Article

Sensory Ecofeminism for Heritage, Tourism, and Sustainability in Mauritius

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Abstract: Worldwide, UNESCO provides a global and authorized set of protocols for the conservation of heritage. The organization has long framed the discourse and practice of cultural heritage management. At the Hangzhou International Congress in 2013, UNESCO declared culture as key to development, thereby confirming the role of culture and cultural heritage in sustainable development. In this article, attention is given to emerging sensory ecofeminism and its links to heritage and tourism in Mauritius, specifically in "unauthorized" heritage management locales and hotel settings. The research problem engaged in this study is that globally, heritage conservation is perceived as being of primary interest to UNESCO, the prerogative of authorized professionals and nominated heritage sites. The goal of the research is to understand the manifestation of cultural heritage and its management in coastal locales and how coastal sites and "unauthorized" heritage managers, hitherto not included in national heritage discourse and practice, may advance inclusive heritage management. Using the anthropological research methods of semi-structured interviews and participant observation to produce ethnographic data in 2022, this study finds that a selection of luxury hotels in Mauritius advances a gender-influenced and ecofeminist discourse that supports heritage, tourism, and sustainability in Mauritius. The conclusion of this study is that "unauthorized" heritage management processes and practices in luxury hotels and tourism establishments can be gender and community inclusive, sensitive to various social hierarchies, and required to achieve environmental sustainability. It is recommended that national heritage institutions and practitioners give more attention to the diverse, often unexpected locales for heritage conservation and inclusion.

Keywords: cultural heritage; luxury; tourism; sustainability; Mauritius

1. Introduction

Heritage identification and conservation are framed as institutionally located, gender-neutral, and state-mediated processes. UNESCO, a multinational organization, leads a globalized heritage management system [1]. It sets national protocols for heritage management and encourages state parties to follow these protocols. Scholars worldwide have critiqued UNESCO's heritage concept noting how it risks ossifying culture [2] and cultural practices [3], commoditizing culture [4], producing myths [5], and further empowering historically powerful constituencies [6]. Heritage is generally considered to be the natural and cultural legacy passed from one generation to the next. However, as this article shows, tangible heritage (monuments, artifacts, sites of cultural value) and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) consisting of beliefs, myths, epics, and other unpalpable cultural expressions are dynamic, diversely located human endeavors managed by diverse peoples and interests. Regarding the impacts of the UNESCO discourse on African heritage, scholars argue that a centralized heritage concept and practice risk the marginalization of African histories [7] and traditional heritage management forms [8]. Nevertheless, some scholars are more positive, perceiving UNESCO's heritage management processes as key to sustainable development, inclusion, and democracy [9]. Omayio, Sreedevi, and Panda [10], for example, note the professionalization of heritage management, stating that it is now a "multidisciplinary

and multisectoral undertaking", involving a diversity of scientists who are most visible and who advance a variety of publicly acknowledged practices of heritage conservation.

In this article, attention is given to luxury hotels and exclusive tourism sites as places of heritage management beyond the formal heritage management sphere. The key argument offered is that such sites provide opportunities for gendered, ecologically aware, globally oriented tourism practices. In particular, the Lux Collective site research offers a nuanced gender tourism strategy and practice, one that recognizes the sensory and gendered aspects of heritage, in particular, the role of ecofeminism in advancing sustainability. It is argued, therefore, that there is a sensory ecofeminism in the Lux Collective tourism strategy. The strategy advances a sensory (embodied and intersubjective) gendered experience, and it is sustained by intense sensory moments that facilitate visions for gender liberation. In the Bel Ombre example offered, there is a shift in heritage management practice. There is an effort not to evoke a diversity of cultural heritages and sensory experiences but the effort to recognize the natural heritage of the region and its still largely masculinized elements. Thus, it is argued that in Mauritius, luxury tourism sites are emerging as gendered, heritage rich, and, in more instances, ecofeminist sites [11]. Thus, and as demonstrated in this article, the selected research sites noted above were well worth an ethnographic study because each indicated multilayered processes of heritage expression and management. This study presented also acknowledges the effort made by these establishments to pursue complex heritage narratives and, in some instances, sustainability initiatives. In addition, and following Plumwood [11], an ecofeminist perspective is adopted for this study and can be understood in relation to this work via the nuanced aesthetic choices made by the designers of the sites, the tourism strategy targeting environmentally conscious tourists, the promotion of environmental consciousness, and the (feminine/Gaia) ethos of protective care for the environment.

Ecofeminism may be defined as philosophy and theory in which concerns about ecological care are sutured to feminist principles and practices. Ecofeminists may, for example, attribute the acceleration of climate change and ecological damage to hegemonic patriarchal ideologies and goals. Sensory ecofeminism (which arises as an outcome of this study) considers the embodied nature of gender relations and asserts the value of sensory experience in tourism and social life. It promotes the palpability of human existence and shifts from disembodied, macrosocial, body-distant accounts of tourism and other social phenomena. As argued in this article, ecofeminism is now emerging in luxury hotel tourism strategies and practices, providing new opportunities for mainly elite women to publicly express and experience ecological concern and awareness. The analytical frame of ecofeminism is appropriate for the discussion presented in this article, as it offers a more nuanced, ecologically aware perspective of gendered relations in the tourism space. A liberal feminist approach would permit consideration of the broader political and economic dynamics of gender inequality which is still valuable to understanding the broader issues of gendered structural inequality. The work of Mauritian gender scholar Ramola Ramtohul, for example, is instructive for a liberal feminist perspective on gendered structural inequality in Mauritius. Ramtohul [12] provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of gender activism and the political positioning of women in Mauritius, including the exclusion of Mauritian women from the formal sphere of politics. Ramtohul discusses how gender is perceived and experienced in the political sphere, a powerful context for the shaping of national gender norms. Gender inequality persists in Mauritius. Darga and Hurroo report on its persistence in their Afrobarometer Report [13]. They state that "Despite the government's efforts, gender equality remains an unfinished agenda in Mauritius. In 2021, Mauritius ranked the lowest performing third (110th among 156 countries) on the Global Gender Gap Index . . . (). Only 20% of seats in Parliament are held by women—below average both globally and in Sub-Saharan Africa [and] Women make up only 40% of the country's labor force and are unemployed at higher rates than men" (ibid).

