

# The making of post/colonial heritage

Exploring the politics and practices of valuing heritage in postcolonial societies

*An international research seminar*

*held at the University of Birmingham, 18 September 2017*

*organised by Dr Helle Jørgensen and Dr Berny Sèbe*

Few societies in the world remain unaffected by the ongoing cultural processes of dealing with the legacies of the colonial empires which grew up from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and which have come to see their demise in the period following WWII. Amongst the wide range of changes which it gives rise to at global as well as national and local levels, political decolonisation and the continual cultural process of defining and grappling with the postcolonial condition cause reappraisals of the heritage of the formerly colonised as well as the former colonisers. The process of making a post/colonial heritage for the present touches on the changing perceptions, valuations and uses of indigenous and precolonial heritage as much as on ways of relating to the heritage of the colonial encounter itself, and postcolonial ways of processing it.

This seminar aims to investigate how post/colonial heritage-making becomes part of the processes of postcolonial identity construction and of the continual unfolding of relations between the formerly colonised and former colonisers. It aims to theorise the practices and politics behind assessments of which aspects of both tangible and intangible heritage to value, keep or discard in postcolonial societies, and how to recognise, promote, use and manage assets defined as a heritage of ongoing value. National policies and institutions serve to select and protect officially sanctioned heritage, while unofficial perceptions and uses of heritage from below may have their own agendas that can agree or disagree with official presentations of heritage; and transnational processes such as heritage tourism, migration, and repatriation of objects act as links that continue to tie together the heritage of former colonisers and formerly colonised.

The seminar will explore the many and overlapping arenas in which the making of post/colonial heritage takes place, with a view to bring out the intersections, synergies and contestations that take place within and between them. It aims to bring together researchers from the humanities and social sciences across geographical and methodological lines, taking a multidisciplinary and global perspective to explore the politics and practices of defining, managing, valuing and using heritage in the postcolonial context.

The seminar is organized by the Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage and the Postcolonial Birmingham Research Network. Everyone is welcome. Attendants should register participation on <https://postcolonialheritageseminar.eventbrite.co.uk>.

**Venue:** Danford Room, Arts Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, room 224 (except for the first session, 1.00-2.10 pm, which will take place in the same building, same floor, but in another room: Arts 201).

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## *Programme*

1.00 pm: *Arts 201: Welcome* by the organisers

1.10 pm: *Arts 201: Keynote* presentation by Prof. Paul Basu, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, SOAS

***Decolonising heritage in West Africa. A contradiction in terms?***

2.10 pm: *Danford room, Arts 224: Cultural heritage in post-colonial African and Indian contexts*

Prof. Paul Jackson, International Development Department, School of Government and Society, University of Birmingham

***Post-colonial conflict and policies as colonial heritage: examples from East Africa.***

Richard Bigambo, PhD research student, Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage, University of Birmingham

***The Management of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Post-Colonial Tanzania***

Dr Lucie Ryzova, Lecturer, Department of History, University of Birmingham

***Mourning the Archive: Middle Eastern Photographic Heritage between Neo-Liberalism and Digital Reproduction***

Sam Kocheri, PhD research student, Department of Modern Languages, University of Birmingham

***The Bible as a postcolonial legacy in India***

3.30 pm: *John Fage Library, Arts 250: Coffee break*

3.50 pm: *Danford Room, Arts 224: Between oblivion, atonement and denunciation: The paradoxes of material heritage*

Dr Berny Sèbe, Senior Lecturer, Department of Modern Languages, University of Birmingham

***Desert fortifications as national heritage: examples from Algeria and Kazakhstan***

Dr Helle Jørgensen, Lecturer, Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage, University of Birmingham

***Challenges in preserving and presenting colonial French heritage in India: The case of Puducherry***

Prof. Walter Bruyère-Ostells, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Aix-en-Provence

***Franco-Algerian heritage perspectives on the Foreign Legion: post-colonial dialogue or monologue?***

Aidatul Bakri, PhD research student, Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage, University of Birmingham

***The Representation of Postcolonial Identity: A Case Study of 'Street Of Harmony', George Town World Heritage Site, Penang***

5.10 pm: *Danford Room, Arts 224: Keynote* presentation by Dr Sarah Longair, Lecturer, School of History and Heritage, University of Lincoln

***The Elephant in the Room: encountering material worlds of colonial memory***

6.10 pm: *Danford Room, Arts 224: Concluding remarks* (Seminar ends at 6.30 pm).

