

Reviews of books

Derek R. Peterson, Kodzo Gavua and Ciraj Rassool (editors), *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: economies, histories, and infrastructures*. Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press and the International African Institute (hb £67 – 978 1 107 09485 7). 2015, 291 pp.

This important collection is, according to Derek Peterson's opening line, 'about the work that the heritage industry does in African political life' (Introduction, p. 1). One might equally well describe it as being about the work that politics and political players increasingly do in the heritage industry, and the ways in which these two spheres incestuously intertwine. I will return to the word 'industry' in a moment. The volume grew out of a 'programme of activity' called the African Heritage Initiative, an international collaboration between scholars and practitioners in the United States (principally the University of Michigan), Ghana and South Africa, which involved a number of projects and activities. The editors make a strong case for discussing and comparing heritage initiatives in Ghana and South Africa, but it is nonetheless a volume that centres largely on these two countries with only passing reference to Uganda in particular (in the Introduction again). While it provides fascinating insights and analyses that may be applied elsewhere, and which resonate with heritage activities and scholarship in or on other parts of Africa, it cannot, as the title suggests, stand for the whole continent.

Peterson expertly dissects the archaic nature of the colonial museum and other institutions 'in which Africans' bodies, cultures, languages ... were dismembered and reincorporated as museum pieces' (p. 7), describes how colonial governance impacted on African cultural systems, and discusses the central role of heritage in postcolonial nation building, a theme that several other contributors also highlight (for example, Herwitz, Chapter 2). Peterson swiftly dismisses the museum as not necessarily the only 'destination' for the 'products of heritage work', which is clearly true. This volume, he declares, will not focus on the museum, although Chapter 4 (Witz and Murray) does just that, in its discussion of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum in South Africa, and other contributors also (inevitably) explore museum legacies (such as Rassool, Chapter 7). However, it is widely recognized that contemporary pan-African heritage work takes place in any number of settings, including cultural festivals, tourism management and marketing, the activities of liberation war veterans (often linked to the search for redress and heroic recognition), indigenous activism, and the work of self-appointed custodians of culture and a host of other players who fall under the rubric of heritage stakeholders. This is where I would quibble with the term 'heritage industry', which does not apply to many African civil society heritage stakeholders who are not – and would not see themselves as – involved in an industry per se. The term suggests monetization and a certain level of corporate organization, which is abundantly evident in heritage work today, but 'Heritage Inc.' does not apply across the board. Scholarship on contemporary Africa (and further afield) shows that many grass-roots players passionately hold dear the non-commercial value of engaging with the past in the present.

That said, there is much to enjoy and learn from this volume. The contributors describe how and why heritage, and the activities that constantly act upon it and around it, is now recognized as a thoroughly political exercise; how and why 'heritage has become the domain in which the struggle over public history is being waged' (Buthelezi, Chapter 8, p. 161); and why elite politicians and war veterans

remain so keen to invoke legacies of struggle in the metanarrative of nation (Herwitz again, and probably others too). Struggle crops up again in Minkley and Mnyaka (Chapter 3), who explore the contestation between citizens and state around a massacre memorial that its opponents angrily read as an attempt to extend state power and propaganda. A memorial to resistance, it has sparked a new wave of resistance from vandals, who are in effect re-making an image they reject. In another stand-out chapter, Rassool examines the centrality of human body parts in debates and disputes about South Africa's 'memorial complex', and the disturbing role of forensic anthropology and scientists in that process. He discusses ethical issues that have resonance internationally: for example, in conflicts between museums and descendent communities around the repatriation and reburial of, and scientific access to, human remains. The bodies just keep coming up.

On the positive side, as a result of these fierce debates and challenges, governments such as South Africa's are moving towards establishing 'national remains' policies, which Rassool applauds as offering 'the promise of decolonising and deracialising museums' in that country (p. 155). A common theme throughout the collection is the myriad ways in which heritage work mirrors the rise and development of the postcolonial nation state, and offers avenues and tools for redress, healing (some scholars would question that), re-memorialising and reclamation in order to counter (Modisane quoting Fanon, p. 234) the ways in which colonialism distorted, disfigured and destroyed the past of oppressed peoples. One may not agree with all the views expressed, but this volume is a must-have for tutors and students of heritage, in and beyond the postcolony.

Lotte Hughes

The Open University

lotte.hughes@open.ac.uk / lotteh2017@gmail.com

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Axel Fleisch and Rhiannon Stephens (editors), *Doing Conceptual History in Africa*. Oxford: Berghahn Books (hb £85 – 978 1 78533 163 3). 2016, xi + 243 pp.

'It is in the complexity of a concept that history can be found,' Rhiannon Stephens writes in her chapter of this intriguing collaboration across disciplines (p. 23). Hers is the chapter in which the intellectual debt to Jan Vansina's pioneering work on African historical linguistics is most explicitly acknowledged, not least because Stephens' temporal horizon over a thousand years finds no parallel in this volume. Yet the contributors do more than reintroduce historical linguistics as conceptual history. The promise here is to enrich the two staples of African history as it is currently practised – social and intellectual history – through a re-invigorated interest in language. Reinhart Koselleck's explorations of conceptual history in Europe provide one inspiration, particularly their attention to the uses as well as meanings of concepts on the basis of the widest possible range of sources. The appeal to scholars of Africa lies in the prospect of investigating intellectual lives in a more inclusive manner than would be possible in 'the reductionism of exclusively studying elite thought' (p. 2).

In their introduction to the volume, the editors chart the way by noting, among other things, important differences in how conceptual history has been done in Europe. One is the habit of considering national and linguistic boundaries in Europe as coterminous. While advocating language as a 'historical source' (p. 3), the editors recognize the need for methods that better account for linguistic