

Routledge Handbook of Critical African Heritage Studies

*Edited by Ashton Sinamai, John D. Giblin,
Shadreck Chirikure, and Ishanlosen Odiava*

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Chapter 1

Introducing Critical African Heritage Studies

*John Daniel Giblin, Ashton Sinamai, Shadreck Chirikure,
and Ishanlosen Odiava*

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INTRODUCING CRITICAL AFRICAN HERITAGE STUDIES

*John Daniel Giblin, Ashton Sinamai, Shadreck Chirikure,
and Ishanlosen Odiaua*

Introduction: Why Critical African Heritage Studies?

If heritage refers to human inheritances, then Africa can be considered to have the deepest and widest heritages of all the continents. Anatomically and psychologically modern humans first developed within Africa. Today, Africa is the second most populated and arguably the most culturally diverse continent, with over 2000 distinct languages spoken across 55 member states of the African Union, all with their own distinct and yet also cosmopolitan heritages, the products of many different African and non-African influences. African heritage has also become globalised through modern African diasporas to the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Oceania and by the appropriation of African heritage by international communities.

African heritage is thus vast and diverse and, like the continent itself, resists and defies easy definition. Africa as a term or idea has its roots in classical Greek, Roman, and Phoenician, referring to a southern landmass. Later it was imagined by the West as the racialised continental landmass of Africa during the period of European imperial and colonial expansion from the 16th to the 20th centuries. In the 20th century, Africa was reimagined by black Africans, for example, through Pan-African, Negritude and independence movements, and popular culture, while today Africa is also a political unit, for example, through the African Union. Africa is, then, at once the culmination of multiple abstract external and internal constructs and a real, lived identity, home, and place for over a billion diverse, cosmopolitan, interconnected African people located in Africa and in diasporas around the world. Thus, just as there is no singular European, American, Oceanic, or Asian identity, there is no singular African identity or distinct, isolated African identities.

In this context then, where Africa and African heritage cannot be meaningfully defined or separated from the world around it, why commission and compile a handbook of critical approaches to African heritage studies? Wouldn't any such volume be an oversimplification, a homogenisation of a heterogeneous and fluid reality, the artificial abstraction and isolation of global phenomena? In response, our aim in creating this volume is not to deny the past and the contemporary dynamic, interconnected, multicultural, multi-continental basis of what is identified as African heritage today. Instead, our aim is to provide a platform for scholars of African heritage, and especially African scholars, to engage critically with the issues and debates around topics of African heritage on the continent and within its diaspora, whilst also prodding at the very notion of African heritage itself.

Despite Africa's vast and deep heritage, its famous heritage sites and practices, African examples have typically been marginalised in dominant global heritage debates and publications. Furthermore, where African examples have been the focus, published chapters, papers, and books have been dominated by non-African scholars (for notable exceptions, see Ndoro et al., 2018; Abungu and Ndoro, 2022). Consequently, despite heritage studies increasingly being taught in African universities and issues of African heritage being taught outside of Africa, the scholarship and profession are dominated by voices and perspectives that have emerged outside of African countries. In response, while including a wide international base of scholarship on African heritage, in this volume we have aimed to privilege African voices and perspectives from across the continent to address imbalances in published work and professional practice.

A common thread running through many of the volume chapters, for example, is the observation that heritage, as it is currently officially practised by African states, is a colonial imposition and neo-colonial persistence, which does little to serve local community interests, values, and practices (see discussion later in this chapter). Another common observation is that so-called cultural, natural, tangible, and intangible heritage distinctions do not work in many African contexts where heritage is always at once natural and cultural, tangible, and intangible. Consequently, the volume is deliberately not structured around these terms and many of the chapters critique their use (see chapters by Folorunso, Mguni and Smith, Ndlovu, Thondhlana, and Chimhundu this volume). In addition, to avoid what Táiwò (2023) has described as problems inherent to 'facilely deploying an entire continent as a unit of analysis', the contributors to this volume have been encouraged to adopt historically contextualised, regional, national, or local case study approaches. This is also in keeping with diverse notions of heritage and examples that are found across the continent from the Cape to Cairo and from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean.