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## *Abstracts (in order of presentation)*

Paul Basu, Professor, Department of Anthropology & Sociology, SOAS, University of London

### ***Decolonising heritage in West Africa: a contradiction in terms?***

My paper questions whether it possible to decolonise 'heritage' in postcolonial West Africa when the very concept of heritage is 'colonial'. Drawing on long-standing research in Sierra Leone, I consider the history of heritage in this West African state, both prior to and after independence in 1961. Despite occasional local voices and more radical calls to 'indigenize' Sierra Leone's cultural institutions, this is largely a history of external intervention and dependency. In the postcolonial era, intervention (almost invariably 'well meaning') has shifted from enthusiasts in the colonial service to a wider range of international actors, including US Peace Corps volunteers, international museum programmes, academics and the discourses of agencies such as UNESCO. I reflect on my own well-meaning interventions, including leading a recent review of Sierra Leone's heritage legislation, and consider whether they reproduce power imbalances and cultures of dependency. How should we, as 'heritage experts', act – and act ethically – in such circumstances?

Paul Jackson, Professor, International Development Department, School of Government and Society, University of Birmingham

### ***Post-colonial conflict and policies as colonial heritage: examples from East Africa.***

This paper will examine the implications of colonial heritage in ethnic classification for ongoing conflicts in Uganda and the protracted war since 1986. It will argue that the current cycle of conflict and the development of the Lord's Resistance Army may be taken directly from the colonial and pre-colonial practice of identifying specific races within the Empire for particular tasks. In particular, in Uganda, identifying the Buganda of the South as those to run the administration and enter business alongside ethnic South Asians, but at the same time establishing the Acholi and other Nilotic peoples of the North as 'martial races' established a pattern that intensified during the post-colonial period and is still felt within contemporary cycles of violence.

Richard Bigambo, PhD research student, Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage, University of Birmingham

### ***The Management of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Post-Colonial Tanzania***

Managing Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is currently among the main agendas in many national and international organizations. This is due to the recent realization of the impacts brought about by globalization and modernization. These two factors are contributing towards cultural processes of homogenization, hybridization or retraditionalization. However, in many African countries, loss of ICH cannot be attributed to only globalization and modernization, other factors, such as colonization, have affected the safeguarding process of ICH in many ways, even after independence. But despite this, little attention has been paid to understanding the impacts of such factors towards this form of heritage. Hence this study seeks to establish the impact of colonialism on the

management of ICH in Tanzania during colonialism, and how it has continued to impact the process even after independence.

Lucie Ryzova, Lecturer, Department of History, University of Birmingham

***Mourning the Archive: Middle Eastern Photographic Heritage between Neo-Liberalism and Digital Reproduction***

The past decade and a half have seen the founding of new archival initiatives in the Middle East devoted to collecting and preserving photographs. This article examines critically the constitution of photographic heritage in the region ethnographically and historically. I look first at how historical photographs are understood in Egypt by their custodians old and new. Publics and institutions overwhelmingly see photographs as “images of something,” and appreciate them for their visual content rather than as social and cultural objects. This facilitates their transfer from public collections into private hands in Egypt and abroad. I examine in detail key actors currently involved in shaping photographic heritage: the Library of Alexandria in Egypt, the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut, and private collectors in Egypt. I look at how these actors assign value to historical photographs in their custody and their strategies for collecting and curating them. They often define their actions negatively, “against others,” historically against a state that they believe has failed to care for national heritage. Yet these very actors, and their rivals, often perpetuate such narratives and associated fears. Two models of photographic heritage-making are currently emerging in the region: a “digital” model that destroys artifacts in order to produce data, and a model of private cultural institutions that provide unclear and selective access to their collections.

