

# Cambridge Elements

Elements in Critical Heritage Studies

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## PATRIMONIALITIES

*Heritage vs. Property*

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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-92838-0 — Patrimonialities  
Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, Martin Skrydstrup  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108928380](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108928380)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108933629

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First published 2020

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-108-92838-0 Paperback

ISSN 2632-7074 (online)

ISSN 2632-7066 (print)

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## Patrimonialities

### Heritage vs. Property

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DOI: 10.1017/9781108933629  
First published online: November 2020

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**Abstract:** With empirical touchstones from Europe, North America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, the authors argue that heritage and property represent different approaches to subject formation, produce distinct bodies of expertise, and belong to different rationalities of government in a global patrimonial field: that cultural property is a technology of sovereignty, part of the order of the modern liberal state, but cultural heritage is a technology of reformation that cultivates responsible subjects and entangles them in networks of expertise and management. While particular case trajectories may shift back and forth from rights-based claims and resolutions under the sign of cultural property to ethical claims and solutions under the sign of cultural heritage, the authors contend that there is significant analytical purchase to be gained from their distinction. Using a critical, comparative approach, they make the case for a historically grounded and theoretically informed understanding of the difference between the two terms.

**Keywords:** cultural heritage, cultural property, sovereignty, reformation, repatriation

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ISBNs: 9781108928380 (PB), 9781108933629 (OC)  
ISSNs: 2632-7074 (online), ISSN 2632-7066 (print)

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African cultural heritage can no longer remain a prisoner of European Museums.  
 Emmanuel Macron, 2018

Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are . . . participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.

ICOM Executive Board, A New Definition of the Museum, 2019

I ask for Oluyenyetuye bronze of Ife  
 The moon says it is in Bonn

I ask for the Ogidigbonyingboyin mask of Benin  
 The moon says it is in London

I ask for Dinkowawa stool of Ashanti  
 The moon says it is in Paris

I ask for Togongorewa bust of Zimbabwe  
 The moon says it is in New York

I ask  
 I ask  
 I ask for the memory of Africa  
 The seasons say it is blowing in the wind

The hunchback cannot hide his burden

Niyi Osundare in *Horses of Memory* (1998)

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