest that it is through these methods that we can begin to understand others (and also ourselves) by attending to the ways in which intangible cultural heritage is performed or enacted (Mckerrell & Pfeiffer, 2020: 24).

2.3 Fieldwork

Locating participants

In preparation for fieldwork, some of the methods that I had used during my undergraduate dissertation were applied. These included participatory mapping and the use of smartphone to record data instead of a field notebook. Participatory mapping is an easy way of locating what a community perceives as its place and establishing any significant features within it. This includes sociocultural features (Cochrane & Corbett, 2018: 2). As fieldwork was traditionally marked by travel to a distant place away from home, I initially felt it necessary to locate a few local islands away from the city that practiced weaving. I contacted a local NGO (which will not be named due to problems that may arise) with the intention of collaborating with them, as they supported several local craftswomen, particularly weavers. As this research was required for a degree named 'Engaged Anthropology', it was important to situate it so that it might contribute beneficially to the community. Applying anthropology tends to require collaboration which can include working with local organisations. This method enables researchers to co-construct ethnographies and share leadership in the research projects (Schensul et al, 2015: 188). This focus moves anthropology away from the abstract and towards solution seeking, and importantly removes the danger of 'talking about others', something that past methods had the potential of doing.

However, at this stage some conflicts of interest arose: the founding member of the local NGO I had approached wanted to lead the research, and claim ownership of it so that it belonged to them. When it was made clear that the dissertation would be the intellectual property of the university, they withdrew their support stating that they were not willing to work with a student in that point of

time. Due to this reason, the original plan had to change, and this was the first moment of the research which evoked a sense of panic.

Nevertheless, it was a learning experience, and one has to acknowledge that preparation for any such outcomes in advance allows for more informed and better decisions to be made (Fleuhr-Lobban, 2015: 138). It is a responsibility of the anthropologist to anticipate any problems and resolve them without harming the research participants or the scholarly community (ASA, 2011: 1). Okely (2012: 48) maintains that not only do these things happen but also that things must be expected to change, and this unplanned character of ethnography is precisely its value.

Without the collaboration that was initially planned, my budget (as a student) was not sufficient to complete my fieldwork in the chosen islands. The flight to travel from the capital Malé to the atoll would cost £150 and the accommodation would have cost £50-100 a night. These costs were simply not feasible and therefore, I had to change my plans and fieldwork had to be achieved in my home city Malé and, in addition new participants had to be found. During the initial participatory mapping stage, two weavers were discovered on Instagram by using the hashtag *#kasabuviyun*. From five star tourist resorts who advertise the Maldivian landscape for travel packages, to small local businesses buying and selling their products online, Instagram appears to be the main social media platform used in the Maldives. It proved to be useful, as the two weavers located ended up being the two main participants for this research.

Once I had found them I used Instagram to approach them. There, I asked them if they would be willing to teach me to weave. The two women were from Malé, and were of different age groups; one was an older woman, and the other was a much younger woman. Both these women practiced traditional weaving, but I kept in mind that the art of making and the lived experience of these two women would be very different, and imagined that would provide me with key information for my research about how individual bodies hold cultural knowledge. Guest (2015: 222) states that in many research contexts, finding knowledgeable individuals willing to participate is fairly straightforward, and, luckily in the case of this research, Guest was right. The overarching, even key, aim for fieldwork was simply to learn to weave from experts with traditional knowledge of the weaving process. All I needed was to let them lead and for me to follow.

Entrance into the field

The next challenge I faced when I started my fieldwork was at the entrance into the field. I was no longer going far away from home, rather doing it in the very city I was born and raised. I questioned

myself, as many other anthropologists had, by asking if ‘without that kind of fieldwork is anthropology still anthropology?’ (Amit, 2000: 15). Perhaps the reason it did not feel like I was not doing ‘proper anthropology’ was because I was doing fieldwork differently to what was traditionally perceived as authentic anthropological fieldwork; the notion of the hierarchy that was upheld in not only traditional anthropology but also genuine anthropology which has been the idea that the field was a geographically distant place. ‘After all, if ‘the field’ is most appropriately a place that is ‘not home’, then some places will necessarily be more ‘not home’ than others, and hence more appropriate, more ‘field-like’. (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 13). All ethnographic research is thus done ‘in the field’, but some ‘fields’ are more equal than others - specifically those that are understood to be distant, exotic and strange.’ (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 13). I felt overwhelmed with doubt.

Caputo (2000: 19) says how this traditional notion of the field being a geographically distant place has implications for the kinds of anthropological knowledge that is produced as it would be limited. However, as I continued with my literature review, I soon realised that anthropologists were redefining the ethnographic field to ‘explore the multi-sited, transitional circulation of people, practices and objects’ (Marcus, 1995; Amit, 2000). Anthropologists like Vered Amit (2000: 16) argues that ‘the old arrival tales’ aimed at exaggerating the social isolation of the field detracted the attention of the ethnographic context of the research, and that ‘we cannot disconnect ourselves from our lives to live our fieldwork, just as our subjects cannot disconnect themselves from the world and their pursuits to engage with or to be abandoned by us’. Nigel Rapport remained close to home whilst doing fieldwork in north-west England and argued that anthropologists used the traditional notion of the field as a sort of ‘validation’ (Rapport, 2000; Amit, 2000: 12). Virginia Caputo (2000: 29) stated that ‘the unique insights and experiences that are gained through fieldwork are apparent despite the actual physical distance travelled’. Sarah Pink realised that her personal relationships could be construed ethnographically as fieldwork, as her key informants were herself, her husband and friends (2000: 102).

Anthropology at home

Anthropology at home as a term is referred to as an anthropologist studying their own culture, which one can argue has given new dimensions to the discipline (Mughal, 2015: 121). As mentioned before, anthropology as a discipline has changed through the years. As a result, it has faced a shift in contexts within the discipline, moving away from colonialist thinking and exotic

writing, thus for anthropologists today, doing anthropology at home has become increasingly popular especially in the non-Western world.

I learnt to rework the notion of field in my head, and that the concept of field being a faraway land is of the past. The fieldwork for undergraduate dissertation was done in a remote island in the Maldives, and I realised that I could apply the same research methods to my current research as well. My fieldwork was based on the two women entirely at my home city; once I assumed my weaving position, I had arrived at my field, thus getting to understand the lived experience. As Okely (2012: 27) suggests, fieldwork is as appropriate for studying the cultural context from which the anthropologist emerged.

Thus, I began my fieldwork and took weaving classes from both these women - Hawwa and Amina. I completed the basics of *kasabu viyun* in the course of a month which fit the budget assigned for fieldwork. For the classes, I went to Hawwa's house three times a week. She was the older lady, and had other commitments, therefore she did not have a dedicated space in her house for weaving. She practiced weaving during her free time as a hobby. Amina on the other hand, was more flexible and brought the weaving tools to my house. She had just finished planning out the basic course, and I ended up being her first student. The weaving process and its ethnographic context will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Participant Observation

Scholars such as Bernard (2011: 275) state that as researchers, we have to maintain a certain level of naïveté in the field. Therefore, I saw myself as a student eager to learn about the traditional art of weaving. He also states that it would be harder to do it in your own culture, as most of what would come would not even occur to me as something worth recording as it would seem natural (Bernard, 2011: 275). Although I was doing fieldwork in my own community, and therefore would know how to behave in accordance to perceived norms, practices and conventions, I still kept in mind that I cannot fully identify with the participants and that I, as a researcher would always be marginal to some degree (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013: 25).

During the weaving process, it was participant observation that made me acknowledge my own senses. Had I merely been just an observer, I would not have understood the lived experience of the women with whom I learnt to weave. Ingold (2013: 3) in some ways appears to chime in with

Malinowski's calls to understand a culture from the inside, by asking us to participate. Participant observation is not just a technique of data collection but lets us explore the connection and the disconnection between what people say and what they do, which further helps us to understand and question the history and ideologies by which we, as anthropologists are influenced (Shah, 2017: 49).

Interviewing: Unstructured / Semi-Structured

Participant observation is just one of the many methods that fit into the general category of qualitative data collection in fieldwork (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 2). Participant observation is assumed to be a good approach to gaining an ethnographic understanding of the social life, and it also provides context for a number of other qualitative methods of data collection such as conversation, story telling, narrative enquiry, and structured and unstructured interviewing (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 3). Informal interviewing was chosen to use at the beginning of participant observation to build rapport and uncover new topics of interest. This was a good method to get people to open up at their own pace (Bernard, 2011: 157). Once the initial rapport was established, I moved onto semi-structured interviews where I had prepared a set of questions:

- How did you learn the traditional art of weaving?
- Is there a difference between the way you weave and how you were initially taught?
- What is the significance of weaving to Maldivian culture and identity?
- How long does it take to complete one set of braids for one dress?
- Are you aware of your body when you weave?
- Do we hold traditional knowledge about weaving in our bodies?

The conversation was still more free flowing than a fully structured interview, but the idea was to let my informants teach me with a general direction in mind. I used this method during Skype calls or phone calls with other participants I knew I would not get more than one chance with (Bernard, 2011: 157). This meant that even though they talked at their own pace, I could still lead the conversation in the general direction of questions that I had planned. One can be mindful about the questions set, but still remain guided by the informant. I used unstructured interviewing, which amounted to informal conversations during the weaving process as well. Here, I am not referring to

learning about the skill of weaving, but rather about these women and the values they upheld. In this case, participant observation combined with unstructured interviewing really was a way of knowing from the inside. It showed how people's individual models of knowledge shape action and agency (Makovicky, 2010: 81). The use of this method meant that the conversations were free flowing, but I could ask a question here and there which would lead back to a topic of interest for my research. Whilst learning a skill such as weaving, I found this method to be the most useful as it gave me insight into the lived, sensed and experienced emotional worlds of the weavers (Watson & Till, 2010: 134; Okely, 2012).

Field notes / Photos / Audio & Video Recordings

Various methods were used to record field data including field notes, photos, audio and video recordings. I learnt very early on not to rely on memory and wait to note it later. It was during my undergraduate fieldwork, when I initially started feeling uncomfortable about carrying a notebook, which is why I decided to dedicate a time later in the day to write up my observations. However, this was a mistake as the exact quotes and what I felt at that moment were forgotten during the writing up process. Therefore, even though I did not go into lengthy descriptive writing, I used the jotting method (Bernard, 2011: 292), which meant that I could refer back to it later during the dedicated time I had for writing to trigger the memory. Okely (2012: 78) noted that 'we don't necessarily have to write notes in the middle of the action but just before the memory filters and fades'.

I did not carry a notebook with me as it felt unnatural, therefore uncomfortable. I wanted to avoid treating 'people as objects of knowledge' (Watson & Till, 2010: 127), especially because fieldwork took place in such an intimate setting with just me and a woman weaver. Instead, it felt more natural making quick notes on my phone. In this current digital age, carrying a mobile phone in public and going on it seemed more acceptable than carrying a notebook. I created a separate folder named 'Field Journal' on my iPhone Notes application which was password protected. With the use of the Notes application, I was able to have all my notes, photos, video and audio recordings compiled in one place. I was able to quickly jot down associations and correspondences that I saw and observed, as a reminder to myself to translate it to field notes later on.

