Let me first congratulate UNESCO for bringing on to its agenda of the Slave Route Project the issue of intangible cultural heritage since arguably to the vast majority of people who tenant this Planet, that dimension of human existence looms large in the way we live and have our being. Among such people are the peoples of the Americas of which the Caribbean is most certainly an integral part. Its location in the cultural landscape turns on the common experience of centuries of a history which imposed on millions a zone of silence. The engagement of such silence has long been an imperative of survival since the tangible dimensions of an enslaved colonial society often meant social death, to quote a fellow scholar, threatening the zombification of a people who, thanks to the retreat into that zone of silence, have been able to stand on the ridges of the creative imagination and function effectively in the world through memory, myth, mask and metaphor.

Some twenty five years ago I had reason to quote a Jamaican/Caribbean griot who sang the following

“You stole my history
Destroyed my culture
Cut out my tongue
So I can’t communicate
Then you mediate
And separate
Hide my whole way of life
So, myself I would hate….

This, according to Jimmy Cliff, the lyricist, musician and reggae superstar, is the price Caribbean brothers and sisters have had to pay so as to guarantee to themselves “peace” and stable living. But only on the surface! For underneath the seeming compliance with a heritage which comes in the symbols, myths, institutional and operational frameworks of those who control, govern, subjugate and denigrate, lie a bed of preserved cultural phenomena which now deserve, indeed, to be “safeguarded” if only because such phenomena have long brought meaning to lives lived and have remained significant buffer zones by saving so much of humanity from the tsunamis of ignorance, intolerance, discrimination and dehumanization.

I have frequently insisted that the history of the Caribbean, in fact of all the Americas over the past half a millennium, is the history of diverse arrivants into pieces of real estate tenanted by indigenous Native Americans. This explains the multiple narratives with varied sub-texts
that litter both the historical landscape and its existential counterpart in the world of today. Persistent are the continuities of the heritage of arrivants from first, old and modern Europe (these arrivants have never stopped "arriving" ever since Columbus accidentally came upon the Bahamian island and was discovered by the native dwellers); secondly, from West Africa which supplied the labour needed for the labour-intensive cultivation of such crops as sugar and cotton; thirdly, from Asia, especially the Deccan Plateau of India and the Hakka-speaking region of Southern China, who came in as indentured labourers to carry on what the Africans stopped doing after full Slave Emancipation in 1838 in the Anglophone Caribbean; and finally, more recently from Lebanon with “Syrians” fleeing anti-Christian hostility in the Levantine. The specific narrative forged out of each migration is best told and understood when filtered through the prism of the "intangible heritage(s)" which in the face of the conquering hegemony of colonising powers have catalysed sense and sensibility and shaped in large measure a distinctive "Caribbean" ethos/aesthetic through a process that scholars often refer to as creolisation. Such, indeed, is the case for safeguarding what has made this possible.

That such intangible heritage(s) have all made their own distinctive contribution to the formation of this Caribbean ethos there is no doubt. Throughout the region sense and sensibility are peppered with the
consequences of the tension-filled struggle that has lasted for over five hundred years between Europe and Africa on foreign soil. The peculiar nature of that engagement is signified by the attempted total control of hordes of chattel slaves by a dominant minority armed not so much with guns and bullets, though there were those as well, but with the authority of law, religion and a philosophy of superiority. This threw up among the enslaved and colonized a culture of resistance, much of which took the form of armed resistance but most importantly of psychic control by the resisters over inner spaces protected, paradoxically, by the very imposed silence which such oppression bred.

It is through the exercise of the mind in its intellectual and imaginative modes that the survival of the oppressed was guaranteed. And it is in this area that the intangible heritage of the involuntary arrivant found ideal, form and purpose duly transmitted orally and via non-verbal communication (as in body language) from one generation to the next and maintained and safeguarded over time.

Such cultural apparatus covers story-telling, the formulation and judicious use of proverbs as part of a dynamic and creative orality - stories brought in from West Africa, adapted to the new environment in which the bearers found themselves, and re-worked and varied in transmission. There resulted, for example, the les contes tradition of the
Eastern Caribbean and the Anansi stories of Jamaica with traceable ancestry of an enslaved people separate and apart from the “tangible” heritage enjoyed by European masters in their written poems, laws, novels which are all in the public domain and all-powerful in the shaping of perceptions, rules of representation and of engagement. Vampire stories of blood sucking demons abound as if to relate through a mnemonic device the suffering of demonic slavery. So there are in the Caribbean such vampire mythical creatures as Ole Hige, Soucouyant, Firerass and Chupucabra from Jamaica to Guyana.