A parallel aim of this volume is to provide a platform for the development of critical heritage debates regarding African heritage examples from across and beyond the continent. Until now, the focus of African heritage publications has been on more positivist approaches to heritage management and sustainable development, where the existence of something called heritage is a given (e.g., Yoshida and Mack, 2008; Beardsley, 2016; Keitumetse, 2016; Ndoro et al., 2018; Bailey and Stig Sørensen, 2020; Abungu and Ndoro, 2022), with less frequent explicit attention to communities, decolonisation, the politics of African heritage, land rights, and the critique of heritage as a discourse (notable exceptions include Pwiti and Ndoro, 1999; Shepherd, 2002; Chirikure et al., 2010; Peterson et al., 2015; Schmidt and Pikirayi, 2016; Schmidt, 2017; Ndoro et al., 2018; Chirikure, 2020; Sinamai, 2022). By contrast, while heritage management and sustainable development remain important here, we have encouraged authors to make contributions that take critical approaches to issues of African heritage rather than the technical aspects of how to 'do' or 'manage' heritage better within established universal frameworks. Our interest was in persuading authors to critique the 'universal' from different regions, using different types of heritage to contribute towards a disruptive understanding which resonates critically and locally. In other words, our attempt was to create a big picture made up of local practices and frameworks from the continent's different people, regions, heritages, and practices. In so doing, it aims not only to critique the mainstream voices but also to bring African knowledge systems to the table.

By taking critical approaches to heritage, as the use of the past in the present, in this volume we are thus concerned with how political and emotional power is invested in and runs through and around heritage things and debates, as well as the consequences of these political and emotional investments for those things identified as heritage. We are also interested in challenges to the universality, objectivity, and positivism of the dominant, often colonial, notions of heritage through alternative ideas that highlight the agency, subjectivity, intangibility, fluidity, performativity,

dissonance, locality, politics, and future-orientated-ness of heritage as a common cultural production process (see Ashworth, 1997, 2014; Pwiti and Ndoro, 1999; Graham et al., 2000; Shepherd, 2002; Smith, 2006; Chirikure et al., 2010; Harrison, 2013; Peterson et al., 2015; Ndoro et al., 2018; Cross and Giblin, 2023: 21). Finally, we are interested in the relationship between heritage and the ‘critical issues facing the world today, the larger issues that bear upon and extend outwards from heritage’ (cf. Winter, 2013: 533 author’s emphasis), such as heritage and decolonisation, climate change and sustainability, terrorism, war and other forms of violence, health and well-being, poverty, and so on. In response, we have encouraged contributions to the volume that explore what underpins various heritage discourses in different parts of Africa, what are their consequences for humans today, and what are the critical human issues associated with heritage in Africa today.

One of the strengths of this volume is its continental breadth, and locally situated rootedness, with chapters drawing on examples from across northern, central, western, eastern, and southern Africa, as well as the African diaspora in the Americas and the dispersal of African heritage in Western museums. Its ambitious breadth has also, however, resulted in many geographic and thematic gaps that should be acknowledged. Firstly, as a set of anglophone editors, all living and working in the anglophone world, drawing on our networks, the chapters in the volume are written in English and largely draw on examples from Anglophone African countries. Consequently, examples that relate to histories of British colonialism and its legacies are over-represented as are English language academic references. No chapters are written in indigenous African languages although some do draw on indigenous African languages (see Chimhundu this volume for a discussion of the importance of African languages and oral tradition as heritage). We hope that we will soon see books and papers written in African languages, themselves a heritage worth protecting. Similarly, the book has no chapter written in colonial languages such as French, Portuguese, Arabic, and many others. Again, we hope future works will correct this omission. Similarly, despite the wide thematic scope of the volume, including useable pasts, justice and society, heritages of slavery, moveable heritage and museums, heritage landscapes, global heritage systems, and heritage decolonisation, notable thematic gaps remain. For example, there are no dedicated digital heritage chapters at a time when Digital Benin (a platform that brings together all the collections from the British looting of the Kingdom of Benin in 1897 – see <https://digitalbenin.org/>) has just been launched and numerous other African consolidatory platforms are being developed, such as the International Inventories Program in Kenya (<https://www.inventoriesprogramme.org/>). Also, in taking a holistic approach to heritage, where it is at once natural and cultural, tangible, and intangible, chapters have given less emphasis to examples which ordinarily would have fallen into natural heritage categories (however, see Lane and Shen this volume for a focused discussion of biocultural heritage). Nevertheless, we believe that the volume gives a flavour of the critical African heritage debates currently taking place in Africa and elsewhere.