Sam Antony Kocheri, Ph.D. Research Student, University of Birmingham

***The Religion and the Book: The Legacies Left Behind***

The 1980s saw in India a new modern Hindu right political thought which started to address 'India' as 'Bharath', primarily to focus on the Hindu majority identity of the country rather than emphasizing on the pluralistic identity of the country India. To the majority Hindu country, Christianity and its central text are still the remnants of the old colonizing power. From its first translated publication in 1727 at Tranquebar in South India by Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, the Bible was methodically translated into the local languages of the Indian subcontinent. It was often called the 'Sahibs Book,' which again aligned it with the identity of the colonizer. Transmitted in India from the 18th to the 20th century, primarily by Protestant missionaries, it caused a clash with the local Catholic clerical communities who out rightly protested this initiative. But the situation began to change after the second Vatican Council. The Catholic authorities and Protestant Communities started the publication and translation of the Bible, which is still distributed freely. Christianity and the Bible are still considered alien to the cultural identity of the country India by the right-wing political parties, primarily due to the insensitive proselytizing effort made by the Missionaries during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Bible as a book, which as a material artifact left away by the British and the Dutch, could be pointed out as the legacy or the 'Word heritage' of the Colonial powers. This paper analyses how the Bible could be viewed as a Postcolonial legacy left behind by the Colonizing agency by showing the history of its introduction to the Indian subcontinent, its dissemination into society and the influence which even now it exerts through extensive dissemination by both Catholics and Protestant churches even after independence.

Berny Sèbe, Senior Lecturer in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies, Department of Modern Languages, University of Birmingham

***Desert fortifications as national heritage: examples from Algeria and Kazakhstan***

The nineteenth-century conquest of Central Asia by the Russians and of the Sahara by the French left long-lasting architectural legacies. The urban design of small settlements which have sometimes grown into large cities (e.g. Tamanrasset, which currently shelters about 100,000 inhabitants or Kyzyl-Orda, the old Fort Perovski, with a population of 250,000), and some aspects of the prevalent architectural style, are often cited as exemplary of the complex transfers of knowledge and practice that took place in colonial contexts. Yet, in spite of the symbolic value of military fortifications, their role and meaning has tended to remain overlooked in the post-colonial period.

This paper highlights the multiple processes through which colonial buildings, and especially desert fortifications, have been recycled in post-colonial Algeria, as opposed to their almost complete disappearance in Kazakhstan. It explores how edifices that could easily be seen as unwelcome reminders of a bygone age have often been taken over by the new authorities or recycled to serve other purposes. Whilst the nature of this heritage remains controversial in a country which sought to emancipate itself through a violent war of liberation, several instances show that these imposing buildings have not always been condemned to oblivion. Rather, the story of these 'outposts of conquest', built to control spaces of wind, sand and stars (to quote Antoine de Saint-Exupéry) reveals the creativity of Algerian government and civil society, and the resilience of the colonial past in the post-colonial period.

Helle Jørgensen, Lecturer, Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage, University of Birmingham

***Challenges in preserving and presenting colonial French heritage in India: The case of Puducherry***

As the former capital of French India, the city of Puducherry (formerly *Pondichéry*) constitutes an internationally little known case in the colonial history of India; but the heritage of French rule is very much alive in present-day Puducherry. Following its decolonisation and merger with the Indian Union (de facto in 1954, de jure in 1962), the Indo-French heritage of Puducherry has been instrumental both in political identity-making in the Union State Territory of Puducherry and in its growing tourism industry, especially in the capital with its well-preserved colonial townscape which displays a mix of French and Tamil vernacular architecture. For an Indian tourist market in particular, the French elements of Puducherry's heritage provide an exotic attraction, which has seen Puducherry marketed as "the Quintessence of French Culture, India's 'Little France'"; and tourism provides a significant part of Puducherry's income. Nonetheless tensions remain in local approaches to Puducherry's French heritage. Historiography tends to portray two competing and conflicting master narratives of French colonialism and decolonisation in India: One of enduring fraternity and positive intercultural relations; and one of French colonial oppression and Indian resistance; and some elements of Puducherry's townscape, such as the prominent statue of the French governor general Francois Dupleix, who in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century came close to creating a French empire rivalling the British in India, have been controversial. The paper shows how heritage conservation in Puducherry is shaped by postcolonial dynamics, and asks: what is the scope for intercultural dialogue in this process, and can the spectre of potential neocolonialism be exorcised?