Of further value to the discussion is Ferguson's account of the detrimental effects of gender-blind tourism and the role of a gendered view of tourism in advancing equality

and combatting the specter of colonialism in tourism [14]. Both authors offer valuable secondary data considerations that complement the study presented, drawing attention to the national context for gender relations and the importance of tourism in advancing gender equality and human development. As found and deserving of greater attention beyond this article, formal cultural heritage in Mauritius remains mostly gender-blind, reflecting the hegemonic gender norms in the society. As discussed in this article, it is in the dynamic, globally sensitized luxury hotel setting that more nuanced reflections and practices of gender equality and sustainability become apparent.

This paper, therefore, considers a specific tourist constituency, a contemporary, elite, instagrammable but still relatable woman who appears to be seeking refuge from the relentlessness of a modernist existence. As this study shows, managers in these tourism settings reach such constituencies in a way that formal, macrosocial heritage practices and managers cannot. World Heritage Sites (WHS) inscribed by UNESCO on the World Heritage List (WHL) attract millions of tourists worldwide [15]. The study presented here shows that heritage sites, formal and informal, are profoundly gendered spaces and are increasingly key to lifestyle expression. The findings in this paper build on what scholars such as Laura-Jane Smith assert, which is that heritage " . . . is gendered in the way heritage is defined, understood and talked about, and, in turn, in the way it reproduces and legitimizes gender identities and the social values that underpin them" [16]. Furthermore, and following Colella, it is argued that the (androcentric) bias in current, formal heritage management "has contributed to validating an elite view of male history—the history of great men and their deeds—perpetuated through the artful selection of sites, monuments, artifacts and places that come to count as 'heritage' to the extent that they confirm that view [17]. Exposing the masculinity of heritage and debunking the myth of its gender neutrality is only the first step in a more complex process of awareness raising".

To discuss these issues, this article offers an analysis of secondary data and primary data collected in Mauritius in 2022. This article proposes that less rigid processes of heritage management can produce a more inclusive discourse and practice of heritage management. Heritage managers and management are diverse and can differently shape the form, experience, and discourse of culture, creating new social values and pathways of cultural identity and cultural diversity protection.

This discussion is arranged as follows: the literature review, which considers the emergence of authorized heritage discourses and critiques of hegemonic notions of heritage, as well as the adoption of these narratives in national discourses of heritage management. There is also a comment on research conducted two decades ago on heritage management in Mauritius and a discussion on recent research and the revelation that tourism remains a complexly dialogical process involving multidirectional cultural flows. The review notes the requirement of dynamic views of tourism and, thereby, heritage for more inclusive and integrated heritage management. In various ways, the research approach is multi-sited [18]. It involves fieldwork in "unauthorized" heritage locales, interviews with "unusual" cultural managers, and openness to the possibility of heritage management beyond existing heritage frames and discourses. The third part of the paper offers the findings, followed by the discussion and conclusion. The conclusion states that globalized regimes of heritage management and official discourses of culture and heritage risk excluding powerful and influential constituencies that have the potential to deepen sustainable human development. Relatedly, persistent perceptions of recreational tourism as distinct from heritage tourism impact consideration of alternative locations of culture and heritage and their role in producing rich social meaning and heritage value.

The practical scientific question addressed by this study was as follows: (1) Mauritius is a country concerned with environmental sustainability and economic development. What is the role of luxury hotels and tourism in sustaining environmental sustainability?; and (2) How and where is cultural heritage, an aspect of global and national human development and sustainability, managed in Mauritius? The aim of this research was to investigate and assess (qualitatively) the extent to which cultural heritage is sustained beyond formal

and authorized heritage processes and spaces. The key objective of the research was to ascertain the role of a selected set of luxury hotels in advancing sustainability and cultural heritage management.

2. Re-Viewing Heritage and Tourism

Mauritius consists of many complex social worlds in which processes of culture management are taken up by diverse and sometimes opposing constituencies. For at least 20 years, scholars have considered the discursive aspects of heritage management. Most now agree that heritage is no longer a mere legacy or gift to be passed from one generation to the next [19]. Heritage is discussed as a site and source of metacultural production [6] where diverse, intersubjective (albeit unequal) relations and processes persist. Heritage is also thought to be partly constitutive; it is a process leading to the creation of locally meaningful identities. Tunbridge et al. [5] add that heritage management is a generative process, "the present selects an inheritance from an imagined past for current use and decides what should be passed on to an imagined future".

Since the adoption of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972 (henceforth discussed as the World Heritage Convention), UNESCO has presented heritage as a circumscribable product managed by trained professionals. Heritage identification, inscription, and management are institutionally routed. State parties to the World Heritage Convention establish national commissions to engage local communities and specialists and to set in motion formal heritage management processes. The centralized approach to heritage management persists, even though culture, a key aspect of heritage, is now understood to be a mobile artifact and construct a de-territorialized process.

Attention is now given to the extent to which tourism facilitates the social production of culture and place [20]. Thus, tourism is no longer only assessed for its impacts on indigenous culture [21] or its exclusion of local peoples [22]. Tourism is now analyzed as an intersubjective, dialogical process in which both tourists and hosts are shaped [23]. Thus, it is now readily accepted that tourism is a managed cultural encounter [24], crafted gaze [25], and source of beyond-the-norm experience [26]. This article advances a similar view of tourism in Mauritius, which is that tourism is a managed cultural encounter and process facilitating the social production of culture and place. Tourism establishments, such as the selected ones presented in this article, are becoming more socially expressive and culturally attuned. Their strategists are crafting socially embedded and sustainability-oriented experiences. Such sites, therefore, create new social value but do not and cannot replace formal heritage management spaces and processes.

Concerned at first with producing a seamless/unified tourism experience, tourism managers initially sought to produce authentic, rooted experiences [27]. Global critical tourism studies, however, now reveal how tourism managers seek to simulate different kinds of authenticity [28], including existential authenticity (ibid). Tourism establishments are shifting beyond sites of fantasy to become places where one can temporarily demonstrate authenticity via acts of sustainable development and creativity [29]. However, even though it is now well known that women are critical to tourism [30], there appears to be little attention given to the role of gender in these forms of social production.