The volume is subdivided into a series of overlapping sections or parts. Rather than summarise each volume part, which is undertaken in the volume as a series of separate ‘Part Introductions’, the remainder of this introductory chapter discusses and interrogates some of the main themes that have been raised across the volume, including pre-coloniality, coloniality, post-coloniality and decoloniality, difficult heritage, and heritage for development.

Pre-Coloniality, Coloniality, Post-Coloniality, and Decoloniality

Every chapter in this volume engages with issues of precolonial, colonial, postcolonial, and/or decolonial heritage in one form or another. This, we suggest, reflects both our explicit call for contributions and a much wider appreciation of coloniality as a central African critical heritage

issue amongst scholars of African heritage. The inherent coloniality of contemporary heritage in Africa is introduced and discussed below but, before doing so, it is worth first recognising some of the problems associated with viewing African heritage through a neatly defined and partitioned precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial structure.

In a recent and much shared online newspaper article, Olúfẹ̀mi Táíwò (2023), professor of Africana Studies at the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University in New York, decried the idea of a ‘precolonial’, ‘traditional’, or ‘indigenous’ Africa as being ‘theoretically vacuous, racist and plain wrong about the continent’s actual history’ and symptomatic of ‘facilely deploying an entire continent as a unit of analysis’. In his article, Táíwò (2023) presented a number of powerful arguments against the use of these terms and the related division and simplification of African history into European defined precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras. We agree with and summarise these arguments in the following sentences. The term ‘precolonial’ homogenises Africa as though there is one African experience of European colonisation that began at a single moment in time. Precolonial becomes prehistory, a place without time, without history until the coming of European modernity and colonisation. Precolonial obscures earlier external colonialisms in Africa, such as Roman and Byzantine/Ottoman. The term precolonial presents the continent as being hermetically sealed until the coming of European imperial colonisation. As currently used, it wrongly implies that colonialism is a non-African phenomenon when there are many examples of African colonialism within Africa and within Europe before the coming of modern colonialism in the 19th century. It also presents Africa as incapable of modernity without colonialism when many features of what has come to be recognised as modernity can be shown to have been independently invented in Africa. Precoloniality reduces African history to one mass period of timelessness before much shorter periods of Africa under colonial rule and postcolonial Africa. As the author reminds us, ‘[we] would benefit from remembering the Nigerian historian J F Ade Ajayi’s corrective that colonialism is an episode in African history, not its principal, much less sole, shaper’. The precolonial, colonial divide hinders both understandings of European colonialism by oversimplifying colonial relationships, including those African societies who welcomed incoming Europeans in addition to those who resisted them, and understandings of the long histories of heterogeneous African sociopolitical systems and their complex and dynamic philosophies.

Nevertheless, despite Táíwò’s convincing arguments against their use, precolonial (and the associated notions of tradition and indigeneity), colonial, postcolonial, neo-colonial, and/or decolonial issues run throughout the chapters in this volume and continue to structure critical approaches to African heritage studies debate elsewhere. In response, we argue that rather than abandoning these terms, we seek to understand why they continue to resonate and to expose what they hide (as Táíwò has done). One reason why they continue to resonate in critical approaches to African heritage research, we argue, is because the roots of official heritage institutions (e.g., museums, archaeological sites, protected buildings, nature reserves), universal practices (e.g., heritage conservation and management emanating from UNESCO, ICCROM, and ICOM), and policies (e.g., conservation and antiquities laws) in many African nations can be traced to the colonial era and be identified as colonial impositions that have since persisted with limited alterations into eras of independence (see Lupuwana and Ndukuyakhe this volume for examples from southern Africa; see Ugwuanyi this volume for examples from western Africa; and see Giblin this volume for examples from eastern Africa; see also Munjeri, 2004; Sinamai, 2020).