Walter Bruyère-Ostells, Professor of Modern History, Sciences Po Aix

### **Franco-Algerian heritage perspectives on the Foreign Legion: post-colonial dialogue or monologue?**

The Foreign Legion built Sidi bel Abbès from 1842 and made it its headquarters. Both this army and this city came to symbolise French colonization. In 1962, the barracks, the war memorial, as well as major figures of the Legion such as general Rollet and so many others, were a large part of the cultural and historic heritage of the city. The paper examines the double evolution of this architectural heritage. On the one hand, relocated in Aubagne after independence, the Legion shows its will to recreate in France the former headquarters of Vienot and to repatriate the most symbolic architectural elements back to the metropole. The paper will show in particular how the new military headquarters got organized around the war memorial transferred from Sidi Bel Abbès. On the other hand, at Sidi Bel Abbès, the monuments which had embodied the pioneering spirit of the colonial troop that is the Foreign Legion are voluntarily abandoned. For example, the castle Decrion belongs to the *mouhafadha* (National Liberation Front governorate) which does not run its administrative services on the premises, that are falling into dereliction. Finally, we shall analyse the current attempts of protection of the heritage by charities and local associations in the face of the local political power that is responsible for its degradation.

Aidatul Bakri, PhD research student, Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage, University of Birmingham

### **The Representation of Postcolonial Identity: A Case Study of 'Street Of Harmony', George Town World Heritage Site, Penang**

George Town in Penang, Malaysia, was a colony administered by the British Crown from 1867, and served as a key trading post of the East India Company which practised a free trade policy that embedded the site in complex international networks. Present-day Penang is known as a place where multiculturalism is accepted and practised, as its colonial trade attracted people from various places such as India, China, the northern region of Sumatra, and the Arab countries. George Town, which was listed as a World Heritage site in 2008, is now part and parcel of the issues and challenges of the postcolonial nation of Malaysia and the way both the nation and the city's multicultural communities represent themselves. The objective of my research is to explore how colonialism affects the present representation of place identity in George Town by using the concept of space and place. The research is based on observation and in-depth interviews with 53 respondents who are key stakeholders of the George Town World Heritage site. They include residents, business owners, local authorities, the World Heritage site manager, and representatives of heritage NGOs, among others. The study is focused on the so-called 'Street of Harmony', which is a key component in the colonial history of George Town as well as in its current representation and uses as a World Heritage site. It is found that the representation of colonial history in place identity depends on how people are dealing with the postcolonial heritage; respect and tolerance of the multicultural community, and the power relations in the appropriation of identity.

Sarah Longair, Lecturer, School of History and Heritage, University of Lincoln

### **The elephant in the room: encountering material worlds of colonial memory**

This paper explores material traces of Britain's imperial experience in the contemporary domestic setting. Such objects are imbued with memories of the colonial past and a close examination of these stories and their display within the twenty-first century home provides new perspectives on narratives of empire within colonial and post-colonial Britain. While curators and anthropologists have long recognised the legacies and entanglements of empire revealed by objects, their methodologies have only slowly diffused into more traditional accounts of political, economic and social change in the twentieth-century British Empire and the era of decolonisation. Recent scholarship also stresses the impact of decolonization on metropolitan cultures. This paper will augment the 'cultural turn' of empire and decolonisation by taking a material turn.

I will draw on a recent research project which employed an object-driven oral history approach in which a colleague and I interviewed some of the last living members of British imperial service to investigate how objects retained in the present embody memory of the imperial era. I will discuss findings from this project to demonstrate how objects can challenge dominant narratives surrounding empire while also attending carefully to the often contested histories and polarising associations of these objects in their present domestic location. While museums are filled with objects collected by colonial officers, this process of transfer often erases many personal stories of colonial entanglement. This project sought to record these individual stories and study the curation of domestic space to reveal meanings attributed to objects and how they present personal narratives and memories, but also how such objects become habituated into quotidian twenty-first century life. I will explore how far the presence of these objects 'colonializes' these spaces, while simultaneously the objects themselves are 'decolonised' by the changing context in which they are displayed. Placing objects and domestic space at the heart of this paper, I will consider how these objects in domestic space are a revealing but rapidly disappearing example of post-colonial heritage. I will hope to offer fresh insights into the nature of colonial and post-colonial memory, and its ambiguities and contradictions.