Photos and videos were used to record the weaving process. During weaving sessions, I used the Voice Memos application on my phone which allowed me to record the audio of conversations that

went on as we both sat weaving. Although the application was in use, it still allowed me to simultaneously use the Notes application to jot down quick notes of things that I did not want to forget. As my main topic of interest was the body, I observed body movements, facial expressions and different signals which cannot be recorded on audio, therefore it was important to jot down the observations in that moment before I forgot (Bernard, 2011: 293). Schensul & LeCompte (2013: 16) note how these bodily movements and signals vary from culture to culture. I kept this in mind as I felt like I had to pay extra attention if I wanted to notice the bodily movements that I was already used to within my own culture. As I learnt to weave from two different women, observing and learning from them demonstrated how personalities were also reflected in the process of weaving which brings in individual identities. It was evident that when a skill is learned, so are the social values, and attitudes within which the skill is practiced (Venkatesan, 2010: 170).

I used my physical notebook later on when I had the time to sit down and go through my notes. The notebook was used to write descriptions transcribed from the jotted notes, audio and video recordings. The audio interviews were mostly done in *Dhivehi*, therefore it took about one to two hours to translate and transcribe one interview. Malinowski noted the importance of knowing the language in doing fieldwork, and as *Dhivehi* - the native language of the Maldives - was my first language, I was at an advantage as I was able to fully immerse myself in these conversations with little effort.

During the transcribing process, I was able to recognise the bits where bodily movements really mattered in the conversation during the weaving process, as I had jotted notes alongside the audio recordings that I had dated. Therefore, every single observation made was written down during fieldwork, and transcribed later the very same day. I was not just paying attention to their bodily movements, but my own body as well and what it was sensing and feeling.

Ethical Considerations

In doing social research that includes people, any moral and ethical issues with using this methodology should be taken into consideration. Immersing into a society means that people are letting you be a part of their world. Therefore, this requires full consent and transparency, which would protect the privacy rights of the informants. Jun Li, describes the ethical challenges he faced in the field by assuming the role as a covert researcher whilst studying the culture of female gambling. Although he was able to observe the natural occurrences that took place, he violated the

privacy rights of the informants and subject himself to psychological conflicts (2008: 108). He described that he was 'unable to make peace with disturbing feelings of my research concealment' (2008: 112).

Informed consent in social research opens up a two-way channel of communication that once opened, allows for a continuous flow of information and ideas (Fluehr-Lobban, 2015: 142). Under the *Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice* of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth (ASA), the ethics form was approved by the university research committee prior to starting fieldwork. A consent form was given to all participants to sign - even those who only participated in a brief interview - which explained how data would be stored and protected. It also explained how the information shared would be used including photographs, audio and video recordings. The participants were assured that the audio and video recordings would be deleted once the research was complete. The forms were also translated to maintain the honesty of the research with informants whose first language was Dhivehi. Moreover, the participants were made aware of the purpose of the research, and the role which they would play in it. ASA guidelines state that 'informants and other research participants should have the right to remain anonymous and to have their rights to privacy and confidentiality respected' (2011: 5). Therefore, the anonymity and confidentiality of all the participants were also guaranteed. To respect their wishes, their names will not be mentioned in this research and pseudonyms will be used instead.

2.4 Conclusion and Summary

This chapter has highlighted the methods used for the purpose of this research. I argue that part of what makes anthropology a relevant discipline today is the ability of the discipline to unlearn and learn new ways of adapting to the contemporary world. For instance, it is clear that narrow concepts of the field and fieldwork are being reworked by contemporary anthropologists as it is vital to the life of anthropology in the twenty-first century (Caputo, 2009: 29), thus proving that anthropologists themselves are challenging the discipline to keep it relevant. More importantly, anthropology provides a method that allows lived experiences, micro moments and movements to be felt and considered.

Bernard & Gravlee (2015: 5) state that whatever epistemological differences there in the fields, the actual methods by which we collect and analyse data belong to everyone across the social sciences. Although participant observation is a method full of problems - such as our presence influencing the

everyday life of communities - it can be argued that because of the humility involved, it is still the best way of 'achieving the necessary knowing from the inside' (Bloch, 2017: 39; Ingold, 2013: 3). More than any other discipline in the human sciences, anthropology has the means and determination to show how knowledge grows from the crucible lives lived with others, and this is made possible by engaging with our surroundings (Ingold, 2014: 387).

With the strengths of participant observation combined with other methods, the research methods in anthropology can be inter-disciplinary as it shows insight into the sensed and lived world of other groups and communities. The questions we ask about the human condition may differ across the social sciences, but methods belong to all of us (Bernard, 2011: 2) which is why the argument has been put forth that research methodologies that are considered to primarily belong to anthropology can be woven into other fields such as heritage. Judith Okely (2012: 21) states that anthropology's methods have their own kind of force anywhere; therefore, 'the theoretical and methodological approaches from anthropological participant observation can be pursued in literate and industrialised contexts, in the metropolis and all continents'.

Chapter 3 - Intangible Cultural Heritage

3.1 Introduction

The term 'heritage' does not just refer to the past; it provides a link through a representation or a reinterpretation of the past, to the past (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009: 42). The definition for the term 'heritage' has been fairly recently re-theorised by Smith (2006: 11) who argues that it should be understood as a cultural process. It can be considered as 'an intangible process in which social and cultural values are identified, negotiated, rejected or affirmed' (Smith & Waterton, 2009: 42). In this case, all heritage can be considered intangible due to the value and social impact ascribed to it (Kuutma, 2013: 4). The notion that heritage is about a place comes from the Western European architectural conservation practices which define it as material, monumental and of universal value (Kuutma, 2013: 4). This perception dominated the definition of heritage for years. However, in the last decade, cultural heritage practice has now moved away from the notion of just protecting old buildings (Long & Labadi, 2010: 2; Kuutma, 2013: 4) and has moved towards recognising the fluid and recurring process that craft ideas of the past and heritage through culture.

Cultural heritage consists not only of individual buildings, but also other elements such as customs, folklores, traditional crafts, gastronomy, national costume, artistic and literary works. Intangible cultural heritage can be recognised in oral traditions and language, landscape as a part of the visual arts, social practices, rituals and festivities, traditional knowledge and applied knowledge about nature and the universe, and traditional arts and crafts.

[Terzić et al, 2015: 103]

This chapter will argue the importance of taking the intangible cultural heritage into account in the active learning, documentation and preservation of culture. The relevance of intangible cultural heritage as a topic of discussion in the discipline of anthropology and the foregrounding of the intangible elements of culture will be discussed. Moreover, in discussing the intangible cultural heritage in the Maldivian context, this chapter will also aim to demonstrate the enormous influence

that the intangible elements have had on Maldivian culture. Throughout this research, I mention the fact that little has been written about the Maldives. Although the tangible culture is slowly being documented, intangible cultural heritage is still overlooked. However, there has been a strong interest in the revival of traditional arts and crafts, in association with the burgeoning tourist industry and the seeking of a Maldivian identity to market, which will also be highlighted in this chapter. With this new found interest in the revitalisation of culture, I argue that this can be used in favour of finally documenting the intangible element of Maldivian culture to give it the value and appreciation that it deserves. It is the documentation and safeguarding which would allow for the transmission of cultural knowledge so that it can be passed onto the generations to come.

3.2 Intangible Cultural Heritage: Background Context and Relevance

1972 saw the introduction of the World Heritage Convention - the Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage. It was deemed problematic for being too Eurocentric as their list consisted of ‘monumentally grand and aesthetic sites and places’ (Smith & Akagawa, 2009: 1). Consequently, it was criticised for being too narrow as it did not include intangible cultural heritage (Lenzerini, 2011: 104). Akagawa (2009: 15) states that the rich cultures of southern countries are expressed in their living form rather than monuments and sites. Therefore, Smith & Akagawa (2009: 6) argue that heritage only becomes heritage once the cultural and social values - which are themselves intangible - are taken into consideration.

Intangible cultural heritage is a loose translation of the Japanese term *mukei bunkazi* which is defined as ‘oral traditions, expressive culture, the social practices, ephemeral aesthetic manifestations and forms of knowledge carried and transmitted within cultural communities’ (Kurin, 2007: 10). In Japanese law, intangible cultural properties ‘consist of skills embodied by individuals or groups of individuals who represent the highest mastery of the techniques concerned’ (Bortolotto, 2010: 102). This implies that safeguarding measures would need to be in order to allow for the transmission of skills (Bortolotto, 2010: 102). It was the Japanese influence on intangible cultural heritage that inspired the establishment of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which recognised its importance at an international level (Bortolotto 2010; Terzić et al, 2015).

This convention attempted to acknowledge the non-Western aspects of heritage, thus sparking international debate about the value of cultural heritage (Smith & Akagawa, 2009). Now that it has

been acknowledged that the immaterial, such as oral cultures and traditions are as important as material effects, Vecco (2010: 324) argues that it can be interpreted as a step taken in the direction of finally overcoming the Eurocentric perspective of heritage, to embrace cultural diversity as a source of enrichment for the whole of humanity. The new goal was not to have professionals documenting intangible cultural heritage, but rather to allow the bearers of their own heritage to themselves to transmit their practices and know-how (Bortolotto, 2010: 103). Therefore, intangible cultural heritage is not something to be considered as something to be preserved in a glass cabinet, but rather a living cultural space which ensures the preservation and safeguarding of the cultural evolution and constant adaptation of its creators and bearers (Lenzerini, 2011: 109). In association with these changes, a framework was proposed by Denhez (1997: 6) through which the value of intangible cultural heritage can be appreciated and supported. This is summarised in the following three points

- (1) granting an official recognition to a selection of ‘cultural spaces’ where there is an outstanding concentration of intangible cultural heritage and oral traditions
- (2) encourage their safeguarding of the above and promote participation of individuals, groups and institutions or governments in the management of the safeguarding actions.
- (3) raise awareness of all stakeholders to the importance of intangible cultural heritage (Aikawa-Faure, 2009: 17).

A main aim of this research is to argue how anthropological methods can be woven into fields such as heritage. Cultural heritage is studied in anthropology

‘because of its importance to current negotiations on remaining human, protecting vulnerable peoples, defending cultural identities, linking culture to development and finding effective paths towards sustainability’

(Arizpe, 2013: 21).

In this context of this research, the aim is not just associated with defending and championing culture, but it is also about defending the cultural identities. The fact that ethnographies are still scarce on cultural transmission has been highlighted by Berliner (2013: 72) arguing that anthropology is still a science of continuity that should keep exploring this idea. Machuca (2013: 67-69) highlights the emerging topics for research in regards to anthropology and intangible cultural heritage all of which can be directly linked to this research:

- Concepts and representations of the body and identity (the concept of person)
- Practical knowledge and the scope of concepts such as performativity
- The importance of traditional knowledge in contexts of innovation and linking it to cultural systems.

Arizpe (2013: 24) argues that it is very important that anthropology engages in the study of intangible cultural heritage as it supports the in-depth knowledge and the development of new ways of understanding and organising fluid identities.

