Heritage work has had a uniquely wide currency in Africa’s politics. Secured within the pages of books, encoded in legal statutes, encased in glass display cases, and enacted in the panoply of court ritual, the artefacts produced by the heritage domain have become a resource for government administration, a library for traditionalists, and a marketable source of value for cultural entrepreneurs.

The Politics of Heritage in Africa draws together disparate fields of study – history, archaeology, linguistics, the performing arts, and cinema – to show how the lifeways of the past were made into capital, a store of authentic knowledge on which political and cultural entrepreneurs could draw. This book shows African heritage to be a mode of political organisation, a means by which the relics of the past are shored up, reconstructed, and revalued – as commodities, as tradition, as morality, or as patrimony.

Derek R. Peterson is Professor of History at the University of Michigan. He has edited several books, including Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa (2009), and has authored Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival (2012).

Kodzo Gavua is Associate Professor of Archaeology and Heritage Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. He has edited A Handbook of Eweland: The Northern Ewes in Ghana (2000) and is co-editor of Intercultural Perspectives on Ghana (2005).

Ciraj Rassool is Professor of History and director of the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies at the University of the Western Cape. He has co-authored and co-edited several books, including Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating and Curating the District Six Museum (2001) and Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations (2006).
“Heritage is an idea and a movement, and an industry. It engages states, communities, and capital. The work of heritage condenses into common frames both democratic and counterdemocratic impulses. As The Politics of Heritage in Africa implies, the contemporary force of heritage may be located in the enravelment of such contradictory effects. The appropriately diverse and engaged essays in this volume affirm that heritage has a history and a politics; moreover, that heritage can be skillfully deconstructed and critiqued, and indeed must be. The Politics of Heritage in Africa reflects big changes in the ways that the past of Africa has been and will be represented, known, and used. The volume opens a field of critical examination of heritage as a most influential mode of production of historical and cultural knowledge and meaning.”

– David William Cohen, University of Michigan
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The Politics of Heritage in Africa
_Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures_

Edited by
Derek R. Peterson
_University of Michigan_

Kodzo Gavua
_University of Ghana_

Ciraj Rassool
_University of the Western Cape (South Africa)_

International African Institute, London
_and_

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Notes on Contributors

Mbongiseni Buthelezi is a senior researcher at the Centre for Law and Society, University of Cape Town. His current work focuses on the logics underpinning post-apartheid legislation on customary law and traditional leadership in South Africa. He holds a PhD in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University and previously taught African literature in the English Department at the University of Cape Town.

Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu received her BA (English and Philosophy) from Queen’s University (in Kingston Ontario), MA (Linguistics) from the University of Pennsylvania, and PhD (West African Languages) from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She joined the staff of the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana in 1964, where she is now Emerita Professor of African Studies. She was elected Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1990.

Kodzo Gavua is Associate Professor of Archaeology and Heritage Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. He holds a PhD in Archaeology and two MAs, in African Archaeology and International Affairs. His research focus is on cross-cultural interactions and Ghana’s cultural, social, and economic development; he also engages in public archaeology and heritage resource management.

Carolyn Hamilton holds a National Research Foundation Chair in Archive and Public Culture at the University of Cape Town. Her research areas include the ethnography and history of the archive, the history of pre-industrial South Africa, and the anthropology of the past in the present. Her publications include The Cambridge History of South Africa (2009) (co-editor), Refiguring the Archive (2002) (co-editor), Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Invention (1998), and The Mfecane Aftermath (1995).

Daniel Herwitz is Fredrick Huetwell Professor of Comparative Literature, History of Art, and Philosophy at the University of Michigan, where for a decade he directed the Institute for the Humanities. A decade’s
work in South Africa (at the University of Natal in the 1990s) led to his book *Race and Reconciliation* (2003). Herwitz retains a formal connection with the University of Cape Town, and while an Andrew Mellon Fellow there (in the Archives and Public Culture Seminar, 2010) he wrote the substance of his *Heritage, Culture and Politics in the Postcolony* (2012).

**Judith T. Irvine** is Edward Sapir Collegiate Professor of Linguistic Anthropology at the University of Michigan. Her research has focused on language and communication in social, cultural, and historical context, with particular attention to how communicative practices both shape and reflect ideology and social hierarchy. She has done ethnographic, linguistic, and sociolinguistic fieldwork in Senegal, as well as research on languages spoken in other parts of the African continent. In addition to publications resulting from those research efforts, and theoretically oriented works on ideologies of language, she is the author of many articles on the colonial history of African linguistics.

