

Derek R. Peterson, Kodzo Gavua, and Ciraj Rassool (eds) (2015), *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures*, London: International African Institute; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, ISBN 9781107094857, 291 pp.

Assertions of heritage can serve as a powerful tool for legitimising claims, politics, or states of affairs. As this volume demonstrates using a number of instances, such legitimisation is by no means limited to the realm of national politics, where the historical record is crafted into a hegemonic image of the national past. The heritage industry has a much wider purview, which encompasses not only language politics and tourism but also sombre issues such as the repatriation of human remains deported under colonialism and questions of local identity. Moreover, heritage is adaptable to a great range of uses, which are often contradictory or even diametrically opposed. As this volume shows, relevant instances and corresponding transformations in Africa also concern the construction of the colonial museum and archive; the drastic changes in historical narratives in connection with the exigencies of postcolonial nation-building; and the more recent recourse to frequently invented tradition for legitimacy, social and – above all – local identity construction, and commercial objectives.

The cases presented testify once again to the fact that this is contested terrain. These contests concern the historical record as much as the uses this record is put to by various interested parties. Fascinating and sometimes disconcerting examples of these quests and processes abound. The studies assembled here cover a wide range of arenas, from museums and physical sites through human remains to linguistics and film, to mention only a few. The narratives vary in their explicitness, yet all of them tell stories about the awareness of the past – in many cases within the living memory of people and in others fairly distant. Generally, they also speak to the problems widely associated with the slanted nature of the colonial archive, as well as with the chasm that sometimes opens between the official (or academic) writing of history and quests for its local or vernacular appropriation.

The case studies refer predominantly to South Africa and to a lesser extent to Ghana, and one contribution each references Senegal and Nigeria. This may be a drawback of the volume, which uses “Africa” as a frame of reference in its title; yet again, whether the practices explored here are specific to Africa may also be a moot point.

One important issue that may speak to the latter view is the role of chiefs in initiating and maintaining heritage activities. In the case of

Manso in central Ghana, reported by Raymond Silverman, these activities are linked to efforts to attract Afro-American tourists as well as repatriates who have relocated to Ghana. These audiences' interests are catered to through the representation of a slave market and through a memorial park in honour of Martin Luther King. This is set against the background of the contentious jurisdiction of Ghanaian chiefs, and their precarious role in postcolonial Ghana. In this case, the chief's roles as a guardian of culture and a promoter of local development are merged in his effort to forge a past that is usable in attracting tourists. Leslie Witz and Noëleen Murray map the transformation of parts of a former migrant labour hostel in Cape Town into a museum about the Apartheid system, in stark contrast to the simultaneous erection of a gated community dubbed Heritage Park across the road. The iconic commemoration of a traumatic past is thus in competition with the mundane concerns of the present, and as the authors demonstrate, both are enmeshed in the logic of the real estate market.

The national image of history is at issue not only in the successive naming and renaming of roads, squares, and institutions, but also in the erection, dismantling, and re-erection of statues, as Kudzo Gavua explains against the backdrop of Ghana's postcolonial history of multiple regime change. Complementing such attempts, mainly in the capital, to project a national identity are the quests to construct a national culture across considerable vernacular diversity. This issue is presented by Moses N. Nii-Dortey, who uses the example of the folk opera genre, which was highly successful for a time but has since lost its appeal, apparently due to the "obsolescence of its nationalistic orientation" (233).

In the case investigated by Gary Minkley and Phindezwa Mnyaka, a memorial erected in commemoration of one of the massacres of the Apartheid regime met with angry local responses. Protesters included participants from the original protest, who now saw themselves misrepresented by the image of a traditional warrior, something which seemed far removed from the reality of the struggles in the 1980s. Here, the memorial's projection of a national narrative embodied in the warrior figure clashed with local sentiments and memory contents. The resuscitation of suppressed memories and identity claims is brought out impressively in Mbongiseni Buthelezi's account of the ways descendants of Ndwandwe, a kingdom conquered and incorporated by the Zulu kingdom under Shaka in the early nineteenth century, are now reclaiming this collective identity against the pretensions of Zulu inclusiveness in Kwa-Zulu/Natal and thus potentially challenging the "grand narrative of the Zulu kingdom" (175).

One of the most emotionally charged and contentious issues in connection with heritage concerns dead bodies and their deportation, their eventual repatriation, and their burial. Ciraj Rassool unearths disconcerting connections between the celebrated repatriations of the remains of Sara Baartman from Paris to South Africa and, more recently, of Trooi and Klaas Pienaar from Vienna to South Africa and two seemingly unconnected strands of science and politics: physical anthropology, which was at the root of the collection of human body parts, and the seemingly innocuous quests of transitional justice, which seek to identify the remains of victims of repression and of fallen freedom fighters. These quests have resulted in a process where physical anthropology has been resuscitated under the guise of forensic anthropology. Again, this preoccupation with human remains sits uneasily in South Africa, where the important decision not to construct the central memorial – Freedom Park, near Pretoria – as a cemetery was taken, while the campaign to screen museums and scientific collections both in South Africa and in foreign countries inevitably raises the question of how repatriated human remains will be buried. One may wonder whether the high profile state funerals for Sara Baartman and the Pienaars will be replicated in the future. Rassool's is a thought-provoking contribution on the complexity of transnational heritage politics, which is what postcolonial politics in this field inevitably is.

Precisely on the basis of the great variety of case studies presented, the volume attests to the complexity of any form of heritage politics. The ways in which such politics articulate the past with often direct present-day concerns goes well beyond the "mere" problematic of the colonial archive. Yet even more, heritage politics is situated at the crossroads of fierce identity politics, nation-building, and commercialisation, and it speaks to memories of suffering and struggle, often in terms that seem wanting to those who have lived through them. The present collection provides thought-provoking and fascinating perspectives that advance these concerns.

- Reinhart Kößler