Furthermore, formalised heritage was not just a colonial imposition but was also based on Western, Enlightenment ideas of racist social evolutionary progress and development and many of those ideas persist in its practice today (Chirikure et al., 2010; Ndoro, 2017, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, 2021; Cross and Giblin, 2023). In response, there is much focus in African critical

heritage studies on the deconstruction and decolonisation of this Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) (cf. Smith, 2006; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Chirikure, 2023) and the construction of new, bottom-up, decolonial, indigenous, or pre-colonially derived understandings of heritage that are more locally relevant and appropriate. Here we see this as an essential strand of critical approaches to heritage studies work in Africa. For example, this includes the historical identification, exploration, and contextualisation of more inclusive understandings of the deep and independent histories of heritage practices in African societies, i.e., African uses of the past in the present, which existed long before European colonialism and the imposition of Western, formalised notions and practices of heritage (e.g., see Mguni and Smith this volume for a discussion of indigenising and decolonising approaches to place and landscape; see Thondhlana for a discussion of African customary law as a decolonial challenge to current Western derived heritage legislations). However, we also share Táíwò's concern that there is danger in uncritically approaching notions of what is or appears to be precolonial, indigenous, traditional, community-based, and bottom-up approaches as though these are unproblematic, non-political, equitable, and utopian ideas and practices, when heritage is always political and dissonant at whatever scale and in whatever way it is practised (see also Fontein this volume for a critical discussion of some of these terms).

However, if we can recognise and problematise the pre-coloniality and coloniality of heritage in Africa, then we must also interrogate attempts to decolonise heritage. Decolonisation has become a buzzword within critical heritage studies as it has elsewhere in academia, museums, and many other institutions. Within heritage studies, decolonisation has typically focused on recognising, acknowledging, understanding the consequences of, and addressing how racist colonial structures continue to inform heritage theories, practices, and institutions. In the international, political sphere, it has also most notably focused on the repatriation or restitution of African heritage, stolen during the modern European colonial era, which now resides in Western museums (see Shigwedha, Stevenson, Longair, and Niala, all this volume). However, decolonisation is a contested area and means different things to different people, with Western institutions often dominating public debates and adopting positions that may not resonate with those in the Global South calling for decolonisation. For example, as defined by the UK's largest professional museum organisation:

Decolonising involves creatively reimagining the way museums work, who they work with and what they value. It covers all areas of practice and creates a framework to better support people and institutions. Decolonising is a collective activity, which can be messy, thoughtful, imaginative, and emotional.

It is driven by the desire for justice and equity in that it aims to rebalance power and representation away from the coloniser narrative of history and society. This work is intersectional, as it challenges structural inequalities across the board to redress forms of historic and ongoing harm.

(Museums Association, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/supporting-decolonisation-in-museums/>)

However, for others, decolonisation is not a process of institutional detoxification and, instead, should refer specifically to the historical process of replacing European colonial rule with independence, a process and struggle that continues today. For example, as argued by Tuck and Yang (2021: 61) when discussing education, 'Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools'. Thus, following this perspective, while the repatriation of African belongings may fulfil an aspect of decolonisation, the rebalancing of power and representation in heritage institutions,

methods, and thinking, as important as those goals might be, may not be decolonisation in its truest sense, especially when it is done by the West for the benefit of the West. The picture is also complicated by the idea of decoloniality (c.f. Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; see also Ugwuanyi and Fontein, both this volume, for contrasting discussions of decoloniality) and the idea that how we form knowledge is itself colonial in its foundations:

Epistemology, then, must be ‘decolonised’ by acknowledging the foundational presence of colonial ways of thinking and making knowledge and examining traditions of knowledge-production that historically sat outside of colonial models – i.e., Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies.

The call to ‘decolonise’, which is often put to knowledge-keeping and forming institutions, (universities, schools, and museums), then is not a demand to erase the often uncomfortable history of colonialism, but rather a critical provocation to consider more than what is traditionally presented, and extend the parameters of our analytical frameworks.

(The Decolonial Dictionary, n.d.)

In response, the contributors to this volume have tackled decolonisation from a range of perspectives, from the detoxification of practices in Western and African museums (see chapters by Zetterström-Sharp and Coombes this volume) and the indigenisation of African heritage practices (see Folorunso, Lupuwana, Mguni and Smith, and Thondhlana, all this volume), to the repatriation of African cultural heritage (see Shigwedha, Stevenson, Longair, and Niala, all this volume) and the decolonisation of the dead (see Fontein this volume) and landscapes (see Shepherd and Mguni and Smith, both this volume), to issues of decoloniality in heritage institutions in West Africa (see Ugwuanyi this volume). Throughout these and other contributions, the question remains, who is co-opting the discourse of decolonisation, to what end, and with what consequences? Indeed, we observe, and it is telling that, so much decolonial discourse is taking place in Western institutions far away from Africa – so much so that we may be discussing the coloniality of heritage decolonisation in the future.