**Gary Minkley** has held the National Research Foundation Chair in Social Change since 2009 and is Professor of History at the University of Fort Hare. One of his major research focus areas is concerned with public histories in South Africa, and with the ways that space, public history, the visual, and the performative produce knowledge about the past and relate to the constituting acts of the social and of social change.

**Phindezwa Mnyaka** is a senior lecturer in Fine Arts at Rhodes University. She has a PhD in History from the University of Fort Hare. She is particularly interested in photography about Africa in the early twentieth century.

**Litheko Modisane** is a senior lecturer in Film and Media at the University of Cape Town. He received his Masters and Doctoral degrees at the University of the Witwatersrand. Modisane is the author of *South Africa’s Renegade Reels: The Making and Public Lives of Black Centered Films* (2013).

**Noëleen Murray** is an architect and academic in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of the Western Cape. Her research over many years offers a reading of architecture and urban planning under and after apartheid, in which she considers conjunctions between architectural modernism and apartheid modernity. Murray is principal editor of *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-apartheid City* and co-editor, with Premesh Lalu, of *Becoming UWC: Reflections, Pathways and Unmaking of Apartheid’s Legacy*.

**Moses N. Nii-Dortey** is a Research Fellow with the ‘Music and Dance’ section of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. His research interests are in the music history of Ghana, the development
of folk opera in Ghana, and traditional festivals as integrated performances. He was one the first cohort of African Presidential Scholars at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 2008/9. He received the African Humanities Dissertation Fellowship of the American Council of Learned Societies in 2011/12.

Derek R. Peterson teaches African history at the University of Michigan. He is the author of *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent* (2012), which won the Herskovits Prize and the Martin Klein Prize, and editor of several books, including *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa and the Atlantic* (2011) and *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (2009). With colleagues at Mountains of the Moon University, he coordinates an ongoing project to organise, preserve, and digitise endangered archival material in Uganda.

Ciraj Rassool is Professor of History and Director of the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies at the University of the Western Cape. He is Chairperson of the board of the District Six Museum and until 2013 also chaired the council of Iziko Museums of South Africa. He is also a member of the Human Remains Repatriation Advisory Committee of South Africa’s Minister of Arts and Culture. He has co-authored and co-edited a number of books about museums, collecting, and public culture including *Skeletons in the Cupboard: South African Museums and the Trade in Human Remains, 1907–1917* (2000); *Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating and Curating the District Six Museum* (2001); *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (2006); and *Popular Snapshots and Tracks to the Past: Cape Town, Nairobi, Lubumbashi* (2010).

Raymond Silverman is Professor of History of Art, Afroamerican and African Studies, and Museum Studies at the University of Michigan. His research has examined the social values associated with creativity in Ethiopia, the visual cultures of religion in twentieth-century Ethiopia, and the commodification of art in Ethiopia and Ghana. Most recently Silverman has been exploring ‘museum culture’ in Africa, specifically how local knowledge is articulated and translated in national and community-based cultural institutions.

Leslie Witz is a Professor in the History Department at the University of the Western Cape and was leader of the Project on Public Pasts and the Heritage Disciplines Project, funded by the National Research Foundation. His major research centres on how different histories are created and represented in the public domain through memorials, museums, festivals, and tourism. He is the author of *Write Your Own History* (1988), *Apartheid’s Festival: Contesting South Africa’s National Pasts* (2003) and
Notes on Contributors


**Kwesi Yankah** is a Professor of Linguistics, specialising in ethnography of communication. Educated at the University of Ghana and Indiana University, he is currently President of Central University in Ghana and had previously occupied several positions at the University of Ghana, including Dean, Faculty of Arts, and Pro-Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs. Yankah has published widely in several international journals, and his book *Speaking for the Chief* (1995) is used in universities worldwide. He has held visiting professorships at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Pennsylvania.
Preface and Acknowledgements