The intangible heritage of the oppressed was to find further form in religion - in acts of worship which facilitate communion with the "gods" of African homelands and adapted in the host society if only to bring zones of comfort to the suspicious and often fearful masters. So the Christian saints of the European overlords were to find parallels in the deities of Haitian vodun which the Fon arrivants from Dahomey (now Benin) brought with them. The complex structures of the metaphysics of belief-systems persist to this day and thrive on the arcane symbolisms to be grasped only by the serious devotees of the religion. Santeria of Cuba and its counterpart Shango of Trinidad have much in common as a medium of communication with the spirit-world independent of the more tangible heritage of Europe's Christian migrants who have transmitted and maintained their myriad Christian denominational
practices throughout the Americas and fully in the public domain. But it is the intangible heritage of the Yoruba-derived shango, santeria and candomble (of Brazil) that continue to attract scholars to deep investigation and analysis in order to bring meaning and understanding to the lived realities of millions of people in the Americas. The arrivants from the Congo brought, transmitted and maintained the ancestral rite of Kumina still practised in eastern Jamaica and is the source for artistic creativity among persons in the performing arts. The maintenance of the heritage is hardly ever in pure form and the syncretised expressions to be found in zion reivialism and pocomania (largely found in Jamaica) continue to define the ontology and cosmology of people who have long migrated from their ancestral hearths.

Embedded in such religious practices and maintained and transmitted are so-called folk philosophies that help to define interpersonal relations and to describe rites of passage from one phase of life to another as well as to delineate kinship patterns - all cross-fertilised in the new soil of the Americas with its disparate elements but maintained with pristine energy brought in by the arrivants from Africa South of the Sahara. So the cyclical construct of a contemporary life representing that which is already lived, that now being lived and that yet to be lived (i.e. by the yet unborn) serves as a promise of hope.
Intangible heritage(s) also find form in the methods of healing that are critical to staying alive and the African slaves were not slothful in invoking the memory of the migrant to maintain health and transmitting the knowledge down the generations. What is now referred to as ethnomedicine or alternative medicine throughout the Caribbean is rooted in great part in the knowledge of traditional cures using "bush medicine" to cure fevers (through bush-baths) or cankers through home-made ointments made from boiled leaves, which are used as well to combat hypertension ("high blood pressure") or diabetes, another debilitating chronic disease to be found among Caribbean people of African ancestry, venereal disease, arthritis, head and chest colds, headaches and stomach ailments. The invocation of ancestral spirits is also part of the repertoire of cures that remain the intangible legacy of African migrants to the Americas over the past 500 years. The Maroons of Jamaica like their “Bush Negro” counterparts of Suriname pride themselves in being the guardians of such bodies of knowledge in plant medicine and herbal healing jealously protected even from some trusted researchers and scholars, thus keeping much of it out of the public domain. The memory of healing among later Asian arrivants is no less powerful in preserving their intangible heritage.

However, what remains more open and enough to be freely transmitted to wider and varied publics which become the guarantors and guardians
of the maintenance of the heritage is the range of festival arts. One of the most prominent of these is the jonkonnu (goombay or masquerade) still reminiscent of West African masquerade and still to be found among the descendants of slaves in Bermuda, Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica, the Leeward Islands and Guyana. But it is the Trinidad pre-Lenten Carnival (counterpart to Brazil's inflammable version and the relatively more sedate Mardi Gras of New Orleans) that fully demonstrates the interlinking of migration, transmission and maintenance of the intangible heritage of a people in a globalised world that has long been a reality as such, at least to the colonized, enslaved and indentured. The maintenance or safeguarding is assured through cross-fertilisation, adjustments and adaptations over time with the resulting products taking on indigenous characteristics but by no means obliterating the influences from the arrivants' place(s) of origin. The intangibility in this lies as much in the spirit of the Carnival as in the continuities evident in the mask and myth from ancestral hearths. The transmission and the maintenance manifest themselves yet further in the Caribbean diaspora which has grown since the mid-20th century on both sides of the North Atlantic where the Caribbean carnival is annually re-enacted among Caribbean migrants in Brooklyn, Miami and Boston (USA), Toronto (Canada) and in Notting Hill, London (England). The calypso and the steelband are in full accompaniment but the most impactful migrant music in the recent past is the reggae of Jamaica which has followed
Jamaican migrants all over the world. Over in Rotterdam, Holland, migrants from the Netherlands Antilles have transported their version of the carnival to that city as well. Here the intangible becomes “tangible”. And ‘zouk’ the popular music of the once French-settled islands of our region has Netherlanders hooked on the “beat”.