‘Difficult’ Heritage

Directly connected to issues of colonisation and decolonisation are attributions of difficult heritage, uncomfortable heritage, dark heritage, or places of pain and shame (e.g., see Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Macdonald, 2009; Logan and Reeves, 2009; Harrison, 2010; Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). Although all heritage is dissonant and thus can be considered difficult for some, these labels are most often explicitly given to heritage sites and remain associated with, for example, the transatlantic slave trade, colonial oppression, and violence, including early colonial massacres, genocides and wars, colonial administration, colonial landscapes, and later anti-colonial struggles, and postcolonial violence, wars, and genocides (typically as a legacy of colonial rule). With regard to the postcolonial, it could be debated whether all aspects of post-independent violence can be meaningfully understood as a legacy of colonial rule. However, the pervasiveness of European imperial and colonial activities in Africa and the huge inheritance of their legacies by contemporary African peoples also means that recent conflicts can also rarely be entirely meaningfully separated from colonial or neo-colonial heritages. In addition to those sites that were originally created through violence, heritage sites that were once not necessarily considered difficult heritage have since taken on that identity due to their targeting in recent conflicts, for example, the destruction of the Sidi Yahya Mosque and other sites in Timbuktu, Mali by the Ansar Dine rebel group (see Folorunso this volume).

Although some of our authors focused their discussions on sites not typically thought of as difficult heritage, such as royal palaces and precolonial archaeological sites (e.g., see Odiava and Bashir and Folorunso, both this volume), many others have focused directly on difficult heritage (e.g., see chapters by Shigwedha, Fontein, Cormack, Engmann, Kiriam, Arazi et al., Bolin, and Fennell, all this volume) or have included it within their discussions of African heritage more generally or implicitly (e.g., see chapters by Forlorunso, Giblin, Niala, Shepherd, and Jopela and Kelouaze, all this volume). While to some degree this reflects our commissioning of chapters, it also reflects topics currently concerning scholars of African heritage as well as the prominence of certain formalised heritage landscapes in Africa, for example, UNESCO's World Heritage Slave Route sites, Rwanda's genocide memorials, South Africa's apartheid memorials, and so on. It also tragically reflects the extensive history of colonial and postcolonial violence in Africa as a legacy of European imperialism and colonisation. (However, it is worth noting here, following Táiwò (2023) discussed above, that sites of 'precolonial' violence, other than those associated with slavery, are rarely attributed difficult heritage labels).

Thus, while African heritage should not and cannot accurately be reduced to one of victimhood or pain and shame, it is also clear that these difficult heritages remain a critical (neo-colonial) heritage issue, as perhaps one would expect considering the overarching coloniality of much contemporary African heritage (see discussion in the preceding section). It should also be noted that what may be a difficult heritage for some may for others be proud symbols of struggle or victory against oppression (see chapters by Cormack, Bolin, and Jopela and Kelouaze this volume). Furthermore, despite typically being legacies of European imperial and colonial activity, sites of difficult heritage may also be places of conflict between different African communities and thus may sit uncomfortably for some or be silenced within national, supposedly unifying, narratives. For example, 'slave forts' in West Africa reflect not only the European-driven transatlantic slavery system but also the selling of Africans into slavery by other African peoples (see Engmann this volume). The Rwandan genocide memorials do not only reflect a legacy of Belgian colonial rule but also the killing of Rwandan Tutsi by Rwandan Hutus (see Cormack this volume). And Mau Mau sites in Kenya do not only reflect resistance against British colonisation but also conflict between Kenyans fighting on each side of the conflict and so on (see Karega-Munene's, 2013 discussion of Mau Mau representation in Kenya cited in Giblin this volume; see also Coombes this volume).

What is clear from the chapters in this volume is that working through memory and specifically difficult memories, by remembering as well as forgetting, remain central to contemporary critical African heritage issues. Furthermore, difficult heritage remains central to the construction of postcolonial states and postcolonial citizens (see Kiriam this volume), and as evidence in support of the demand for symbolic and actual reparations within Africa and particularly between African and European nations (see Niala this volume), defining the future of a political and economic global Africa. Difficult heritage should also not only be thought of in terms of tangible remains but must also be considered in terms of its psychological effects on individuals and collectives as a form of intangible inheritance, affecting understandings of self, place, and ultimately belonging (see Cormack this volume). In so doing, they may cause dramatic, long-lasting, transformative ruptures in the heritage practices of cultures. Understanding African experiences of difficult heritage is thus key to understanding Africa from contemporary African viewpoints.