New materialisms in feminism [31,32] and poststructural feminism [33] can be taken up to analyze the gendered aspects of tourism and ways in which tourist sites may become gendered heritage spaces. Braidotti, for example, helps one to understand the continuous formulations and iterations of intersubjectivity [29] in ways that showcase the ongoing formation and entanglement of gender in social realities, such as tourism. Thus, adopting her approach is not enough to consider inequalities, as noted in feminist tourism studies [30, 34]. Tourism spaces are not merely historicized, patriarchal worlds underscored by colonial fantasies of power and control. They are also spaces where globalized identities and empowered gendered senses of self are continuously produced. The study in this article provides a unique example from the Indian Ocean region and enriches critical heritage

studies [35] and feminist heritage studies, both of which call for critiques of authorized heritage discourses and their encouragement of linear, hegemonic understandings of the world. Furthermore, this study hopes to nuance heritage studies in Mauritius, which do not yet consider new materialisms in feminism, entangled intersubjectivities, or even the gendered aspects of tourism and heritage management in the country. Tourism is still mainly discussed from a macroeconomic and macrosocial perspective [36–38], and heritage is firmly associated with historical revision; the recovery of sites and histories are obscured in slavery and colonization. In the latter, narratives of women's contribution to heritage, especially intangible cultural heritage (ICH), are subsumed in the broader histories of either indentured work or slavery. In recent years, there have been calls to change and to consider the application of a critical social lens to tourism [37], but these do not yet appear to have emerged in Mauritius. In this regard and considering alternative locales of heritage management and heritage managers, the data and analysis presented in this article fill an important knowledge gap, that of the role of tourist settings as sites of sensory experience facilitated via the articulation of heritage, and the role of nationally "unauthorized" heritage managers in producing such sensory, feminized narratives of heritage.

In Mauritius, heritage management is a systematic, professionalized process [39]. Heritage is framed as a process that occurs in historicized and institutionally authorized heritage locales. As Troubat [35] notes, "... two cultural heritage sites have been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List respectively; The '*Aapravasi Ghat*' (stepping stone of immigrants) on the 13th July 2006, earlier known as the 'Coolie Ghat' and *Le Morne Cultural Landscape* on the 6th July 2008, a rugged mountain in the southwest of Mauritius that was used as a shelter by runaway slaves, maroons, through the 18th and early years of the 19th centuries. These inscriptions to the World Heritage Sites of UNESCO represent an excellent opportunity to promote cultural heritage tourism". However, as noted in the findings of this article, the situation is not so clear-cut. Mauritian society is expressive of a globalized *état* in which there are multiple contradictions. It is a country that is traditional and compliant with UNESCO's (hegemonic) discourse of culture because it is a party to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and, therefore, must subscribe to UNESCO's policies and protocols, identified processes, pathways, competencies, and approaches endorsed for heritage management. Mauritius is also a creolized society [40,41], and it is a globalized Small Island Developing State (SIDS), part of digitized and discursive flows of knowledge and identity [42]. Mauritius is, therefore, influenced by multiple flows of power and meaning. The latter is especially relevant in tourism, where one finds new intersubjectivities shaping practices and shaping of tourism. For example, in its 2013 report on Mauritius as a sustainable island (Maurice Ile Durable [MID]), the government commits to a more inclusive society and environmentally sustainable growth. The tourism sector in Mauritius takes this commitment seriously and is focused on cultural inclusion, trying via its sustainability strategies to implement measures that better safeguard the natural environment while delivering unique and valuable experiences for international tourists. The MID report notes the importance of gender equality but only in relation to achieving basic equality in education and employment. In the following part of the discussion, the method and methodology are offered, indicating how a critical heritage analysis leads one to consider a different set of the heritage of managers and locations. The section also notes the challenges of asserting such locales as potential research spaces.

3. Research Method and Methodology

Anthropological research, that is, primary data collection (via participant observation and interviews), was collected in Mauritius in 2022. The interviews were conducted in situ at the hotels and tourism sites noted in the article. Each interview lasted one hour, and key questions were asked regarding the role of the site in environmental sustainability and the management of culture and heritage. I approached the General Managers of the hotels via the publicly available portals on the hotel websites to set up interviews prior to arriving in Mauritius. Once these were confirmed, travel dates were set, and interviews

were implemented according to the agreed-upon schedule. As the researcher, I stayed at one hotel (Lux Grand Gaube) for two days and traveled to the other sites for scheduled interviews. The interview questions were sent ahead so that the General Managers could read them. All participants were provided with the option of written consent for the interview, and not all General Managers agreed to be interviewed. In one instance, the General Manager delegated the interview to the sustainability manager. In another instance, the manager recommended other additional senior managers (such as two sommeliers) in the organization for me to interview. The interviews were also facilitated by the fact that I am trilingual; I speak English, French, and the lingua franca of Mauritius, Kreol. The data were anonymized where relevant to protect the privacy of the participant if this was requested. However, as evident from the discussion presented in the article, most of the managers interviewed agreed to openly share the progressive practices of the hotels and tourism establishments in which they are situated.

The data collected forms part of a larger, comparative research project on ocean cultures and heritage in Africa and the nearby Indian Ocean diaspora. The goal of the larger project is to document and analyze human cultural relations with the ocean and coast, bearing in mind that coastal cultural heritage is a concept diversely defined and experienced. The literature appraised prior to the implementation of the study presented in this article suggests that a more self-reflexive, holistic, and gendered approach to cultural heritage research is required. Researchers should critically assess the hegemonic and authorized discourse of heritage management and be curious about the potential of alternative heritage sites for heritage management. In this regard, the discussion presented in this article can be applied to other geographical and cultural contexts as well, especially when considering colonial and hegemonic forms of heritage management. This study's findings encourage curiosity about the place, purpose, and forms of non-authorized heritage processes, products, and forms of heritage management. Since Mauritius is an island for whom tourism is key to economic growth and sustainability, a research choice was made to assess whether such sites may be alternative locales of heritage production.