3.3 Maldivian Cultural Heritage: Tangible & Intangible

The Maldives has a cultural heritage that has evolved in association with being positioned in the Indian Ocean (Ahmad & Jameel, 2015). Due to the unique geographical formation and location of the Maldives - which Heyerdahl (1988: 20) describe as ‘dots on the map in the Indian Ocean, which is an exhibition of green jade necklaces and scattered emerald jewellery placed on blue velvet’ - it can be argued that groups of people from different regions of India, Sri Lanka, East Africa and Arabia have reached and settled in the Maldives throughout history (Heyerdahl, 1988: 19; Jameel, 2012). Their influences are clearly reflected on the culture, and these cultural fusions can be seen in language, traditional crafts, folk stories and oral traditions, performing arts, cuisine and festivities and celebrations. Some of these examples will be briefly outlined in this chapter.

Tangible Heritage of the Maldives

Not much archaeological evidence of the early inhabitants is available as the materials utilised were most likely perishable such as wood or coconut leaves (Jameel, 2012; Ahmad & Jameel, 2016). However, Buddhist structures have been discovered on various islands in the Maldives, thus unveiling Buddhism to be the former faith of the early inhabitants. After the Maldives embraced Islam in 1153 A.D, the Buddhist structures were ‘systematically demolished’ (Forbes, 1979: 46) and mosques were built on these sites.

The coral stone techniques used in the mosque architecture are distinctive; Maldivians use a unique method of coral construction called coral carpentry which uses assembled and shaped coral blocks with an interlocking dry joinery system. The interlocking method integrates the walls, columns,

doors, ceilings and the roof structure and is a type of architectural technique that is not seen in any other part of the world (Ahmad & Jameel, 2016). Thus, the remnants of these structures and the method itself received international recognition; six of the finest coral stone mosques have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List. Malé *Hukuru Miskiy* stands at the top of the list for its fine coral stone carvings, lacquerwork and calligraphy, and has been identified as one of finest coral stone buildings in the world (Ahmad & Jameel, 2016). The typical coral stone mosque is built on a raised coral stone plinth made of shaped coral stone blocks. Today, coral mining is banned in the Maldives under new environmental laws thus ‘marking the end of a significant part of the cultural history for the country’ (Ahmad & Jameel, 2016: 50).

The above example illustrates that the tangible culture of the Maldives is now slowly being documented. The Maldives Heritage Survey led by Michael Feener is a collaboration between the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Earth Observatory of Singapore, SAIEL at Washington University and the National Centre for Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Heritage in the Maldives. It aims to complete a comprehensive survey of the tangible cultural heritage of the Maldives such as the religious sites, vernacular architecture and aspects of material culture (Feener et al, 2021: 8). It is being documented with a matter of urgency as the Maldives is threatened by climate change which would cause irreversible damages (Feener et al, 2021: 2).

Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Maldives

Much like the tangible culture, it is evident that the intangible culture of the Maldives has also been influenced by settlers from different regions. Moreover, the intangible cultural heritage has evolved over time, adapting to the various changes and historical events, but the Maldivian-ness remains. My undergraduate dissertation which focused on the coconut culture of the Maldives revealed that as natural resources were scarce, the few resources that were available were heavily exploited (Maaz, 2018). The creation of crafts were undoubtedly inspired by the practices of neighbouring regions, but were nonetheless made ‘distinctively Maldivian’ (Litser, 2016).

One such example is the Maldivian toddy container (see Fig.1), locally known as *raa badhi* used by toddy tappers *raaverin* to collect the coconut sap. In other South Asian countries such as India and Sri Lanka which practiced toddy tapping, clay vessels were used to collect the sap (Law et al, 2011: 477). As clay was not readily available in the Maldives, the toddy container was fashioned out of two polished coconut shells bound together with coir rope, which was also locally made, thus providing an example of how materials from the surrounding environment were utilised.

I have pointed out this object in particular to demonstrate that simply looking at an object fails to communicate what might be called its true essence. This is because the intangible elements that go into the making of these items or tools are important points to consider as they provide insight into the elements such as the socio-cultural life of Maldivians, the surrounding environment and the materials utilised. Some intangible elements that make up Maldivian culture will be highlighted below to show their influence and significance:



Fig 1: Raa Badhi - Toddy containers

Dhivehi Language

The official language of the Maldives is known as *Dhivehi* which is of Indo-Aryan origin consisting of older Indic elements (Litser, 2016: 64; Maumoon, 2002: 25). Old Maldivian alphabet has similarities with the 7th century Tamil Grantha script, which suggests connections with Buddhist centres in India (Romero-Frias, 2003: 25). It has its own script which developed over many centuries from *Eveyla Akuru* to *Dhives Akuru*, and finally *Thaana* which is the script used in the present day (Maumoon, 2002; Mohamed, 2005b). Moreover, *Thaana* is written from right to left which illustrates Arabic influence of the post-Islamic era (Maumoon, 2002: 56). The language is spoken across the country with dialects that vary from regional atolls. It is also spoken in the Minocoy Islands - locally known as Maliku - which is administered by India in the present day (Maumoon, 2002). It is evident that the language has been influenced by various Indian languages, Sinhalese and Arabic, but it is most impressive that the Maldives developed its own individual language despite multiple influences.

As mentioned above, the coconut palm tree plays an important role in Maldivian culture and its significance is reflected strongly in the Dhivehi language. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis argues that language moulds and reflects thinking and provides mediums of expression for a society (Sapir, 1958 [1929]: 69). This is evidenced with regards to how the coconut palm is characterised in Dhivehi. The palm is not categorised as other botanical entities, it is grouped separately as *ruh*, whilst all other trees and plants are called *gus* and belong to the same category (Litser, 2016: 65). This establishes the palm as distinct from other plants and demonstrates the cultural need to

separate it linguistically. However, there is a word for every single part of the coconut palm tree, every stage of the fruit and every product created with it (Maaz, 2018: 15), thus, perhaps, demonstrating the economic, social and practical value of the plant for island inhabitants. Similarly, there are separate names given to different parts of the sea; *vilu* is the name for lagoon with *vilu noo* (blue) being the colour for the turquoise shade of blue; and *kand'u* is the name for given for deep sea with *kandu'noo* as the colour for dark blue (Maumoon, 2002: 21). Moreover, due to the geographical formation of the country, no words for city, village or town exist in the language as all are classified as islands and atolls (Maloney, 1976: 660).

Oral Traditions, Performing Arts & Rituals

Raivaru is a form of poetry in Maldivian literature which come in verse form resembling a couplet and has a certain tone when recited (Romero-Frias, 2003; Maumoon, 2002). Traditional folk stories of the Maldives have been documented over a period of 28 years by Romero-Frias (2003) in his book *Folk Tales of the Maldives*. These stories ranged from tales of monsters, fairy-tale myths, stories with humorous characters, fables with local animals, seafaring stories and historical events that portray locals as heroes and heroines (Romero-Frias, 2003; Maumoon, 2002) with the main purpose of passing on a moral lesson. He observes how these stories were an 'inseparable part of the national identity', which had been passed down from generation to generation, but had become less popular with the influence of Islam and wave of modernity which encouraged these stories to be perceived as unrefined and backwards (Romero-Frias, 2003).

Jameel (2012: 15) observes that the performing arts such as music and dances are also influenced by an exposure to different cultures. For example, in traditional drumming *bodu beru* the drumbeats resemble East African beats whilst the melodies sung are closer to Indo-Asian (Jameelm 2012: 15). Black magic or sorcery - locally known as *fanditha* - practices are still common in the Maldives today. This is a tradition that reflect the presence of quasi religious magical practices, which also tend to mirror ideas that have been transmitted via the old religious traditions (Amir, 2011: 13; Romero-Frias, 2003). *Fanditha* once played a substantial part in Maldivian culture; for instance, Maldivians used *fanditha* to protect themselves from evil spirits and diseases, which were caused by the actions of the spirits (Romero-Frias, 2012: 110).

Traditional Arts & Crafts

Maldivian traditional arts and crafts evolved in association with and adapting to the surrounding environment. Some of these crafts such as coir rope weaving and coconut thatch weaving have deep roots. By analysing historical sources authored by early writers, it is evident that the Maldives was famous for its coir rope production which was in great demand amongst ancient travellers (Pyrard, 1619; Ahmad & Jameel, 2016). Ibn Battuta, a renowned medieval Muslim author created one of the world's first travel diaries of his travels around the Islamic world. His account reveals the longevity of the local rope weaving practices.

The greatest part of their trade consists in a sort of hemp, that is, thread made of the fibres of the cocoa-nut. It is made by macerating the nut in water, then by beating it with large mallets till it is quite soft; they then spin it out, and afterwards twist it into ropes. With this thread the ships of India and Yemen are sewn together, of which, when they happen to strike against a rock, the thread will yield a little, but will not soon break, contrary to what happens when put together with iron nails. This is the best sort of hemp.

[Ibn Battuta, 1829]

Making of coir rope is a lengthy process which could take months to complete. It is made from coconut husks which are removed whilst the coconut is still young. These husks are then made tender by laying it in to soak in the sea for about five months; this process is called *bombi faakurun* (Pyrard, 1619; Maldives Independent, 2017). It is then followed by *bombi thelhun* in which the soaked husks are beaten to loosen the strands. Once the loose strands are extracted, they are twisted and spun together usually by women to produce bundles of coir rope (Maldives Independent, 2017). This process is called *roanu veshun*.

Another popular craft in the Maldives is coconut thatch weaving, locally known as *fangi vinun*. Panels of thatch were used as fencing and roofing material until the introduction of corrugated roof material in the 1960s (Ahmad & Jameel, 2015: 5). Thatch weaving, although less common now, is still practiced in various local islands today in the form of cottage industries (Maaz, 2018: 23). The tourist resorts use thatch roofing for the bungalows that make up the famous Maldivian image sold to tourists. Undergraduate fieldwork in the island of Kihadhoo, famous for its thatch weaving, revealed that this was also a process which takes a lot of time and effort. The collection of dry palm fronds and the necessary weaving are activities that are done by women in groups. These times provide arenas for sharing and lubricate important social networking mechanisms. Moreover, it also

has an educative function as this is where women transmit the knowledge their bodies hold about the making of these items, which then reflect simultaneously their social and cultural values (Maaz, 2018: 26; Okely, 2012: 115).

Lacquer work, locally known as *liyelaajehun* is a decorative art form traditionally used to increase the durability of wooden products, which is thought to have come to the Maldives through trade relations with China (Athif, n.d b). This craft is now exclusively practiced in the island of Baa Thulhaadhoo creating various products for locals (such as *gathaa fai* - the traditional embroidery weaving tool) and as tourist souvenirs.