Heritage for Development

The final crosscutting theme identified here is the intersection of heritage with development. This includes standard debates about tangible heritage as a resource to be salvaged in the face of

infrastructural development and heritage tourism as an economic resource, alongside observations that the cultural developmental purpose of heritage in Africa goes beyond economics (see chapters by Folorunso, Giblin, Cormack, Bolin, Lupuwana, Kiriama, Ndlovu, Labadi, Wynne-Jones et al., Adie et al., and Coombes, all this volume). Once again, at the heart of these observations is concern about the coloniality of international and national development and the need for more locally derived, understood, and delivered forms of heritage for development. Indeed, just as the introduction of universalising heritage practices in Africa can be traced to the colonial period, so can the introduction of universalising developmental practices, which were part of the Western justification for colonialism, i.e., the paternalistic development or civilisation of Africa by Europe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, 2020; Ndoro, 2017, 2021; Chirikure, 2023; Cross and Giblin, 2023). Furthermore, universalising international development values continue to be promoted today through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which many nations, scholars, and practitioners are aligning their heritage work with. However, it is necessary to question whether the laudable aims of the SDGs are being pursued at the expense of more locally desired, indigenous, decolonial ideas about and aspirations for development. In response, many of the chapters in this volume call for more local, community-driven, pluriversal, rather than universal, approaches to development (e.g., see chapters by Folorunso, Lupuwana, and Ndlovu this volume).

Heritage in the Face of Development

Heritage has often been presented as an obstacle to socio-economic development, with traditional practices supposedly being a hindrance to Western, normative, universalised ideas of progress. In this scenario, the question has been presented as a choice between either heritage or development (Ndoro, 2021). In addition, where the economic value of heritage has been recognised, for example, in terms of heritage tourism, it has typically been understood as something to be salvaged and preserved in the face of infrastructural developments. For example, in Africa this has included major heritage salvage projects in the face of dam and port constructions in Ethiopia (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam), Sudan (Merowe), Zimbabwe/Zambia (Batoka), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Grand Inga Dam), Uganda (Bujagali Dam), and ports on the east African coast (Bagamoyo, Tanzania and Lamu, Kenya). However, these views of heritage and development are increasingly being challenged. For example, traditional institutions may be more culturally appropriate than Western forms through which locally understood ideas of development can be explored and delivered (see Odiaua and Bashir this volume). In addition, the salvage of tangible heritage without the support, involvement, and development of the communities to whom the heritage belongs, and who are an essential part of the intangible life of that heritage, raises questions about who salvage is really benefitting, the heritage industry or local communities (see chapters by Folorunso and Lupuwana this volume). However, as Ndlovu (this volume) reminds us, more must be done outside of the academy and the heritage profession to make the case for the socio-economic value of heritage in the face of infrastructural developments.

Heritage and Economic Development

The economic potential of heritage tourism has long been recognised (e.g., see Wynne-Jones et al., this volume, for discussion of the importance of tourism for maritime heritage in eastern Africa; see also Kiriama, Engmann, and Adie et al., all this volume, for other discussion of heritage tourism). However, the monetisation and commercialisation of heritage have also raised questions over appropriateness, authenticity, access, and impact for local understandings of heritage. For some,

the heritage tourism industry in Africa is an aspect of an imposed, Westernised, heritage system that homogenises and reduces previously complex, indigenous heritage experiences and distances local people from their heritage sites and practices. For example, in the case of slavery heritage sites, Kiriama and Engmann (this volume) have discussed conflicts over access to and representations of slavery heritage in eastern and western Africa, respectively (see also, however, discussion in Arazi et al., this volume, bemoaning the lack of commercialisation of slavery heritage sites for tourism in the Democratic Republic of Congo). In addition to the creation of conflict over access and interpretation, and the marginalisation of local communities, others have also questioned the ability of heritage tourism to deliver poverty reduction. As discussed by Labadi (this volume; see also Engmann this volume), there is little evidence to support the claim that heritage tourism alleviates poverty for local communities, rather than benefiting national and international actors and agencies. Instead, it is suggested, the developmental potential of heritage might be better understood in different, more holistic, community centred, and indigenous ways.