The literature review also led to a hypothesis of critical heritage management emerging in the sites selected for research. My online viewing of promotional videos of exclusive locales in Mauritius (from May to October 2022) showed that selected hotel chains are active in sharing globalized narratives of culture and heritage. I complemented the online viewings with primary data collection to triangulate what was observed online with experience in the research locale. After viewing the online videos and reading the online promotional materials and Annual Reports [43], I decided that the research sites would be (1) part of the Lux Collective because of the organization's strong emphasis on sustainability and the creation of bespoke experiences for its clientele and (2) the promotion of a gendered narrative of leisure in the Lux Grand Gaube promotional video. Furthermore, I chose a second research site, the chateau and restaurant of a property residential scheme (PDS) situated in the south of the island. The latter was selected for comparison and contrast purposes. The term heritage is abundantly used in the promotion of the latter, and the goal is to assess how heritage manifests in a space where the concept is deliberately deployed.

The research sites are indicated in Figure 1. Concerning the characteristics of the research area, Mauritius is an achingly beautiful and highly profitable tourism destination. In December 2022, the country earned 522 million USD from tourism [44]. This is the major reason it annually attracts millions of tourists worldwide. It offers a cerulean lagoon ringed by a protective reef, white sand beaches, gentle rolling waves, and warm tropical air. Inland, there are volcanic peaks, indigenous forests, and culturally rich villages and towns where one may encounter diverse religions and peoples. The island society of 1.3 million people who originate from India, China, Europe, and Africa has produced a socially creolized society [38]. In 2022, Mauritius was recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the population [42] and on tourism [45]. In the findings narrated below, it is argued that a major part of the recovery process involved creating a new environment for tourism that is conscious of environmental sustainability. Indeed, the primary data collected show that

tourism managers are paying more attention to the ecological performance of Mauritius and are focused on advancing Mauritius as a sustainable destination. Moreover, as the primary data also suggest, an emerging sensory ecofeminism is apparent in these tourism endeavors. The findings noted are arranged as follows: (1) the online encounter of the Lux Collective hotels and of the chateau located near the PDS selected for this study, indicating how such spaces offer opportunities for the expression of heritage, lifestyle, and new materialisms; (2) the observations in situ; and (3) the interviews conducted. Anthropological research was conducted at four sites: (1) Lux Grand Gaube; (2) Lux Grand Baie; (3) SALT of Palmar, and (4) Bel Ombre Heritage Resorts, specifically the Chateau of Bel Ombre.

Figure 1. Map of Mauritius, indicating the research sites for this study. Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/Mauritius-map.htm accessed on 17 March 2023.

The three foci indicate the existence and salience of heritage management in non-authorized heritage settings and the role of "heritage" managers in crafting and advancing heritage narratives and heritage tourism. The findings focus on four establishments.

Three hotels form part of the Lux Collective in Mauritius and the restaurant of a Property Development Scheme and its associated historical setting in the south of the island.

Practically, the long-term financial and research cost of accessing these sites was prohibitive. The primary data collection, therefore, via participant observation and interviews in 2022, took place over a period of two weeks, whereas observation of formal sites of heritage management in Mauritius occurred intermittently over a decade (2005–2016), and the observation of promotional videos online occurred over months (from May to October 2022).

A last point to be made regarding the research method is that the research seeks to understand the social and cultural dimensions of tourism and the social dimensions of sustainability. As per the literature on heritage in Mauritius, the literature on tourism emphasizes the economic dimensions [33]. A research decision was, therefore, made to consider the complex cultural dimensions of tourism in Mauritius without falling prey to a substantive analysis that draws this study from a close understanding of alternative locales for heritage management.

Ten participants were recruited, and seven (four men and three women) participants enrolled for the primary data to be collected. These individuals were interviewed using the semi-structured interview approach, either online or in person, for a period of at least one hour each. The selected interviewees were senior employees (CEO, managers, sommeliers, and executive managers) of the tourism establishments. The aim was not to achieve representativity or obtain quantitatively meaningful data but to pique interest in the multiplicity of spaces in which heritage is engaged with and managed beyond formal spheres of heritage management. Furthermore, while it would have been valuable to understand how differently empowered persons in the hotels experience and perpetuate/desist from heritage production, the research focused on the detailed interviews with the senior managers and on ethnographic observation in the chosen locales to share insight on the sustainability goals of these establishments, as well as the way in which such goals overlap with and support cultural heritage expression and management. The research was not an exercise in body-distant analysis of spaces, peoples, and interactions, nor does it intend to be scientifically replicable. It offers a self-reflexive, body-close, socially embedded experience of the chosen spaces and analyzes their contribution to heritage management. Focus was maintained on the richness of the social context presented by the hotel establishment and PDS.

Concerning the recruitment method, the participants were enrolled for preliminary contact via email to the hotels to which they are affiliated. This preliminary contact was important and difficult since the participants were high-powered executives whose diaries are managed by administrators trained to filter out individuals seeking to "bother" the managers. It was, therefore, fortuitous that the administrators could screen the Internet for information regarding my project (noted at the start of this discussion) and decide whether I could interview their superiors.

Methodologically, a critical heritage studies approach and sensory feminist perspective were adopted. The sites were experienced in situated, embodied ways, and attention was given to how the sites advanced social production and generated cultural meaning. What artifacts, values, and rituals were used to facilitate cultural and social production? Which specialists were used to attain the desired social ends? As an embedded and embodied researcher, I experienced the places as spaces of sensory fantasy, globalization, cosmopolitanism, and freedom from persistent patriarchal routines. In this manner, and as a feminist-tourist-anthropologist in this setting, I was able, as Emily Apter [46] explains, to *un-time* "these historical periodizing frames" and associated patriarchal impositions of time.

4. Findings

4.1. Secondary Data Findings

For the online analysis, four videos are considered, along with online materials indicating the ethos of the tourism establishment or reports on the establishment's annual performance. The first encounter with the promotion of heritage discourse online was in the presentation of the Lux Hotel at Grand Gaube in the northeastern part of the island in 2021. The first video [47] encountered (see the video still in Figure 2) articulates the historical and tangible cultural heritage of Mauritius. The global doyenne of interior design, Kelly Hoppen, takes the online audience through the then-renovated Lux Belle Mare. Hoppen indicates that she wanted to create cocoons for the clientele, as well as a sense of privacy, exclusivity, and sensory experience. Access to the sensory heritage of Mauritius is apparent in the visual element of vernacular architecture; the tactile experience of local materials hints at intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the behavior, values, and wellbeing treatments offered at the hotel. Visually, there are verandas, rattan patio furniture, and woven baskets, all of which signpost nostalgic remembrances of a pre-modern Mauritius. Hoppen's narrative ties these narratives to the potential Lux client, a woman desirous of Independence and self-care, a person who desires seclusion from a relentless modernist existence. The narrative aligns with Otegui-Carles et al.'s [48] substantive review of solo traveling, which confirms that solo traveling is increasing worldwide, and a substantive proportion of these travelers are women, who perceive this form of travel as a liberatory and potential source of mediated self-expression. Field research at the Lux Collective hotels (specifically Grand Baie) and at the Chateau de Bel Ombre revealed narratives of elite lifestyles and spheres of exclusivity [49]. Not only do such "tourists" have curated leisure spaces, but they also access bespoke services that other, less influential and less wealthy travelers cannot access. As noted in this article, the health spa at Lux Grand Baie offers the experience of elite exclusivity; treatments are designed by globally renowned "traiteurs", and the treatments are tailored for each client. At less exclusive hotels, the emphasis is on group benefits to reduce costs.