Due to the limited scope of this research, just a few examples of Maldivian objects and the intangible cultural heritage associated with them have been outlined in brief. Nevertheless, the few that have been mentioned above provide a snapshot of some of important artefacts of the Maldivian culture, its influences, how it has evolved and is still continuing to evolve. The example this research pays attention to is *kasabu viyun* - traditional Maldivian embroidery weaving, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

3.4 Revitalisation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Maldives

In the introductory chapter, I highlighted a few reasons that led to the neglect of Maldivian cultural heritage - especially the neglect of the intangible aspects of its cultural heritage - specifically with reference to documentation, preservation and safeguarding. However, there have been recent attempts at reviving the islands' arts and crafts practices in a bid to reestablish traditions. Revitalisation was a major topic of discussion in the 2003 UNESCO Convention negotiations. In Article 2, Paragraph 3 the Convention identify revitalisation as:

- [If referring to practices developed by the cultural community]: reactivating or reinventing social practices and representations, which are no longer in use or falling in disuse.
- [If referring to heritage policies]: The encouragement and support of a local community, developed with the agreement of the same community, in the reactivation of social practices and representation, which are no longer in use or falling in disuse.

Scovazzi (2015: 122) explores the loss of heritage and suggests that the loss of heritage could occur due to a wide variety of events of natural and social character, or simply because of the indifference

shown by younger generations towards the traditions of older generations. There has definitely been a large neglect on the Maldivian cultural heritage, and I have highlighted issues such as the sudden acceptance of a new faith and the rise of tourism as key factors. However, it is clear that this neglect does not come from younger generations. In fact, as mentioned before, there has been a recent spark of interest among the younger generations to revitalise the traditional arts and crafts in order to value and appreciate them.

Authentic Maldivian Handicraft (AMH) is a United Nations Development Program endorsed initiative which guarantees the customers authentic Maldivian products crafted by island practitioners. The instigation of AMH has established a set of partnership links between local island communities that practised handicraft making. The initiative aimed to protect the livelihoods of craftspeople and the revival of these handicrafts (Authentic Maldivian Handicraft, n.d). Moreover, there has recently been a rise in local brands who are working on the revival of Maldivian culture. A few of these local brands and their mission are highlighted below:

Toddy Inc.

Toddy Inc. uses the slogan ‘The untold story of Maldives’ and was founded by two brothers in 2011 who were inspired by the Maldivian history, mythology, marine life and traditional arts and crafts. Their most popular products are t-shirts which feature Maldivian designs used in traditional arts and crafts. In an interview given to Hotelier Maldives in 2019, the brothers discussed their plans of incorporating stories from the pre-Islamic era to shed light on the stories of rituals and magic, as they believe that the current historical records of the Maldives are in a state of inadequacy (Hotelier Maldives, 2019). Moreover, they also discussed the issues faced as a small local business competing against large souvenir companies in the Maldives who still dominate the tourist area of the city.



Fig 2: Toddy t-shirt featuring traditional Maldivian design



Fig 3: Island Bazaar Products



Fig 4: Oevaali phone cases

Island Bazaar

Island Bazaar was established as recently as 2015 by a young Maldivian couple and this is their story: ‘With respect for cultures, reviving tradition and heritage, our series of homeware, apparel and jewellery collections embodies tranquil and warm styles... And we collaborate with local artists and encourage them to showcase their talents, and offer an inclusive platform to celebrate individuality’ (Island Bazaar, 2021). Their most popular products range from canvas tote bags to jewellery, all exhibiting Maldivian characteristics.

Oevaali Art Shop

Oevaali Art Shop was also founded in 2015 by two sisters who create art and products ‘that are evocative of Maldivian history, culture and geographical beauty’ (Oevaali, 2021). The products crafted by local artists benefit directly via this brand, in which they state that the revenue from tourism channels back into the local community. The contemporary products such as journals and phone cases feature the map of the Maldives and common local wildlife such as turtles and manta rays. Moreover, they have held exhibitions such as ‘Heritage Through Folk’ in which local artists and their works were displayed which featured old Maldivian folk stories.

Stone Carving by Gadheemee Collection

The main objective of the Gadheemee Collection as stated on their Facebook page is to ‘reintroduce the almost lost art which is embedded in the history of Maldivian arts and crafts by recreating the ancient limestone carvings made by our ancestors’ (Gadheemee Collection, 2021). As coral mining is now illegal in the Maldives to protect the environment from further damage and erosion (Jameel, 2012), the founder of this brand uses an alternative material called celicone building blocks which is an artificial material which mimic the original coral stones used in the past. He creates products with the traditional carving designs using the same hand techniques and tools that past artisans would have relied on.

The products range from homeware such as vases and storage boxes to decorative plaques made for custom tourist resort orders. In collaboration with Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI), the Gadheemee Collection has held courses and workshops that teach the traditional art of stone carving stating that ‘traditional stone carving was picked specifically as research suggested that this is a dying art with very few traditional stone masons and carvers operating in the Maldives’ (Maldives Insider, 2019).



Fig 5: Coral stone art inspired products

Kasabu by Hidha

This is a small business owned by a weaver who also creates contemporary products such as wristbands, bracelets and homeware by using the traditional methods. When you purchase a wristband, you get a message saying:

When making this wristband, the same ancient techniques were used with more vivid colours. The chosen colours are inspired by the traditional *libaas* and *feyli*, colours of the ocean and rays of the sunrise.

[Kasabu by Hidha]

Traditional embroidery weaving tools *gathaa fai* and *foali* (bobbins) are used to create the braids. An interview with the person who started this business revealed that she learnt this craft with the aim of reviving it by teaching the knowledge she gained. Her art of making is follows the traditional rules, as she uses the ancient techniques, but her products are contemporary, which shows how culture both inform and be entangled in objects.

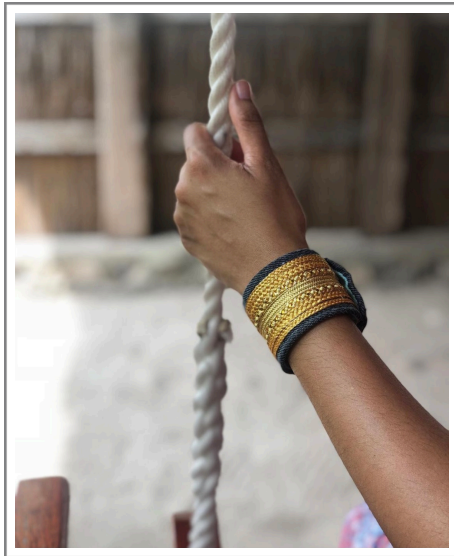


Fig 6: Bracelet with *kasabu* embroidery



Fig 7: Cushion covers with *kasabu* embroidery

These are just a few examples of local brands that have been established in the recent years with the aim of revitalising the Maldivian intangible cultural heritage. It appears that their work is contributing positively to a modern iteration of the Maldivian image and the revival of this aspect of culture. What is most significant about their work and items described above is how much of an impact it has had on the local community, particularly in regards to sparking an interest amongst younger generations. As the Maldivian society is a close-knit community, these brands have had the advantage of the trend catching on through word of mouth and informal social media advertising. A quick look and brief, informal review of Maldivian Instagram pages particularly amongst my own friends and acquaintances showed that almost everyone between the ages of approximately 18 - 40 now own a product from at least one of these brands. Arizpe (2013: 20) states that the recent flare up of interest in these kinds of heritage items may create new possibilities for safeguarding of existing living heritage. This is certainly true in the case of the Maldives, as interest grows in consuming the products that represent a sense of Maldivian-ness locally (and not simply for the

tourist industry). Van Der Borg et al (1996) believe that this strengthening of the interest in local culture is good for the reconstruction of traditional culture and national identity.

3.5 Conclusion and Summary

This research has shown that the Maldives is blessed with a culture and heritage which is in need of better documentation. Although the early inhabitants did not leave any archaeological remains (Jameel, 2012), the influence on culture and how it has evolved over time can be seen by analysing some of the elements of the intangible cultural heritage. As mentioned, there has been a recent trend in the revival of traditional crafts which shows that the younger generations are looking for, starting to recreate and thus, appreciate Maldivian culture. This chapter has outlined the importance of intangible cultural heritage and how it needs to be better protected. The following chapter will focus heavily on weaving, and how the local Maldivian weavers I engaged with create and transmit knowledge through the bodily movements and processes necessary for creating the braids used for the national dress - *libaas*. This will provide an illustrative example of how passing on the intangibility of cultural knowledge relies heavily on the art and actions of making.

By attending to or focusing attention on making, it is possible to see the relationships, connections and ties between people and the objects they make, between people and images and people and ideas, not only in the sense of the pathways via which objects, images and ideas are spread and exchanged, but also in the sense of the symbolic values and meanings people attribute to them and to each other (Terzeć et al, 2015; Dudley, 2002). This chapter has also outlined some of the ways that anthropology as a discipline contributes to the study of heritage. An anthropological perspective shows how the past is remade or refashioned in present day practices and how much of what is held to be of the past is occurring currently. Anthropological research can be applied in a multidimensional sense, together with participant observation and fieldwork, its approach can be linked to a more committed sense of safeguarding certain practices (Machuca, 2013: 66). By moving away from the notion that we must focus on the end products, and turning attention to the processes responsible for the formation of things, we can see the human material connections that collect as if in the object (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010: 9). Heritage protection has never been simply about the past, and now it seems more than ever to be seen as a strategy for the future (Long & Labadi, 2010: 2).

Chapter 4 - An Embodied Experience: Weaving Knowledge

4.1 Introduction

In order to fully appreciate the context of this research in discussing intangible cultural heritage, the movements of materials, bodily experience and the creation and transmission of knowledge must be understood. Cultural transmission is the process through which something is passed from one generation to another, and takes place despite the absence of visible objects and ancient rituals (Berliner, 2013: 71-75). The role of the body in these processes of transmission form an integral part of this research. According to Csordas (1990:5) ‘the body should be considered as the very subject of culture, rather than study it in relation to culture’, and following this idea, this research aims to demonstrate that the body - specifically the movements of the body expected by practitioners - play an important part in the making of Maldivian woven products. As the body can be held to an ongoing project, this raises questions about relationships between the maker, the construction or production of items and the life of the object itself (Malafouris, 2010; Marchand, 2010). Indeed, following this train of thought, one needs to ask if products can ever be understood without reference to the body movements that create them, and in association, if one can successfully prying bodies and the objects they labour to make apart.

Many disciplines have recognised that material culture plays a significant role in shaping how people act, perceive and think. Malafouris & Renfrew (2010:1) therefore suggest that it is of paramount importance to come up with cross-disciplinary understandings of the material culture in relation to co-evolution of brains, bodies and things. According to Appadurai (1986:5) it is the things ‘in motion’ that illuminate their human and social context. This chapter will attempt to outline how during the process of making and transmission of knowledge, the bodily practices of the individual, their history, culture and identity are all woven together.

4.2 *Kasabu Viyun* - Weaving of Traditional Neckline Embroidery

The traditional Maldivian costume (*Dhivehi libaas* or *boavalhu libaas*), is a dress, usually red, with a gold lace embroidered neckline (*kasabu boavalhu*). The final garment is sometimes referred to as

kurafehi libaas, which is worn with an underskirt (*feyli*) patterned black and white (Bosley, 2017). The neckline braids are woven with imported silk, cotton and metallic threads which range from green, gold, silver, red and blue (Hadi, 2021). There are seventeen layers of braids in a neckline which consists of eight different styles of braids. Each braid is given a name and needs different amounts of bobbins to weave.