African heritage had never seemed more pertinent than it did at the turn of the second millennium. In South Africa, the end of apartheid occasioned the rapid overhaul of the museum collections, the commissioning of new memorials and monuments, the proliferation of new holidays, and the redeployment of professional scholars. The District Six Museum in Cape Town was opened in 1994. One of the moving spirits within it was Ciraj Rassool of the University of the Western Cape. The Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum opened its doors in the year 2000; on its managing board was Leslie Witz, also of the University of the Western Cape. The Hector Pieterson Museum was opened in Soweto in 2003. Among its core exhibits were a set of oral interviews that the curator, Ali Hlongwane, had conducted with the young participants in the 1976 uprising. ¹

The heritage sector in Ghana was likewise occupying new spaces and opening up new sites of memory. There was an increasingly large tourist trade centred around the ‘slave castles’ on the Ghanaian coast: Elmina received a record 100,000 visitors in 2000; Cape Coast castle received 34,871.² In 1994 UNESCO launched the ‘Slave Route Project’, which encouraged the world’s population to ‘enhance their awareness of the cultural heritage of the slave trade’, and in 2007 Ghana’s Ministry of Tourism launched the ‘Joseph Project’, which aimed to bring together Africans on the continent and in the diaspora to address the legacies of the slave trade. There followed a proliferation of new memorials in upcountry Ghana, as rural people sought to make their localities part of the burgeoning touristic infrastructure. Entrepreneurs in Assin Manso constructed a garden and a ‘Wall of Remembrance’ at the site of what had once been a slave depot; in Salaga a museum was constructed near the location of a slave market.³

² Bayo Holsey, Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning the Slave Trade in Ghana (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 178.
Scholars at the University of Michigan were very much involved in these new articulations of African heritage. Cultural historian Daniel Herwitz was drafting a book about the heritage industry in South Africa. Art historian Ray Silverman was working with local authorities to develop a new museum and cultural centre in Techiman, in central Ghana. Anthropologist Kelly Askew was completing a manuscript about music and national culture in socialist Tanzania. Ethnomusicologist Lester Monts had published a book that classified the instruments and repertoires of Vai musicians in Liberia. Michigan’s School of Information had a long-standing relationship with the University of Fort Hare, where Michigan students had been involved in the organisation of the archives of the African National Congress. In 2008 University of Michigan President Mary Sue Coleman paid an official visit to several universities in Ghana and South Africa, and thereafter she opened up a stream of funding to support faculty and student collaborations in the hard sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. Part of this tranche of funding supported the creation of the ‘African Heritage Initiative’, an international working group of scholars and practitioners. Since its creation the Heritage Initiative has supported a range of worthy projects: archive preservation work in Uganda and South Sudan; master classes joining opera faculty at Michigan with colleagues in Cape Town; the digitisation of the African music recordings of the Voice of America; the preservation of the video archives of the palace of the Asantehene. Its central task has been to facilitate and sustain collaborations joining faculty in Ann Arbor with colleagues in Ghana and South Africa. There was, first, a seminar about digital records management at Rhodes University; then a large international conference, titled ‘Heritage Matters’, in Accra in December 2009; and finally, in July 2011, a scholarly meeting held at Museum Africa in Johannesburg.

The present volume grows out of this programme of activity. As editors, we gratefully acknowledge the people who helped to create the infrastructure for our work. We thank, first, President Coleman, whose generous support and capacious vision created the framework for this collaboration. We thank Lester Monts, accomplished ethnomusicologist and Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs at Michigan, whose leadership oriented the Heritage Initiative’s work. We thank Kelly Askew, founding
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Director of the African Studies Center at Michigan, and Devon Keen, the Center’s administrator, whose boundless energy brought coherence and discipline to all of our endeavours. In Accra we were hosted by the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. We thank Brigid Sackey, the Institute’s Acting Director, and Kojo Amanor, its Associate Director, for their hospitality. In Johannesburg, where most of the chapters in this volume were discussed, we were hosted by Dr Cynthia Kros and the Division of Arts, Culture, and Heritage Management at the University of the Witwatersrand. Naomi Roux, a postgraduate student at Wits, organised the logistics for the occasion. The conference was held in Museum Africa, where Ali Hlongwane, the museum’s director since 2008, generously opened up the vast vaults for us to explore. We thank the several scholars who played a critical role in the Johannesburg conference as discussants or as presenters: Hylton White, Sekepe Matjila, Liz Gunner, Michele Pickover, Peter Lekgoathi, Anthea Josias, and Isabel Hofmeyr.

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