Figure 2. The nomade, Lux Grand Gaube (video still). Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9OzqB86gOk (accessed on 14 May 2023).

The second video, focused on Lux Grand Gaube, reveals a stronger effort to harness and articulate cultural heritage in the tourism space. In the Palm Court, a food dispensing area, there is the offering of diverse Mauritian cuisines, and clientele moves from one food station to another to literally encounter the taste heritage of Mauritius. Prospective

clients are offered glimpses of the multicultural smorgasbord they could encounter if they booked to stay at the hotel. Through taste, décor, and curated spaces across the property, the cultural heritage of Mauritius is presented for a culturally specific experience in the same way that one would encounter a heritage site. The video of the solo woman tourist experiencing these restaurants also hints at liberatory practices. The woman in question is able to taste different cuisine, express an independent opinion on these, and inter alia reveal the culinary heritage of Mauritius.

Design decisions for a tourism establishment add to the palpability of the heritage experience. The video clearly highlights the distinctive nature of soft finishings, suggesting the possibility of "soft landings" for exhausted travelers. Chang [50] adds that tourism studies should consider efforts to render destinations socially meaningful. He asserts that such socially meaningful destinations are part of a global lifestyle "turn", "tourism accommodation has changed dramatically since the post-war period . . . today, a new genre of hotels strives to be known for their uniqueness. The holidays that tourists go on, the places that they visit, and the hotels in which they stay are increasingly a reflection of their individuality and distinctive lifestyle. The tourism industry has responded to this 'lifestyle turn'. Hotels market their distinctiveness through unique interior décor, architectural styles, and personalized services. Many hotels sell 'experiences' that cannot be replicated elsewhere" [47].

A 2016 European Travel Commission Report suggests that the lifestyle "turn" may be traced to experiences of an unfulfilled life. The Report adds that the search for "lifestyle" experiences is especially evident among long-haul travelers, who are now keen to combine self-improvement and experiential elements in their travels. Such travelers seek to fulfill personal, non-work-related desires in their chosen destinations. However, reading a popular reflection on the role of lifestyle in feminism, it was found that lifestyle expressions are an important first step in public feminist behavior [24]. It is possible to extend the second view to this study. Women tourists, as imagined by Lux, are not merely there for the palpable potential heritage experience of the tourist site; they are also there to publicly express their feminist desires for freedom from social constraints and expectations. Considering the promotional videos for the Lux Collective in Mauritius, the narrative of the desire for fulfillment is apparent. The women represented in the videos appear to be traveling in search of freedom and existential authenticity [25]. This is depicted in an online, publicly shared video [51] regarding a group of women friends arriving at Lux Grand Baie in the North of the island (see video still, Figure 3 below) to celebrate historical and present feminine ties and friendships. Lux Grand Gaube appears to offer this possibility, first through their adage of "lighter, brighter", which encourages the clientele to live a heuristically enlightened existence and to tangibly feel lighter, less burdened by the oppressions of patriarchal impositions and values. This is captured in an online, publicly shared video [52] of the quintessential Lux woman traveler, who supposedly stays healthy by drinking "greens"; however, as the video indicates, this is not a reality. Emancipated women travelers prefer to explore, live, enjoy, and be authentic. The story presented in the Lux Grand Gaube promotional video is that the women are pursuing sensory experiences of a kind that liberates them from daily, "normal", potentially restricted experiences.

This is especially apparent in the video on the "Nomade", a young, instagrammable woman who is depicted as an individual freeing herself from societal norms, such as the need to be disciplined in food and exercise habits, the need to be socially conscious and ecologically aware. The woman depicted is desirous of new experiences and unafraid to pursue these. The Nomade subverts the narrative of the socially approved woman who does what others expect. She expresses inconsistency, indecisiveness, poor choices, playfulness, and forgetfulness about propriety—she takes a holiday from patriarchal expectations. She appears to be in touch with her existence as a vulnerable human being desirous of new worlds and experiences. The Nomade is a contemporary woman navigating the challenges of living in an androcentric world where women are expected to conform to social mores of propriety, self-control, and ecological care. She is also a woman who, as in the publicly

shared video promoting Lux Grand Gaube (see above), connects with long-forgotten female friends and recreates meaningful carefree (patriarchy-free) memories with them.
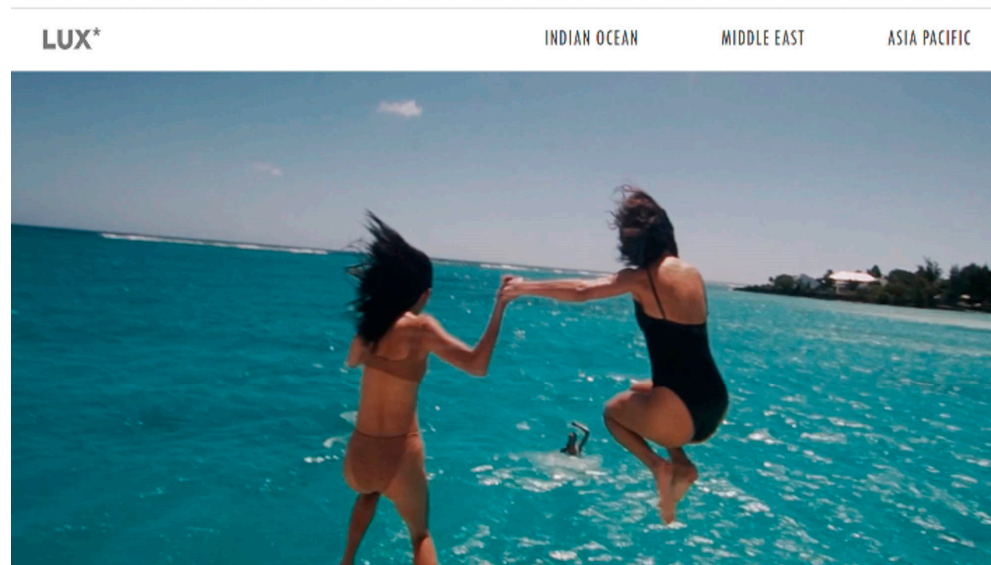