Fig. 8: Maldivian model in traditional libaas



Fig. 9: Myself, ready for a school play

- Mathee hiru*: top golden braid (13 bobbins)
- Hima hiru*: middle golden braid (14 bobbins)
- Three hiru*: bottom golden braid (21 bobbins)
- Bagiya/ Baadhalaa hiru*: coloured braid with metallic yarn
- Rodhigandu*: main centre braid with metallic yarn
- Hudhu hiru*: silver braid (17 bobbins)
- Thundu*: zig zag braid (5 bobbins)
- Thundu kairi hiru*: border zig zag braid (10 bobbins)

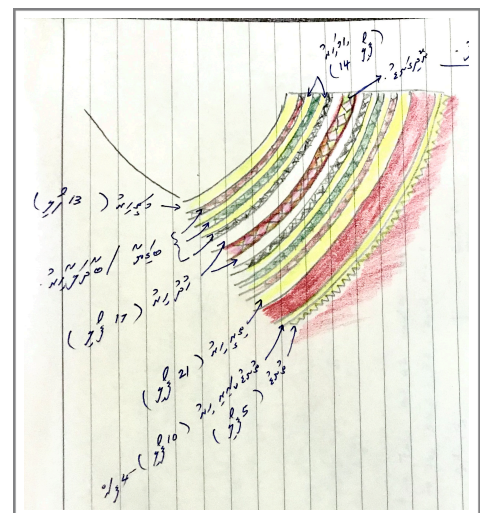


Fig. 10: Weaver's sketch of neckline and braids

The traditional craft of *kasabu viyun* is still practised in a few islands across the Maldives for which they are famous. 'Ei kasabu viyaa rasheh' - loosely translated, 'that's an island that practices traditional weaving' - was a common sentence I heard

during the course of my fieldwork. The weaving in different islands exhibit regional differences in the style and colours chosen for the embroidery. For instance, in Huvadhoo Atoll, more colours are chosen for the neckline whilst in Addu Atoll, the predominant classical colours of silver and gold are used (Hadi, 2021).

As there are only a few documents regarding the Maldivian history and culture in general, it is unclear when exactly Maldivians started wearing the *libaas*, or how long it has been worn for. However, early writings on the Maldives do mention the *libaas*. One of the earliest accounts of the Maldives was written by François Pyrard de Laval, a French navigator who was shipwrecked in the Maldives and was detained between 1602 and 1607 (Jaufar, 2019: 49). He wrote a short description about the traditional dress and the jewellery (*fattarubai*) which accompanies it:

As for the women, first of all they have a large coloured cloth of cotton or silk, which covers them from the waist to the ankles, and serves as a petticoat. Above this they wear a robe of taffetas, or of very fine cotton, but very long, reaching to the feet and with blue and white borders... They have many chains of gold about their necks if they be women of rank and fashion, or they knit together pieces of gold coin.

[Pyrard, 1619: 168-169]

From this account, and chiming with what some participants informed during the interviews, the traditional *libaas* with the gold jewellery seem to mostly be attributed to an upper class in the society in the past. Clopot (2016: 110) states how costumes serve as an active role within the community when they are embedded in social hierarchies and practices, which she suggests represents a method that enables tradition to be transmitted along the lines of intangible cultural heritage.

Today, the traditional dress is worn only on special events such as weddings or ceremonies, or exclusively by older women in the islands (Hadi, 2021). The dress styles of women have evolved in the Maldives in the last two decades with the Muslim headscarf (*buruga*) becoming more commonplace, which obscures the defining features of the traditional *libaas* - the neckline (Bosley, 2017). However, there has been a sudden spark of interest in this traditional craft (*kasabu viyun*) which makes up the embroidered neckline. The younger generations have been attempting to revive

this art of making by holding workshops and weaving classes which teach the traditional techniques used in weaving (Maldives Insider, 2019).

Moreover, contemporary products such as bracelets, bags and homeware are being made by weaving the braids using the traditional method. Although the traditional *libaas* is rare, these contemporary products still display this art. Moreover, it is evident that the traditional craft and *libaas* are both held in high regards in relation to the Maldivian identity as it is displayed on a *Rufiyaa* note - Maldivian currency (Bosley, 2017)



Fig. 11: Libaas and art of weaving on Rufiyaa

The Art of Traditional Weaving

Weaving in the Maldives goes back hundreds of years, and was an important part of everyday life. Traditional mat weaving, basket weaving and thatch weaving were all practiced on a daily basis. Embroidery weaving of the *libaas* neckline (*kasabu viyun*) still remains important as it constitutes an integral part of the traditional dress.

The embroidery weaving technique is called *kasabu viyun*, and a special equipment called *gathaa fai* is required to weave the neckline. This equipment comprises of a short hollow, neck-shaped wooden base structure on which a rounded pillow ‘head’ can be placed. In addition, the weaver needs threads and a set of weighted bobbins or spindles. The wooden base is fashioned in the style of a traditional Maldivian vase, and is coated with traditional lacquer work. The hollow vase is covered with a round cloth covered cushion which is used to pin the threads that are used to weave the neckline (see Fig.12) (Athif, n.d). The first tool of this kind is thought to have emerged from

Italy in the 16th century which exhibited a similar style with thread wound bobbins secured to a hard pillow (Levey, 2003 :585).

Although this tool was inspired by European bobbin lace weaving utensils, the traditional tools created in the Maldives were crafted using local materials, thus highlighting how local materials are favoured. The wooden vase and bobbins are usually made from breadfruit wood. The breadfruit tree (*Artocarpus altilis*) is a tropical plant that provides lightweight wood which is resistant to termites. The tree can be found across the Maldives.

Traditional lacquerwork which is used to decorate the vase and bobbins is now predominantly practiced in the island of Baa Thulhaadhoo (see Chapter 3).

During fieldwork, I interviewed a traditional craftsman from this island to understand the significance of breadfruit wood in making these products, to which he replied ‘it is soft and light which makes it the most convenient of woods for these crafts’.



Fig. 12: *Gathaa Fai* - Traditional Weaving Tool

Weaving Lessons with Hawwa & Amina

My first lesson was with Amina. Amina is a woman in her late thirties who had given up a corporate job to pursue her passion in weaving and encourage the revival of this traditional art. Our first conversation was via a phone call where I explained I was a student doing research on *kasabu viyun* and therefore would like to learn to weave. I could sense the surprise in her voice as she said ‘Wow, someone as young as you is really interested in documenting this?’. I went onto explain that I was passionate about documenting Maldivian intangible cultural heritage such as the practise of traditional weaving, and her voice then changed to a tone of excitement. I inquired whether she was doing any classes on weaving to which she replied, ‘No, but I have been thinking about it for quite some time - to pass on this knowledge that I have learnt. But I am still quite hesitant to teach as I have never done it before, are you sure you want to learn from me?’ - to which I immediately answered a grateful yes.

We decided to have the classes at my apartment as she had explained that she lived with her extended family and had limited space at her house. As she was quite flexible with time, we decided to do 3 to 4 lessons a week for two weeks which would cover the basic elements of weaving.

When Amina came to my apartment for our first lesson, she was incredibly shy. She was dressed elegantly in a long black dress with a black hijab, and I remembered being quite taken by how graceful she carried herself. When she walked, it was almost like she was gliding. She had a long rectangular bag with a leather strap which seemed to be the perfect bag to hold the traditional tools which have an awkward shape. As soon as she entered, she sat down on the couch and started unpacking the tools which comprised of the lacquered stand, the bolster pillow, bobbins (approximately 25) and the threads. We did our formal introductions as she was unpacking - at this point, I found out that she was a former classmate of my aunt's. What a small world!

Amina had a calm and gentle voice which made me feel instantly comfortable to be around her. I told her she had the 'teacher voice' which made her giggle shyly. Our first lesson consisted of learning to hold the bobbins. The importance of holding them correctly were emphasised as it would have a great impact on the hand movements. To set up weaving, the required number of bobbins were wound with thread and hung from a large pin dangling over the large bolster pillow which is balanced on the lacquered stand, *gathaa fai*. The bobbins are then divided into two sides (Side A and Side B) to start weaving the braids. As Amina was new in teaching this skill, we tried to figure out how it can be done together. We soon realised that writing, drawing and explaining worked only to a certain extent - and the actual learning would come from ultimately doing it. It was a learning experience for both me and her, in finding out how to teach and learn a traditional practical skill which was deeply engrained in bodily practice (Makovicky, 2010). She drew quick diagrams to try and explain the patterns of Side A and Side B and how they would go together for different braids. Although this was useful in demonstrating how many bobbins were used on a side for each braid, we realised it was ineffective in teaching the actual technique behind the weaving process.

She then showed me a quick demonstration, to let me have a go saying 'you will only learn this if you do it, you will not understand anything if you just sit there and watch me'. This was certainly true, as I realised that learning by doing was essential to understanding this skill (Ingold, 2013). The bobbins were to be picked up with four fingers and the thumb to hold them in place in a scooping motion, with the palm facing up. She explained that the movement of the hand is crucial to weaving the perfect braid; for instance, loose hand movements would result in a loose braid. As Amina wove

and explained, it sounded something like, “take this one from Side A...it goes under that one...and that one goes over this one on Side B...” which does not make much sense if you are not keenly observing the hand movements. Even with undivided attention and observation, it was still difficult to keep track of these hand movements. Observing the hand movements as she wove was really overwhelming. The rhythmic movements of the hands seemed so elegant and effortless in weaving the braid. Timing seemed really important during weaving as well, as the bobbins need to be dropped from one hand to the other just in time for it to be crossed over. The more I thought about the process of weaving, the less of an object or thing it became (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010: 1), and more of a performance.

After my first lesson with her, I grasped the basic hand movements and the concept behind the braids. At this point, I decided to invest in my own *gathaa fai* which cost about £300. I could afford to buy this within my fieldwork budget as my initial plans to travel to the islands had changed and I no longer needed to purchase tickets or book accommodation.

During our lessons, we talked about Maldivian culture, the importance of documenting it and teaching it to the younger generations. I slowly led the conversation to the topic of ‘the body’ and she readily discussed it with me. I learnt that it was one of her concerns when she was learning to weave from the older ladies on an island, but she explained that the topic of the body was dismissed it is still considered a taboo in Maldivian culture. I asked her what her exact concerns were and she said that posture was important as she was getting neck and back pain from weaving. However, when she tried to discuss it with her teachers, they dismissed it as something that craftswomen have to endure - thereby making connections between weaving, women’s bodies and physical pain.

When I was doing my desktop research prior to fieldwork, I noticed that in a lot of the past images of Maldivian women weaving (see Fig,13), they would sit with their backs and legs straight with the tools to their side. They would sit like this with their neck bent and weave for hours and hours. I talked about this image of women in this posture and Amina admitted that this was impossible for her to emulate, which encouraged me to try it. She was right - it was impossible for any length of time.