Heritage and Cultural Development

In addition to the impact of infrastructural development on heritage and the potential of heritage tourism for economic development, many of the chapters in this volume propose or imply a cultural development purpose for heritage. (This is in addition to, but distinct from, the overt political use of heritage, for example, by traditional leaders through the co-option of heritage sites (see Odiava and Bashir this volume) and by politicians in their speeches (see Giblin this volume) (see also Peterson et al., 2015 for discussions about *The Politics of Heritage in Africa*)). Despite the problems associated with heritage, its difficulties, conflicts, and marginalisations, many of the authors in this volume highlight the importance of a decolonised heritage as a founding basis for community cohesion, resilience, justice, and, by extension (more than economic), development.

In terms of decolonising heritage for development, Chirikure (2023: 275) has argued elsewhere that this can only be achieved through engagement with indigenous concepts and languages. For example, he explains, in ‘Shona, development translates into *budiriro*, a holistic concept that deals with many things such as improvement in material and non-material situations, ability to help others, and a change in individual and collective circumstances’ while heritage, or ‘*nhaka*’ comprises ‘skill, knowledge, and practices’, and thus development ‘is a consequence of heritage and heritage making’ (see also Ndoró and Pwiti, 2001; Chirikure, 2021; Sinamai, 2020). Thus, in Shona, heritage is the basis for development, not a hindrance to it or something to be selectively applied within it. Similarly, Chimhundu and Folorunso (both this volume) have highlighted the importance of indigenous language as a form of intangible heritage that is essential for the deconstruction, and decolonisation of dominant heritage and development practices, and the construction of new, more culturally appropriate ones. Elsewhere, Coombes (this volume) has explored the recent creation of a series of ‘mega’ national, international, and private museum and gallery decolonisation projects in South Africa (Zietz Museum of Contemporary Africa Art – Zeitz MOCCA), Senegal (The Museum of Black Civilisations), and Togo (the Palais de Lomé) and has questioned the success of their decolonial developmental aims compared to grassroots, community development projects, such as the Peace Museums in Kenya.

Another theme running through these chapters is the way that a decolonised heritage practice might bring about social justice, for example, in terms of archaeological projects delivering social benefits for communities (see Folorunso and Lupuwana, both this volume), or in terms of post-conflict memory and identity work for peace and nation-building. For example, Bolin (this volume) has examined how in Central Africa heritage is being, or has the potential to be, utilised

in processes of post-conflict memory and transitional justice, peacebuilding, and nation-building, and as a site of struggle for political power. Similarly, Cormack (this volume) has described how heritage has a role to play in post-conflict development in South Sudan, not only as sites of reconciliation and conflict management but also as a way to consider what it means to have a particular national identity and how to live together with others in conflict affected societies.

Conclusion

The chapters in this volume all explore issues that the authors believe to be critical to the study of African heritage. Emerging from this collective discussion are a series of key areas of critical concern.

Firstly, the official practice of heritage as it currently exists in Africa today is inherently and persistently colonial in its Western universalism, and thus it needs to be decolonised by developing new, indigenously, locally inspired and delivered understandings of heritage that are alert to the ways in which African heritage is often at once both tangible and intangible, natural and cultural, and always lived.

Secondly, so-called ‘difficult heritage’ remains a central concern for critical approaches to African heritage studies. While African heritage should not be characterised as ‘difficult’, the histories of slavery, colonialism, and post-independence legacies of colonialism have left a trail of sites, objects, and memories that are of critical importance to the future of many African communities both within and outside of the continent. However, again, there is a need to develop African, indigenous, local understandings of these heritages and their significance.

Thirdly, heritage is an integral aspect of development as broadly construed within Africa. It is not only something that international, national, and infrastructural development impacts on, or something that can generate funds through tourism, but also is a vital aspect of understanding and delivering locally desired, culturally appropriate forms of development. Indeed, it is not a choice between heritage or development; it is heritage for social, economic, and political development.

In summary, heritage as it is currently practised in Africa remains largely universal in its approach, drawing on standards from UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, ICOM, and others, adopted in national heritage legislation, with colonial era roots. However, what the chapters in this volume explicitly or implicitly call for is the development of a pluriversal approach to heritage in Africa, in which many different worldviews can coexist.

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