Figure 3. Recreating memories with female friends Lux Grand Baie (video still). Source: https://www.luxresorts.com/en/mauritius/hotel/luxgrandbaie?campaignid=17628100066&adgroupid=135649303582&keyword=lux%20grand%20baie&device=c&gclid=Cj0KCQjwnMWkBhDLARIsAHBOftr1MVxLnAcLmUp0fA-iXx_XncTDDvSa_YbwPIChN0sqISHGcyCB5CsaArlWEALw_wcB (accessed on 14 May 2023).

In subsequent tales of the Nomade, various kinds of people surface. The story unfolds diversity in the tourism setting in a landscape where diverse choices for play are realizable. The story is that one can be anything. One does not need to be authentic and relatable to be valuable. As an interviewer and participant in the research setting of these hotels, I also adopted and tried to realize the persona of an emancipated woman traveler, managing social media representation of her identity in the emancipating context. This is apparent in Figure 4, where I curate the impression of being free and a foreign visitor to the Banyan Tree House at Lux Grand Gaube, when in fact, I am Mauritian by birth.

Online research was also conducted on the Bel Ombre Heritage Resorts and primary data collection at the Chateau de Bel Ombre (See Figure 5) near the PDS of Villas Valriche. To encounter the narrative of this space required viewing the many promotional videos of the sites; two are selected for analysis in this paper.

Similar to the lifestyle "turn" at the Lux Collective, the narrative of Villas Valriche and Chateau de Bel Ombre in the Belle Riviere District of Mauritius is embedded in a story of the heritage of the region, its intertwined colonial and local community culture, and the presence of nature (and the grounded-ness that this offers) in the lives of future inhabitants and visitors. In the first video, one encounters Bel Ombre, a region with an industrial sugar plantation history. The video chosen for Bel Ombre [53] foregrounds the natural heritage vision and endeavor of the Bel Ombre Heritage Resorts. The video is followed by a series of other clips which emphasize the sustainable development journey of the group. The main video emphasizes the unity of sea, land, and life (*la mer, la terre, la vie*). The emphasis is on creating space for and sustaining natural heritage and the symbiosis of humans with nature.

Figure 4. The author pictured at the Banyan Tree House, Lux Grand Gaube, December 2022. Source: Author's Own.

Figure 5. View of the formal gardens of the Chateau de Bel Ombre. Source: Author's Own, 2022.

At Bel Ombre Heritage Resorts (and specifically in relation to the Chateau), there is a leveraging of the plantation history as an important source of historical identity. The online promotional videos showcase the formal colonial gardens leading up to the chateau and the role of the historical owner, Telfair, in creating the chateau and its grounds. The videos in the series regarding the chateau and the Bel Ombre location indicate the area's rich natural heritage at the heart of indigenous forests, rivers, and waterfalls. Not far away is the Domaine de Belle Rivières, crisscrossed by multiple streams and rivers important to

the livelihood of local villagers. The property also borders on a nature reserve, declared a Man and Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1977.

Originally focused on the cultivation of coffee, cotton, and indigo, the estate is now residential. Each villa in the PDS includes natural materials and local architectural features to maximize natural ventilation and light. The estate pays homage to an early tangible cultural heritage. Coupled with this visible, palpable history of the region is a masculinized cultural heritage in the form of hunting (and golfing) and wine and rum tasting. In contrast, perhaps then, to the Lux Collective, at the Chateau de Bel Ombre and the Telfair Golf course, there is a possibility for the temporary realization of a hegemonic masculinized self. The videos watched, however, do not reveal only this. They suggest that there is an effort to engage the local community and village of Bel Ombre itself in various environmentally conscious endeavors and sustainable development projects. One of the videos highlights the success of a local inhabitant who became the head sommelier of the chateau. The Creole man describes his journey from apprenticeship to his current position and what he was doing to help others needing assistance in the village.

4.2. Primary Data Findings

During in situ research, it was found that social production and cultural heritage signposting were evident in curated spaces across the grounds of Lux Grand Gaube and the Chateau de Bel Ombre. In the former, there is a nostalgic vending station for ice cream, the kind that one would find on the public beaches of Mauritius. There is also a rum house draped in the vines of a banyan tree, signaling the Creole heritage of the island and, visually, the rootedness of that heritage. Finally, there is the wine-tasting cellar which evokes the French heritage of the island (given the degustation of French and South African wines from Franschhoek in the cellar), and a nearby restaurant that evokes the hunting heritage of the French descendants. At the restaurant, one can order game meat dishes (i.e., roast deer meat) that harken back to the French colonial history of Mauritius. At the hotel then, it was found that established heritage narratives of ethnic history and associated productions (game meat, rum, fine wine) are compartmentalized for the tourist experience. Liberated women tourists can participate in such narratives, surfacing diverse forms of feminist empowerment in each locale.

The analysis partly aligns with a review of the online Annual Report of the Lux Collective [40]. The report seeks to capture and identify diverse forms of social complexity emerging in the tourism collective. There is careful identification of the audience, purpose, values, and tagline of each of the Lux hotels and affiliated tourism establishments. The list indicates that for the Lux Collective, the audience can be objectively framed as "simplicity seekers" and "social capital seekers", whereas those at SALT (such as the SALT of Palmar establishment) are "cultural purists" and "ethical travelers". Lux helps people "celebrate life", while SALT helps its clientele to "connect with local people and places". Observation in situ, however, suggests that such narratives may be difficult to achieve. There are many kinds of visitors to these hotels, and there is divergent uptake of offerings for lifestyle improvement.