The most we could do was about 10 to 15 mins in that posture. I realised that being fully aware of the body - in particular the weaver’s body - had significance other than for weaving, and that a comfortable posture was crucial but that culturally being able to accept the pain generated by the required posture was meaningful. The posture, although uncomfortable was used by these older

women to demonstrate a sense of femininity when performing the art of weaving. Amina explained that she always practiced yoga to stretch her lower back and neck before she started weaving. She said that in the past, it was perhaps because women did work which required more of a physical presence, such as sweeping the roads with an ekel broom (a locally crafted broom made out of coconut palm fibre) for which they had to be bent almost double for, so perhaps they were more flexible than we are today. Amina concluded that just because the women in the past did it in that position for hours, we as women today didn't have to endure that pain in order to practise this traditional craft - and I agreed with her. Despite rejecting the positions used in the past, Amina's body was important to the final product as she was still able to uphold the femininity required or even expected culturally during the weaving process.

Amina held herself with grace and when she wove, it was almost like a dance performance which you could get lost in. I was mesmerised. When I asked her about it, she said she practised it in a way that it was indeed like a performance - that the body plays as much of a role in the making of the braid as the tools do. In this performance of weaving, the tools, body and mind become one entity. This fascinated me and I wanted to experience it myself. Once I got the hang of weaving, and got comfortable in my own posture, I realised that she was absolutely right. It was overwhelming, I was dancing and it was a magical experience; working with the materials and my body all becoming entwined.

Hence, the importance of participant observation for the learning of this skill became apparent. As I started repeating Amina's hand movements, I quickly realised that it was important to 'respond to the visual and sensual clues generated by the thread' (Makovicky, 2010: 86). The senses when weaving are visual, touch and sounds. Visually, it is important to keep an eye on the braid rather than the hand movements when weaving. Correct hand movements would guarantee the goal of a perfect braid, but it was still important to check on the braid every now and then. The sense of touch is felt on the bobbins, as you drop them from one hand to another in a quick rhythmic motion, so the bobbins need to be light on the hands and left to fall using gravity to draw the threads into the correct tension.

As mentioned above, the craftsperson who fashioned the tool talked about the lightness of the wood and I could see what he meant by that, as the bobbins were a comfortable weight in my hands when weaving but had enough substance to pull the threads as required. The bobbins bumping and clacking against each other added another dimension of sound produced by the motion and rhythm.



Fig. 13: Older women weavers

Once you mastered the skill, the correct hand movements resulted in a certain rhythmic pattern, which made the sound of the bobbins almost like shells clacking on the beach. As I got into the zone of weaving and became lost in its process with these sounds, it immediately generated the image of being on a Maldivian beach with the shiny shells that would adorn the white beaches and how these shells would gently clack against each other with the ebb and flow of the ocean waves. This made the process of weaving feel almost meditative.

My first lesson with Hawwa was completely different. When I spoke to her on the phone to initiate the classes, she seemed very enthusiastic, so I was rather excited. When I met her in person, she was very reserved and seemed to want to get to the lessons right away. She was a homemaker and was therefore less flexible than Amina, which meant that I had to go to her house for the lessons. When I first went to her house, she had a pot of curry on the go which she attended to every now and then, but was still able to give me attention. However, unlike Amina, she did not necessarily want to discuss other topics, but just the topic of weaving. I found it difficult to initiate conversations with her. Although she was a more experienced weaver, she was not concerned about her body in terms of pain and posture unlike Amina who was in constant awareness of her body. Due to this, I struggled to ask questions about the body.

During our first lesson, she seemed almost impressed that I knew how to set up the tools and bobbins. But as soon as I started weaving, she dismissed the way I was doing it and was adamant on teaching me the ‘correct way’ to weave. She was unhappy with the crossing of my hands which she said was ‘most ungraceful’. At this point, she took the bobbins away from my hands and started weaving which was effortless. She was better at articulating actions into words as she taught and was able to demonstrate the techniques well. I concluded that this was probably due to her experience in teaching the skill and knowledge as she was a well known mentor of this craft and someone who had initiated a lot of workshops to revive the art. In our lesson, she was not bothered about the body or posture, but rather the hand movements which would influence the braid. When I

brought up the body as a topic, she dismissed it by saying 'you will get used to it' which immediately made me think of what the older ladies who taught Amina said - that if you want to be a craftswoman, a certain extent of pain has to be endured in the doing of these crafts.

Hawwa, although a more experienced weaver was not concerned about her body in terms of posture unlike Amina who was in constant awareness of her posture. It can be argued that these are the social values upheld by these women which reflected through their art of making; Hawwa being older holds onto the traditional notion of women's bodies upheld in a patriarchal society. This is also evident from what the older weavers who taught Amina had to say regarding the body - 'it is just something a craftswoman has to endure' - referring to the back and neck pains that are a direct consequence of hours of weaving in the same position. Amina on the other hand practiced yoga daily. Unlike the older women, she does not believe that a woman has to be put through this pain in order to practice a traditional craft, simply because it was the way it was practiced in the olden days, but can still uphold the femininity required in the performance of weaving.

After interviewing different weavers based in the local islands, I was amazed to find out that it took at least a week to complete all the braids required for the neckline. It was when I started fieldwork, and my own weaving classes that I came to appreciate how much time and effort went into the making of these braids.

As I was learning from two different women of different backgrounds, it occurred to me just how much individuality played a role in how cultural knowledge is taught, and therefore, transmitted. They had a different way of holding and moving the bobbins, but still produced the same braids with the same results. Moreover, the two women repeatedly stressed on the importance of practicing the skill. 'If you don't practice regularly, you will forget'. To the onlooker, the performance of weaving might look effortless (which is exactly what I thought when I first saw Amina weave) and that it is being done without much thinking. However, Ingold (2013: 111) states that 'it is the gravest of errors to regard such know-how as subconscious, as though practitioners could do it without thinking, when in fact, their work involves the most intense concentration. After having learnt and practising the craft myself, I must agree with this statement as the process of weaving really does require your utmost concentration.

The correlation between gender, body posture and bodily movements is obviously of significance and is another area to be researched. There appear to be deeply rooted cultural expectations circulating the ability to endure physical discomfort without complaint and being female. From my

fieldwork experience, it is evident that certain crafts - such as embroidery weaving - do associate women's work with pain and femininity because the product (the neckline for the traditional dress) is made by women, for women. From the conversations that took place during fieldwork, it was revealed that a certain degree of femininity in the posture and performance was expected which signifies weaving to be a gendered task in the Maldives. Moreover, it was clear that the objects (tools) and femininity are in relationship with regards to how the body is meant to be positioned for the performance of weaving and that being able to endure the discomfort of weaving was part of the process.

This is undoubtedly an important area, and as gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and religion, Judith Butler (1999: 6) states that it is 'impossible to separate out gender from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained'. However, due to the focused scope and limited word count for this research, I am choosing not to discuss this any further in this document in favour of focusing on the processes of making. Suffice to say, that echoes of the debates associated with the cultural subjugation of women are articulated by these findings, but that these associations are being challenged by younger women brought up in a globalised world.

4.4 Making Knowledge and the Knowing and Sensing Body

The questions presented at the beginning of this chapter asked if a product is ever truly finished? And does it continue being entangled with the world around us in our everyday lives? These questions are philosophically connected to the notions of the past and intangibility that are being employed by this research, and provide a framework to think about how items or objects not only embody the past, but also tie the present to what once was. If we consider these products to have a social life, or 'life histories' we must look into the knowledge that goes into creating the product (Appadurai, 1986: 41). Knowledge is generated through various processes including sensing, attending and thinking through making. Knowledge, or what one thinks one knows, emerges with, and grows from our practical and observational engagements with the material beings and things all around us (Ingold, 2013).

As Marchand puts it, 'making knowledge, after all, is an ongoing process shared between people and with the world' (2010:1). John Locke's *tabula rasa*, is an empiricist notion that believes that people begin life as blank states and that the process of knowing relies on attention to the surroundings. Using this perspective, all knowledge scientific or otherwise must be obtained

through our senses, which in turn guides our interpretation of the world (Schneegg, 2015: 23). Knowledge acquisition and dissemination emerges through relationships with the worldly materials and other entities, but what of knowledge creation? Marchand suggests that in exploring the making of knowledge, we should take the total environment into consideration, such as the artefacts, tools, raw materials, architecture, space and weather (2010: 2), as it requires a broader complexity than simply human and item or idea. Learning and knowing therefore is reflexive and is never complete. It is an ongoing process which continues to transform with our situated bodies and minds (Marchand, 2010). Comparing the weaving techniques adapted by Hawwa and Amina, this ongoing process is evident, as the younger generations are practising the craft in a way suited to the present-day lifestyle.

Moreover, when there is a scarcity of tools or materials, it promotes and encourages improvisation with what is available, which results in changing styles of artefacts, thus highlighting how culture evolves over time (Marchand, 2010: 14). As mentioned before, this is apparent in Maldivian culture; although resources are scarce, whatever was available was exploited heavily and creatively, thus whatever is crafted remains 'distinctively Maldivian' (Litser 2016). When things are crafted by utilising the surrounding environment, cultural transmission is 'powerfully influenced by the physical context in which it occurs as we depend on the brains, bodies and environment in which occurs' (Cohen, 2010: 193).

So how do we know? Cohen (2010: 195) is clear that knowledge should not be imagined to be 'stored in some sort of neural filing cabinet... [and that] the retrieval of knowledge entails the partial reenactment of the very situations that led to its recording. Learning by doing and immersing one's attention in the process of working with materials appears to be required for one to have the body memories necessary for an experience to be embodied - where one knows without thinking. This is where the temporal, social and physical processes blend and merge inseparable from the acts of learning and communicating knowledge (Marchand, 2010: 7; Ingold, 2013; Dilley, 1989). Barth (2002: 1) states that 'we must share some knowledge to be able to communicate and usually must differ in some knowledge to give focus to our interaction'. It follows then that learning and knowing cannot be easily separated (Venkatesan, 2010: 159) but form parts of a joined process. Cohen (2010: 194) argues that the traditional view that knowledge resides neurally independent of the mode specific route by which it was acquired is gradually losing ground. He also discusses a new framework which has emerged in the recent years, which puts forward the idea that:

Knowledge resides in modality specific neuro-cognitive systems such as the process vision, movement, audition, emotion and motivation and is reactivated via the partial stimulation of the cognitive and bodily states, social interactions and environmental situations that contributed to its acquisition’.

[Cohen 2010: 194]

Venkatesan’s argument that ‘skill is an outcome’ in participating to learn is agreed by Marchand (2010: 15) as he discusses ‘motor cognition’ which he has based on his own study among carpenters. He states that motor stimulation is the sense or feeling of executing an action without necessarily realising it, and that the system produces understanding from the movements achieved as a body (Marchand, 2010: 15). He argues that our human capacity for motor stimulation makes embodied communication possible, which presents opportunities for carrying the social production of skilled based knowledge in new directions in anthropology (2010: 15).