The arrivants’ preservation of the intangible heritage in host habitats is a clear means of coping with and surviving new environments especially if they are hostile. It also serves to build zones of comfort rooted in what is known even while one assimilates the unknown. All the more reason why such intangible heritages must be facilitated, safeguarded and better understood.

The Asian arrivants who migrated in the nineteenth century to the Caribbean have done no less with their ancestral memories in the new climes they chose to inhabit. The Indians of the Deccan plateau while not facing, as the Africans did, any deliberate efforts at radical cultural uprooting have been able to defy much of the efforts by the masters in indentureship to convert them to Christianity - the religion of social and political power. So Hinduism and Islam have remained not as intangibles but as overt religious practices – thanks, in part, to the increasing ecumenism that has gripped the Western world since the mid-20th century. Even before then the transmission of the Muslim festival
of **Hosay** found willing devotees in Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad where indentured Indians had reason to feel wronged and deprived during their indentureship and after. This festival art persists to this day, with people of African ancestry participating just as (East) Indians are integral to the pre-Lenten carnival that is unduly regarded as a predominantly Afro-Caribbean event. To a lesser degree the intangible heritage of other arrivants into the Caribbean is evident.

The very tangible and visible synagogue of the Sephardic Jews who were among the earliest arrivants to the Caribbean is underscored by a keen sense of "Jewishness" transmitted sometimes intangibly from one generation to the next throughout the Americas even while accommodations with the Gentile West remain a reality. The Chinese who came much later integrate no less but the intangible heritage of a brand of Confucianism, strong family values and a diet which is jealously maintained despite the adaptations to Western taste, add to the diversity of contemporary life in the world which Columbus called "New" and which has breathed new life and challenges to humankind's self-perception and self-actualisation.

The homogenisation now threatened by globalisation will have its fiercest opponent from the intangible heritages of migrants who came to make up the vast majority of the population of that "New World"
whether they be ethnic Poles, Irish, Italians, Hispanics or black Africans, Jews, Muslim Arabs or Koreans, Japanese and Chinese. The phenomenon is of course not restricted to this world of the Americas (which includes Latin America and the Caribbean). The Old World of Europe and of the East in their modern forms are themselves undergoing the kind of transformation that is bound to come from migrants through the transmission and maintenance of what they bring in enduring strength – namely, those parts of their heritage deemed intangible, not being readily accessible to all others but which stand reinforced and safeguarded by the ancestral certitude of ages.

And here UNESCO has scored again in giving an iconic place to yet another manifestation of the force and power of the intangible heritage. I refer of course to the cultural diversity which is bound to make sense through a thorough grasp and understanding of the force and power and of each ingredient’s intangible heritage respected and duly safeguarded!

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ABSTRACT

**Migration, Transmission and Maintenance of the Intangible Heritage**  
By Rex Nettleford

The history of the Caribbean and of all the Americas over the past 500 years is the history of migrations of diverse arrivants into lands inhabited time out of mind by Native Americans. The result is a range of narratives by descendants from such diverse places of origin as Europe, West Africa, Asia (India and China) and the Levantine. The narratives turn in large measure for millions on the intangible heritage(s) only parts of which are in the public domain. Much else reside in the myths, folk philosophies, oral traditions, religious rituals, traditional medicine, festival arts and such other products of the collective creative imagination as music, dance and orature.

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Artistic representation of the copiero dance from Brazil – still extant among African descendants in that country.

(Courtesy – National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica)

Singers and musicians of Jamaica’s National Dance Theatre Company. Accompanying the dance presentation of “Gerrehbenta” which draws on funeral rites brought over from Africa and still observed among Jamaicans of African ancestry in rural Jamaica. In the picture can be seen the “benta” – a string instrument played with katta sticks and a gourd as part of the intangible heritage of African arrivants to the Caribbean from the sixteenth century.

(Courtesy National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica)

Masquerade dancers in Montserrat (Leeward Islands) West Indies. The heritage is found all over the Caribbean region.

(Courtesy Caribbean Quarterly, University of the West Indies)

Carnival revellers from Trinidad and Tobago. The pre-Lenten festival has spread to the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, London, New York and Boston.

(Courtesy Caribbean Quarterly, University of the West Indies)