In the next section, the observation findings and the interview findings are offered. The discussion is closed with a summary overview and conclusion.

4.3. The Observation and Interview Results

The Lux Collective has several hotels in Mauritius, two of which were selected for primary data collection. The two hotels are Lux Grand Gaube in the northeastern part of the island and Lux Grand Baie in the north of the island. A third hotel was selected for observation and an interview, SALT of Palmar, which is also on the east coast of Mauritius. Lux Grand Gaube was opened in March 2018, and Lux Grand Bay in November 2021. SALT of Palmar was opened in November 2018. Lux Grand Gaube has 186 rooms, which are divided into six types, including villas and Prestige rooms, whereas Lux Grand Baie can accommodate guests in 86 suites, 8 villas, 20 residences, and 2 penthouses. SALT of

Palmar is a smaller establishment with 59 sea-facing rooms. At the Lux Collective, the emphasis is on creating and offering a diversity of spaces in which one can experience an aspect of the island's "identity". There is a clear distinction between the hotels, as Lux Grand Gaube is classified as a five-star hotel and Lux Grand Baie as a five-star-plus hotel, meaning that it has more exclusive offerings and décor finishes, appealing to a clientele that is wealthier than those able to afford a five-star establishment. This is especially apparent at Lux Grand Gaube, where a retro-chic ethos plays on 1970s nostalgia and aesthetics. This ethos is represented in the videos discussed above.

Observations of the site were performed almost continuously for the two-week period of the research. As noted from the online assessments, it was clear that the Lux Collective strategically creates sensory and experiential spaces in which women seek freedom from the strictures of an imposed patriarchal (and perceived anti-environmentalist) ethos. This is first made possible by conscious suggestion in the promotional videos and is subsequently realized in the various activities and heritage spaces that women can enjoy on the hotel grounds, the "bubble" wherein they may feel free to express diverse identities.

An effort is made so that the tourist's attention is not detracted from the crafted spaces. The employees wear only white (perhaps, to give visual effect to the adage of "lighter, brighter") and move efficaciously from one set of tasks (attending to tables and room cleaning) to another. The resort is set so that tourists can have "complete" diversity within the grounds of the resort. There is enough to eat and "do" for a weekly package on the hotel grounds. In a way, this seems to mirror earlier tourism scholarship on the role of hotels providing an "environmental bubble" for the tourist, a cocoon, as the designer of the Lux Collective notes, for the tourist. To refine that earlier argument, one can say that the "environmental bubble" view ad even materialist feminism cannot really account for this situation; instead, it can be argued that a major desire/need of the woman tourist is the need for care and cocooning, for refuge from the violent intrusions and demands of a hegemonically masculine world.

The "heritage" activities are cultural (i.e., the wine tasting at the bespoke underground cellar, the ice-cream eating at the vendor under the palm trees, a drink of rum under the Banyan trees, or learning how to do Ashtanga yoga in the afternoon). It was observed that there was a strong environmental conservation ethos, even though everyone was aware that tourists arriving at the resort would have contributed to the global carbon footprint only by traveling to Mauritius. Food is not wasted at the Collective; it is "collected" and redistributed to the less fortunate. There were no disposable containers that one could see, and tourists were encouraged to reuse linen and towels to reduce water wastage. More substantively, interviewing one of the managers of the Lux Grand Gaube, it was learned that the resort works closely with marine biologists at an environmental NGO called Eco-Sud, to gauge and seek to protect marine biodiversity in the lagoon.

At SALT of Palmar, one observes even another level of environmental conservation and pursuit of sustainability. SALT of Palmar is noted to be for "cultural purists" and those committed to the principles of degrowth and "locavorism", that is, the reduction in one's ecological footprint via a choice of locally sourced foods and materials. One might say that SALT seeks to demonstrate the effect of systemic change for sustainability, as there is little tolerance for environmental impact. There are no televisions in SALT's hotel rooms. Most of the products in each room are made from natural fibers and materials. Interviewing the manager of SALT, it was learned that the hotel represents and supports tangible and intangible cultural heritage by nominating "saltshakers", local inhabitants with unique craft, music, and food-making skills to share with a global audience. Tourists at SALT are encouraged to ride a bicycle into the village to palpably encounter the sights, smells, tastes, and intangible cultural heritage of village life. These skills and experiences, as Khalil and Kozmal [25] argue, allow tourists to pursue creativity and visceral experience at the tourist destination. The process is mediated by group engagement to facilitate socially transformative action. The manager of SALT also expressed the view that the approach is

enabled by the socially inclusive landscape of the hotel. The lagoon in front of the hotel is still visited by local small-scale fishers. He said, "They are part of the landscape".

At the five-star plus Lux Grand Baie, observations and two interviews were conducted at the exclusive spa. In this context, luxury products and bespoke experiences are used to distinguish additional forms of feminism and globalized heritages. For example, the spa manager explained that an important concern is the achievement of psychosocial and physiological balance in their, mainly women, patrons. Women arriving at the spa are often in search of respite from the demands of modern existence and the imbalances that such an existence brings. The spa therapists analyze, via a recognized survey, the dietary behaviors and inclinations of the women, propose new habit options and choices, and present a bespoke treatment plan that hopes to endear them to a better, more balanced existence. Organic products, locally or regionally sourced, are offered, as well as treatments utilizing natural products, such as salt, honey, ylang-ylang, and vanilla. Crowning these treatments are the manicures and pedicures offered by a globally renowned pedicurist–podiatrist who seeks to enhance the natural beauty of nailbeds by not covering these with lacquer. Thus, women exit their manicures with no experience of water (water softens the feet too much) and with no nail varnish, or at most, a varnish that is friendlier to the environment. While the woman seeking heritage experiences at Lux Grand Gaube may seek to visit the heritage sites curated by the hotel to help her engage with a simulation of local culture, at the Lux Grand Baie, heritage experiences are available indoors in the products used by the spa, the foods and drinks offered, and philosophies of self-care, beauty, and well-being, which are also informed, for example, by Ayurveda, historical, cultural philosophies of human health. This in situ study at Lux Grand Baie, the five-star plus establishment, indicates distinctions and hierarchies in access to and management of cultural heritage in tourism settings. Tourists with greater disposable wealth appear to have the option of not being encouraged to mingle with the local communities but to experience the locals in a body-distant and class-segregated manner. It is recognizing what Harradan [54] describes as liberal feminism since it asserts the option of choice and possibility of disengagement rather than embedding interlocutors in the context.