Knowing and Sensing Body

Csordas (1990: 5) challenges the Cartesian dichotomy suggesting that bodies are feeling and sensing things, and therefore should not be treated as an abstract entity. As mentioned before, he stated that ‘the body should be considered as the very subject of culture, rather than study it in relation to culture’ (1990: 5), a sentiment that contemporary anthropologists have successfully used to moved away from Cartesian dualism. Malafouris (2008: 2) agrees with the fact that we have moved away from the traditional mind-body dichotomy by grounding cognition in bodily experience. He argues that the ‘the hand is not simply an instrument for manipulating an externally given objective world by carrying out the orders issued to it by the brain; it is instead one of the main perturbatory channels through which the world touches us, and which has a great deal to do with how this world is perceived and classified’ (Malafouris, 2008: 2). Marchand (2010: 2) applies this to the nature vs. nurture debate, agreeing that these ideas should not be studied in isolation, but rather should be thought of as being interdependent, impacting and co-producing when exploring what knowledge is and where it comes from.

There is obviously a material dimension to every element of intangible heritage. Without this material dimension, this element could not be shared, would not exist. Our awareness and understanding as human beings relies on this material dimension. We need to

apprehend it through one of our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, depending on the degree of materiality or immateriality.

[Skounti, 2009: 77]

The acquisition of a skill is embedded in a large body of information concerned with skilled based ideas about the body, gender, identity, politics and economics (Venkatesan, 2010: 158). From the way the two women wove, it was evident that although there is a certain level of individuality reflected in how they wove, the end result of the braids appeared to be the same. Intangible cultural heritage shows how traditional crafts are recreated constantly which reflects the identity of its creators and holders (Lenzerini, 2011: 118). Therefore, this shows how important it is to consider the intangible including the body movements of the crafter when looking at and attempting to understand an artefact and its meanings. The art of making does not just reflect the making, it also provides insight into the senses, social culture, identity, history, the body and gender as they are all woven together.

Ingold (2013) argues that when a skill is learned, so are the social values and attitudes within which the skill is practised. This became evident during fieldwork, as body postures appropriate to weavers in this culture were adopted instantaneously. In this case, how the body holds itself is integral to knowing and in consequence, this means that body knowledge holds a large place in social, cultural and value production (Machuca, 2013: 63).

As has been explored, knowledge is not a passive receipt of ideas but is generated through the combined processes of thinking through making. Learning therefore is not unilinear or unidirectional from the outside, externalised expert to the novice, but rather relies on a complex set of interplay between the inside and the outside. Without this, one may cut knowledge growth off. It can be argued that in order to fully appreciate intangible cultural heritage, the movements of the tangible or materiality that comprises an object must also be grasped to be understood. Following the movements of the body, the threads, the weight of the bobbins and the noise of the process, the tangible and intangible wove together to produce an item that emerged from the memories held in flesh so that those memories were transferred by the shifting, clacking and shuffling into the weave.

The Performing Body

Looking at human behaviour as performance can serve as a way to study the world around us (McKerrell & Pfeiffer, 2020: 18). Berliner (2013: 76) state that cultural transmission is not always where we think it is, but rather it can be found in ‘linguistic interjections or silences, emotional expressions, gestures, tones and actions in daily interactions’. A sense of ‘Maldivian-ness’ was felt when weaving as certain hand or head gestures were noticed. However, I had to be on constant awareness to notice these gestures, as I was so used to doing them myself within the society. So how does this affect the process of weaving? I argue that these unknowing bodily practices has everything to do with the process of making - from the impatient wave to take on the next bobbin, to the head shake of approval when you have finally grasped the technique of weaving a certain braid. The knowledge resides in the movements, and the very performance of making. Intangible cultural heritage, also referred to as living heritage keeps the traditional crafts alive through performance. McKerrell & Pfeiffer (2020: 22) argue that performance of or with intangible cultural heritage is always an embodied practice which has a function in the present. In this case, every artefact is a performance as it demonstrates its ‘coming-into-being in the world (Gell, 1998: 67; Malafouris, 2008: 3).

Taylor (2008: 94) argues that these acts are kept alive through repeated enactment; through rigorous performance and practice, the embodied knowledge is passed on from the craftspeople to the next generations. The weaving lessons can be taken as an example of how this embodied knowledge is taught through performance, rather than diagrams, illustrations or other ways of teaching. It is the performance which included the rhythmic bodily movements, attention to posture, exchanging the bobbins from one hand to another and the senses that allowed for the transmission of knowledge. No gestures are performed in exactly the same way twice; different senses are felt with each bodily movement which contributed to the performance again and again (Taylor, 2008: 92). Performance does significant cultural work as all societies use performance as a means to cultural ends (McKerrell & Pfeiffer, 2020: 21). Moreover, it is important to consider bodily memory as ‘memory reflects experiences and social relations, but also shapes daily life and the ways in which people think about social relations, transforming contemporary life ways and objects into sites of memory (Kenny, 2009: 156).

4.5 Conclusion and Summary

This chapter has discussed the traditional Maldivian weaving technique of the libaas neckline. The knowledge and the art of making has been outlined in detail to show how individual bodies hold culture and how culture as knowledge is transferred into items through physical relationships with the world.

It is evident that when cultural knowledge is applied in the production of traditional skills, symbolic value is added into that product (Machuca, 2013: 58). Now we see here that cultural heritage is a good that is not accumulated but above all is transmitted between persons and generations (Machuca, 2013: 59). The product or the artefact is not just a product. It includes the social and cultural value of the individual who made it, the environmental and social conditions it was made in and the techniques and designs learned from earlier generations (Spooner, 1986: 199). This process of knowledge transmission becomes more apparent when you learn from the individuals who possess the specialist knowledge. By learning, participating and corresponding with them, we understand the social and cultural context that goes into the production. It is also the performance which plays a significant part in transmitting knowledge as it involves embodied memory which is conveyed in movement and gesture (McKerrell & Pfeiffer, 2020: 22). Moreover, we can see how body shapes the mind, therefore, the material culture which surrounds the body also shape the mind (Malafouris, 2008: 3).

This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity.

[UNESCO, 2003]

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Research

This research has aimed to explore traditional Maldivian embroidery weaving locally known as *kasabu viyun* to understand how bodies hold and transmit cultural knowledge. I have chosen weaving as this is a constant theme that runs through the patterns of Maldivian products and appear to be one of the key craft skills utilised in making artefacts and creating design patterns in the Maldives. Moreover, I have argued that the use of anthropological research methods such as participant observation is crucial to understanding the intangible elements of culture for its documentation. Utilising the method of participant observation allowed for these intangible elements to be foregrounded rather than focusing on the finished object to demonstrate that culture continues to live, adapt and evolve. For instance, the ethnographic information collected during fieldwork revealed the cultural and social values upheld by women weavers during the process. Moreover, a lack of academic interest and neglect of Maldivian culture and heritage sparked the motive behind this research. Indeed what Romero-Frias (2003) stated was true, that the Maldives as a country has been described well, but not understood. Therefore, with the purpose of documenting the Maldivian culture and heritage, I have aimed to lay a foundation for further research for the generations to come, which I hope would result in its appreciation and preservation.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the Maldives has a rich cultural heritage and history dating back to 3000 years (Jameel, 2012: 2). It has been influenced by the culture of ancient settlers which came from different regions of the world, the Buddhist heritage brought by these early settlers, the conversion from Buddhism to Islam and the wave of modernity which saw the rise of tourism in the country. The Buddhist heritage of the Maldives was ignored for a long time until the archaeological excavations which revealed it to be the dominant religion in the country before Islam. The Buddhist structures unearthed during the excavations were studied by archaeologists who concluded that Buddhism had its roots in the Maldives from both India and Sri Lanka, highlighting the multiple influences brought by early settlers (Bell, 1940; Mikkelsen, 2000; Mohamed, 2002). The Arabic influences became apparent when the Maldives embraced Islam in 1153 A.D. To this day, this is considered to be the most significant event in Maldivian history. It led to Maldivians wanting to dissociate themselves from their Buddhist heritage in order to fully embrace their Islamic faith. However, the Buddhist heritage was deeply embedded in the culture, which can be seen in the intangible cultural heritage of the Maldives such as language, folk stories and oral traditions. The

conversion to Islam meant that the embedded Buddhist culture had to merge with the culture and values of a new religion, which caused the fusion into a new culture for Maldivians (Jameel, 2012: 15). Moreover, with the impact of modernisation that hit the Maldives with the introduction of tourism in the 1970s, it led to fast development in all aspects such as the economy and education of the country. All these factors meant that the Maldivians had to adapt to 'a new culture' (Jameel, 2012: 15). I have argued that both culture and identity are intangible themselves and therefore this element of intangibility needs to be taken into account in exploring their true meaning and value.

Anthropology as a discipline has changed and evolved over the years, from its methodologies to the very nature of the discipline. After this transformation of its perspectives, anthropology is now in a position to make vital contributions to the construction of a globalised cultural world (Arizpe, 2013: 20). This research has demonstrated how anthropological research methods can be used in the field of heritage to appreciate intangible cultural heritage. The knowledge that is transmitted through embodied performance is understood with methods such as ethnographic interviewing, and most importantly, participant observation. By knowing what things are and how they become what they are you gain an understanding about what minds are and how they become what they are (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010: 4). In participating to weave with two women weavers, I was able to understand how the embodied knowledge of weaving has been transmitted from generation to generation for years.

Conflicts of interest arose during the fieldwork process, however, this was taken as an opportunity to learn to deal with these conflicts as an anthropologist. As Okely (2012: 48) suggested, the unplanned characters of ethnography is precisely its value, and I would have to agree as the unplanned series of events that followed provided me with the opportunity to learn and re-evaluate concepts in anthropology which shaped this research. For instance, due to the student budget, I was not able to travel independently without the initial planned collaboration which meant that I could not carry out fieldwork in local islands. This made me question myself as an anthropologist and the authenticity of my work as there was no set geographical location. However, after reading many accounts of other anthropologists, I soon realised that the field being a geographically distant place is an outdated concept in anthropology. Contemporary anthropologists have moved away from this concept to doing fieldwork in more urban settings which were multi-sited and transitional (Marcus, 1995; Amit, 2000). Therefore, it made me rework the traditional notion of field in my head and this

will influence the way in which I practice anthropology in the future. As Ingold (2013: 3) says, ‘the only way we can really know things is through a process of self-discovery’

Mixed qualitative methods were used which gave insight into the lived experience of the participants. For recording of data, field notes, photos, audio and video recordings were used. I applied more contemporary methods of documenting data by justifying the use of smartphone applications. The use of these applications allowed me to record data without feeling uncomfortable or without making the participants feel uncomfortable. I pointed out how carrying a notebook felt like treating my participants as ‘objects of knowledge’ (Watson & Till, 2010: 127). Moreover, in the context of this research, data recording was more convenient via smartphone applications such as Voice Memos to record conversations, as I was learning the skill myself, therefore multitasking. Informed consent was given by all participants who provided me with valuable knowledge that shaped this research. The consent form was also translated to *Dhivehi* to maintain the honesty and transparency of this research. Their anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, therefore pseudonyms of ‘Hawwa and Amina’ were used to refer to the key participants.

Cultural heritage, and how it has evolved over time has not been documented well. I argue that perhaps it is due to the factors outlined above that caused the negligence of documenting culture. For instance, accepting a new faith meant that anything to do with the past religion and culture was disregarded and the boost in tourism meant that the focus was on that industry rather than the documentation and preservation of culture. Ahmad & Jameel (2015: 11) state that due to the lack of appreciation by local people, the culture was at point of vanishing. However, I argue that new concepts in tourism have contributed to a new spark of interest in the revival of cultural heritage. Therefore, the potential in the tourism industry has on making a positive impact on preserving culture must be acknowledged by doing proper research.