At the Chateau de Bel Ombre, a process of partial embedding was apparent. Although the site is one of rich cultural history and social exchange, this was not clearly apparent to me as the researcher. Remnants of the industrial and slave heritage of the establishment were apparent in the partial conservation of the nearby sugar factory, which, according to an interviewee from the village, had been the center of social and economic life many years ago. Interviewing the CEO, two sommeliers, and two inhabitants in the area, it was found that the Chateau had become the centerpiece of the property development scheme (PDS) and Telfair golf course. The Chateau, expressive of the tangible cultural heritage of Mauritius, did not feature as a heritage site, and its complex social history was only documented in the promotional videos set for international homebuyers and investors. Part of the challenge is that the Chateau is used as a restaurant establishment and, perhaps, therefore, does not come under the aegis of government-managed cultural heritage sites.

Considering the role of gender in such spaces or other potential intersubjectivities at play in the space, it is found that the site expresses a mainly hegemonic, masculine ethos. The place is mainly known for its golf course, and international male players come to the site to play golf. It was learned that only in recent years that the local gardeners have allowed indigenous fauna and flora to return to the landscape, thereby creating a more authentic natural heritage space for international visitors to encounter. In the broader context of the Chateau and the village of Bel Ombre, a rich cultural heritage and history could be better integrated into the public narrative of the estate, and local communities could be more visible in the cultural expression and reminisce of the area. The sommeliers indicated that they tried to bring in local tastes of wine and locally crafted drinks to diversify the still mainly French menu. They had succeeded in doing so several times, as tourists desire culturally influenced meals that are, at the very least, palatable. The one sommelier added that recognizing these tourist needs required self-reflexivity and attention to one's own

cultural diversity. Using a wine metaphor, he alluded to himself as a "pinot noir—white on the outside and black on the inside", indicating that such diversity and openness to diversity had allowed him to cross various cultural divides. The other sommelier conceded but added that cultural and racial integration was still an arduous process in Mauritius and that it may be important to demonstrate shared histories and identities more clearly, for a more genuine representation of history and heritage.

Observations beyond these tourism establishment sites reveal a hugely diverse and overlapping cultural heritage landscape. Mauritius has a vibrant street food scene; the cultural values and practices of the people are evident in publicly demonstrated ritual practices, such as the Tamil ritual of Cavadee or the 40-heures (40-h) ritual visitation of Catholic churches during the Lenten period. Such ritual activities are accompanied by a plethora of ICH, from food consumption to appropriate dress for the occasion and/or appropriated social behavior. In brief, and given the scope of this article, it is fair to argue that much of cultural heritage management continues beyond formal heritage management processes in Mauritius. Presently, tourism establishments are perceived as sources of foreign direct investment. They are not understood or perceived as spaces of cultural production. However, as this study has shown, there is ample evidence via secondary sources (i.e., annual reports and promotional videos) that the managers and corporate teams of these establishments are active in heritage management and may have valuable insight to conveying to formal heritage managers on the role of play, activism, and gendered liberation in heritage conservation.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The examples presented in this article indicate that some tourism establishments in Mauritius are concentrating on reaching specific clientele and providing these individuals with culturally rich experiences, including access to local cultural heritage. As argued, the managers of these establishments are working as unrecognized heritage managers since they are aligning their establishments' practices, values, and narratives to reshape local heritage experience and education. Of special interest to the discussion is the way in which such establishments advance and twin feminism and ecological care. In Mauritius, heritage management is still led by formally acknowledged heritage managers and formal heritage policies. However, as shown in this article, cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, is being curated and managed by people who are not formally recognized as heritage managers. Furthermore, it is argued in this article that the endeavors of these tourism establishments do not detract from formal heritage management spaces and interventions; rather, the tourism heritage management endeavors enhance and draw attention to the mandated platforms for heritage expression. Furthermore, these public heritage management processes in the tourism space are encouraging new social values in the form of heritage conservation and sustainability and are doing so through more playful and celebratory experiences of heritage. These contrast with formal processes and sites of heritage management observed indicate a more serious, ponderous, and often trauma-focused experience. A more serious approach to heritage issues is necessary for a country that has experienced slavery and colonial rule and desires to showcase the resilience of those who fought for freedom. Formal heritage sites in Mauritius, therefore, present all the harsh truths of the colonial and/or slave encounter, and such representations are addressed (see the earlier discussion in Boswell [41]) as necessary for authenticity and "truthfulness" about the past.

Considering the initial findings noted in this article, it is recommended that formal heritage managers enlarge their analytical frame to consider how and where heritage is being managed, to understand and to link with such establishments to unfold more synergistic and multilayered heritage management strategies. Formal heritage managers could also consider and include gendered, intangible manifestations of cultural heritage—not merely for the purposes of equality but for the purpose of sustainability, since ICH expression is fundamental to the local valuation of resources, the inclusion of marginalized groups in heritage use, and it is important to cultural education and the protection of diversity.

Presently, and as found two decades ago [41], Mauritian heritage managers were focusing on narratives of oppression (slavery and indenture), casting these as the primary narratives of identity for the population. As predicted then, such narratives risk dominating articulations of heritage and heritage management in Mauritius, excluding and obscuring the incredibly diverse manifestation of cultural heritage and the gendered protagonists in such exchanges. By considering alternative formulations and locations of heritage management, existing heritage managers worldwide may also partner with national tourism heritage managers and, perhaps, make their endeavors more substantive, less exclusive, but still interesting and valuable.

6. Limitations of This Study

Regarding the limitations of this study, the financial cost of doing the research in situ, since Mauritius is a luxury destination for tourists, is high, and it became very costly to conduct participant observation in situ. Secondly, since these are luxury destinations, it was challenging to recruit and enroll transient visitors for interviews on their experiences to participate in the creation of intangible cultural heritage and a narrative about it. However, I feel that this presents a future task for this research, as I certainly experienced the hotel settings as gender liberating and expressive, allowing for multiple iterations of a sensory identity to emerge. Capturing the transient expressions of ecofeminism in the tourism setting may yield valuable information about the form and substance of gendered sustainability efforts and experience in the tourism setting.

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