Lenzerini (2011: 120) states that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is not about collecting samples, or classifying them into categories. Rather, the ‘safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage means preserving its link with living cultures and its role in the identity of its holders’ (Lenzerini, 2011: 120). Moreover, I have argued that it is the safeguarding of measures that would allow for the transmission of knowledge. Intangible cultural heritage, unlike tangible heritage, if not nurtured risks becoming lost forever (UNESCO, 2003).

This research has explored how people learn processes along with the knowledge, skills and creativity that inform and are developed by them. The products they create and the resources, spaces and other aspects of social and natural context necessary to their sustainability; 'these processes provide living communities with a sense of continuity with previous generations and are important to cultural identity, as well as to the safeguarding of cultural diversity and creativity of humanity' (Gimblett, 2004: 54).

It is evident that the Euro-American perceptions of heritage have been dominant, and consequently had an influence on the expression of culture and identity (Smith, 2006: 5). However, heritage, just like discipline of anthropology is continuing to move away from previously upheld Eurocentric notions. The Western notion of heritage undermined the intangible elements that make up a culture as its main focus was on the preservation and conservation of monuments. However, intangible cultural heritage has been recognised as an important field of study. I argue that inter-disciplinary study such as anthropology and heritage would generate valuable knowledge that can be used in its safeguarding and preservation.

Cultural heritage was discussed in the Maldivian context to demonstrate how the Eurocentric notions of heritage influenced the heritage industry of the country. The main focus remains on the preservation of tangible culture such as the coral stone mosques and structures. In Chapter 3, I outline some examples of intangible cultural heritage of the Maldives to demonstrate how deeply embedded cultural elements can be observed by analysing it further. For instance, the evolution of the Dhivehi language illustrate the significant historical events that took place in the Maldives, such as the conversion from Buddhism to Islam. Malinowski highlighted the importance of learning the language when doing fieldwork as it would show the native thinking, and how language moulds thinking (Sapir, 1958 [1929]: 69); DeWalt, 2015: 251; Nader, 2011: 214, Schengg, 2015: 27)

Traditional folktales, oral traditions, performing arts and rituals also exhibit intangible elements that are embedded in the culture, from mythical stories of spirits to traditional beliefs and knowledge. Traditional Maldivian arts and crafts have been practiced for years which is evident from early writings about the Maldives. Although they are not crafted for traditional domestic purposes

anymore, the crafts are still practiced in the local islands mostly for the purpose of tourism. However, as they are no longer practiced for domestic and daily use, it is evident that they are in decline. In fact, all elements of intangible cultural heritage are endangered as pointed out by scholars. Therefore, I argue that its preservation and revitalisation are more essential than ever.

As mentioned, there has been a recent spark of interest amongst the younger generations in the revival of traditional crafts with the aim of preserving and appreciating them. Local brands which support local craftspeople are on the rise, thus establishing a platform for younger generations to practice traditional crafts. Small local businesses such as Gadheemee Collection and Kasabu by Hidha use the traditional techniques of making to create temporary products. This reflects a need to appreciate and value the traditional art of making these crafts. Moreover, it shows that cultures are constantly in transformation (Terzić et al, 2015: 103).

Chapter 4 provided a discussion about the example of intangible cultural heritage chosen to highlight my argument in this study, specifically to demonstrate how by applying anthropological methods to study the intangible, one can understand how cultural knowledge is transmitted and learnt. Traditional Maldivian embroidery weaving *kasabu viyun* was used as an example to illustrate how anthropological methods allow the intangible knowledge that resides in the tangible products to be better understood. I also argued how important it is to consider the body in studying and understanding culture, as individual bodies and their movements hold cultural meanings and identity. It was evident when doing fieldwork with the two weavers that their bodies hold embodied knowledge that cannot be transmitted through words, but only by doing. In the performance of making the items, different embodied knowledges are reflected through each movement and rule which in turn reflects their social and cultural values. Soumhya Venkatesan who did fieldwork in India about traditional weavers agrees with Ingold that the acquisition of a skill is embedded in larger social knowledge about the value of the skill, which collectively is based on ideas about the body, gender, identity, politics and economics (2010: 158). As weaving is a personal experience for the worker, it can control the performance of their identity as well as the economy of the worker.

A recurring theme in this research is that all processes are fluid and are therefore an ongoing process. The transmission of knowledge can therefore be considered as an ongoing process in how it influences the intangibility of culture and identity. Moreover, I have argued that it is important to look beyond the material object in the glass cabinet by taking into account the processes of its

making and knowledge transmission that goes into that object. I have used the movements of the body and the way it performs in the art of making to demonstrate this.

5.2 Limitations of Research and Scope for Further Research

Due to the limited scope of this research, I was only able to focus on limited themes and subject matters. For instance, I have pointed out in this research that in studying the body, themes such as gender need to be taken into consideration. After analysing the data collected during fieldwork, it was evident that the task of certain crafts such as weaving was gendered, thus opening another area of study to be explored. However, as I wanted to focus on intangible cultural heritage and the importance of weaving to foreground my argument, I decided not to discuss the topic of gender any further.

Moreover, although I reworked the notion of field and did fieldwork in an urban setting, I would argue that in order to understand the full extent of the art of traditional weaving, fieldwork in the islands would have helped in understanding the regional variations that go into the weaving and the finished product. Perhaps this can be an idea for further research.

During the course of my research, I realised how hard it was to find sources regarding the pre-Islamic history or culture of the Maldives. It was during this time that I learnt that books such as *The Folk Tales of the Maldives* and *The Maldivian Islanders* by Xavier Romero-Frias and *People of the Maldives* by Clarence Maloney were banned by the authorities in the Maldives. Romero-Frias states that his book was banned in the country as it was deemed ‘irreligious’ by the authorities as there was a chapter which discussed the rise of Islam in the Maldives (Flood, 2014). However, I was able to get an e-book copy of the *Folk Tales of the Maldives* and *The Maldivian Islanders* but *People of the Maldives* is a rare book that only a few people have had the pleasure of reading. Oshea’s (2011) article about the Maldives also state how these books cannot be purchased in the Maldives, and have never been translated for Dhivehi readers, which proved to be true. A visit to the Maldives National Library for the purpose of this research in search for these books was met with disapproval as the staff told me that these books were not available.

Each culture or society will have topics of conversation that is considered to be controversial. In the Maldives, the ancestral Buddhist heritage is still not widely accepted amongst individuals. This

dissociation makes it hard to talk about a past that is not acknowledged. Xavier Romero-Frias noted how it took him years of patient work, living with the locals that he was finally able to understand their ancestral soul. He writes ‘my hope is that this book will help them recover their pride in their heritage’ (Romero-Frias, 2013: 2). Twenty two years later after the first edition of *The Maldivian Islanders* was published, here I am discussing similar issues faced during fieldwork and writing up this research. Moreover, it was evident that most of the extensive work done on Maldivian culture is by foreigners and not locals. Perhaps it is years of negligence on the cultural heritage of the Maldives and the limitations mentioned which discourage people from doing research on this topic. However, I hope that this research will lay a foundation in recognising the importance of documenting and safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of the Maldives.

If intangible cultural heritage is not nurtured, it risks becoming lost forever, or frozen as a practice belonging to the past. Preserving this heritage and passing it on to the future generation strengthens it and keeps it alive whilst allowing for it to change and adapt.

[UNESCO, 2003]

Bortolotto (2010: 103) states with perhaps the goal is not for the professionals to document it, but rather to allow for the bearers of knowledge to transmit it. I argue that both academic documentation in recognising the intangible elements and establishing a platform for the practitioners to transmit their embodied knowledge is essential in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. In this way, we can nurture it to pass it onto the future generations.

Afterword

This study has focused on the documentation of Maldivian cultural heritage, especially its intangible elements. As a curious child going to museums, looking at an object locked behind a glass cabinet always left me feeling disappointed. It left me with a burning sense of curiosity to find out more: Who were the people that made these objects? How did they get the materials? What was the process that went into its making? And what was their story behind it? These questions were always in my mind which has resulted in my interest in exploring intangible cultural heritage. I believe that these intangible elements that make up culture are as important as the finished material object when studying and exploring cultures.

Weaving was chosen as the primary focus of this study as it has been a key craft in the Maldives for generations and is still practised today. In the past, weaving was crucial in all aspects of the daily lives of the islanders such as housebuilding, boat building and fashioning tools and vessels for domestic use. The process of weaving is lengthy and time consuming but is still passed on from generation to generation. I was curious to learn and understand how this knowledge has been continuing to transmit for years.

One of my key participants, Amina was new in teaching this craft. I was her first student to complete the basic weaving course which she says has given her the confidence to keep teaching and create a weaving community to appreciate this craft. As of today, she has taught and passed this skill onto many other women and her work has been recognised by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Heritage. She has successfully established a weaving community with her former students (including myself) on a WhatsApp group called 'Kasabu Boavalhu' where we all discuss weaving past, present and future.

This is precisely the kind of involvement I wanted to have as an engaged anthropologist with the main concern of documenting culture and raise awareness about its importance. I have highlighted the challenges faced by academics and students in studying Maldivian culture which has undoubtedly resulted in people being discouraged to explore it any further. However, with the completion of this study, I hope to re-spark the interest in the people of the Maldives to understand, document and appreciate our culture.

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Sources for Illustrative Material

Fig. 1: Raa Badhi - Toddy Containers

Source: <https://www.meeru.com/blog/2020/04/17/tales-from-the-meeru-museum-the-toddy-tapper.html>

Fig. 2: Toddy T-shirt featuring traditional Maldivian design

Source: Instagram - Wear Toddy (2020)

Fig. 3: Island Bazaar products

Source: Instagram - Island Bazaar (2021)

Fig. 4: Oevaali phone cases

Source: Instagram - Oevaali (2021)

Fig. 5: Coral stone inspired products

Source: Instagram - Gadheemee Collection (2020)

Fig 6: Bracelet with *kasabu* embroidery

Source: Instagram - Kasabu by Hidha (2020)

Fig 7: Cushion covers with *kasabu* embroidery

Source: Instagram - Kasabu by Hidha (2019)

Fig 8: Maldivian model in traditional libaas

Source: <https://crosstheequator.blogspot.com/2017/11/traditional-costumedhivehi-libaas.html>

Fig 9: Myself, ready for a school play

Source: M, Maaz (2020). Unpublished photograph

Fig 10: Weaver's sketch of neckline and braids

Source: M, Maaz (2020). Unpublished photograph.

Fig 11: Libaas and art of weaving on Rufiyaa

Source: <https://edition.mv/features/4482>

Fig 12: *Gathaa Fai* - Traditional Weaving Tools

Source: Instagram - Hidhana Latheef (2018)

Fig 13: Older women weavers

Source: Nausham Photography (2019)

<https://www.facebook.com/naushamsphotography/photos/2281312538642361>