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Heritage-making

Review by Brendan Tuttle

Christoph Brumann and David Berliner, *World Heritage on the Ground: Ethnographic Perspectives* (New York, Berghahn, 2016).

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"World Heritage on the Ground," a collection of ethnographic essays edited by Christoph Brumann and David Berliner, examines a wide range of the ways that places have come into relation with heritage regimes by being turned into World Heritage properties. The book consists of an introduction (by the editors), eleven excellent essays on UNESCO-inscribed properties, and an ethnographic study of World Heritage Committee sessions and General Assemblies. The essays that make up the book combine ethnographic and historical research in Morocco, Mali, China, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Indonesia, China, Mexico, Italy, Libya and Tanzania, and Nigeria. These are grouped into three sections of four essays.

The first section consists of four essays about cities and town centers. The first and last chapters in this section involve the passionate ways that people relate to their surroundings. Manon Istasse describes affective and sensuous people-house relations in the Medina of Fez (Morocco) to draw contrasts between different ways of caring for (and about) houses, and to show how heritage is made not only through the operations of heritage institutions and experts, but also through ordinary restoration and maintenance work, re-decorating, and the sensual experience of living in a house. In the last chapter, David Berliner describes a kind of continuum of nostalgias attached

to Luang Prabang (Lao PDR), ranging from foreigners' 'exo-nostalgia' for a romanticized vision of a colonial past, (which they had not themselves experienced), to the 'endo-nostalgia' of long-term residents, who may have wished that young people dressed more like their grandparents, but were more concerned about home repairs and the restrictions placed by authenticity-crazed foreigners on the materials that they can use to make them. Chapters 2 and 3 concern groups within states. In "Heritage Making in Lijiang," Yujie Zhu relates an observation made by a Naxi man who had grown up in the old town of Lijiang (China), an old trade town that had been turned into a "tourism marketplace" after its inscription in 1997: "When I walk in the street of the old town, I feel like a stranger. The food in restaurants is no longer good, but costs much more. I can only hear Han Chinese in the street, no more Naxi being spoken" (87). The popularity of Lijiang among tourists relegated long-term businesses and residents to the margins of the town: grocery stores and restaurants disappeared and were replaced by souvenir shops and restaurants set up for tourists by business people from other parts of China; shopkeepers were outfitted in traditional Naxi clothing (to lend 'authenticity'); and an exhibit developed for a nearby cultural theme park, 'Encountering a Naxi Family,' was established to allow tourists to buy handicrafts and poke around Naxi family homes ("even our bedroom") while taking photographs (92). UNESCO's work is premised on the idea that "global peace and development [are] achievable through intercultural dialogue and understanding," Charlotte Joy writes; but, in actual practice, this dialogue is between states "and cannot easily include the voices of individuals or groups within nation states, such as the views of the Tuareg in Mali" (64). (Neither does Zhu suggest much understanding is gained by tourists encountering a Naxi families.) Joy contributes a chapter about the Old Towns of Djenné (a serial property in Mali inscribed in 1988), where concerns about safeguarding heritage objects have at times overshadowed concerns about safeguarding peoples' livelihoods and safety, and how UNESCO participates in debates about Mali's Islamic identity and the legitimacy of different forms of global politics.

One of the key arguments of "World Heritage on the Ground" is that the sites, buildings, and landscapes inscribed on the World Heritage list are not so much 'things' as heritage-making projects, or processes, which bring particular locales and their residents into relationship with global institutions and structure encounters between states and groups within states, and among long-term residents and visitors, tour guides, researchers, conservationists, and an array of

others. Heritage sites are tangible but they are never fixed. Rather than freezing monuments in time and place, or setting them off in wholly new historical directions, heritage-making entangles places in processes of change and transformation that involve struggles for control over establishing the meanings assigned to materials and what aspects of the past are identified as heritage and stabilized and preserved. “Heritage … is a coproduction” of many differently situated actors, the editors write in the introduction, “but this should not be confounded with a consensus on values and meanings” (17). Some of these disagreements are small: Moroccan residents of Fez do not share foreigners’ view that televisions are a threat to ‘authenticity.’ Other disputes, such as those that led to the destruction of the tomb of Sidi Mahmoud Ben Amar in Timbuktu, attract global attention. Since “lived realities are linked to multiple heritages,” and differently situated groups tend to have different ideas about heritage, Jasper Chalcraft observes toward the end of the book (226), heritage preservation is always a kind of iconoclasm; some perspectives and heritages are excluded from preservation.

The second section contains four essays about archaeological sites. Keiko Miura describes how, in Cambodia, Ankor’s inscription as a World Heritage property created endless possibilities for struggles over the management of the Ankor area between the UNESCO office in Phnom Penh and the minister of state, and between APSARA (the authority tasked with protecting the Angkor Archaeological Park) and provincial and ministerial authorities, all of which held overlapping claims on the property. Within the Angkor area, Buddhist monks and other residents found themselves at odds with Heritage Police, who placed restrictions on building temples and houses and prevented farmers from cultivating rice, cutting trees, collecting firewood, or grazing livestock on monumental sites. Noel Salazar writes about two neighboring sites in Indonesia, Borobudur and Prambanan, and how differently their places in a larger social order have been understood and valued at different times by different people; “despite their proclaimed universal value,” Salazar shows, World Heritage sites “have different meanings for different groups of actors” (164). Shu-Li Wang relates how standards of living for residents within the protection zone of the Yin Xu Archaeological Site (China) abruptly dropped between 2001 and 2006, during preparations for World Heritage inscription. While heritage officials put up sanctimonious posters (‘Clean your hands before eating’) and worked to stage “an idealized image of civilization” (171), farmers were relocated into tiny apartments where, without land for

cultivation, they had to constantly scramble to get enough to eat. Not surprisingly, many residents came to see the nearby archaeological site as a "ruin," a kind of symbolic mirror of their own decline, rather than a monument of high civilization. Lisa Breglia contributes a chapter about Chichén Itzá (Mexico), which sets off from a scandal that unfolded around an online voting campaign for the "New 7 Wonders of the World" and revealed Chichén Itzá's private ownership. But New7wonders.com can't be blamed for introducing the profit motive into a once disinterested appreciation of the site; the property had been privately owned since 1894, when it was acquired by Edward Thompson, who sent what he dredged up from the Sacred Cenote to Harvard's Peabody Museum and the Chicago Field Museum. During the 1930s, the Barbachano family, "Yucatan's first family in tourism" (200), acquired the property piece by piece under somewhat dodgy circumstances which involved placing parcels under various relation's names to avoid restrictions meant to afford the redistribution of land among peasants and indigenous Mayan.

The third section is about cultural landscapes. In "Decolonizing the Site," a chapter about how much contemporary heritage practice recalls earlier colonial regimes (in Kondoa-Irangi Rock Art Sites in Tanzania, Tadrart Acacus in Libya, and Valcamonica in Italy), Jasper Chalcraft writes about how he had "hoped that the realities, on the ground, would reveal the thrilling hybridity and cunning cultural brokerage of locals subjected to UNESCO's universalizing World Heritage gaze" (221). What he found, instead, was that ritual experts who used Kondoa-Irangi were banned from the site; in Valcamonica, residents burnt down an archaeological reconstruction to register their antipathy toward heritage management and the management authority of one rock art site drilled holes into an engraved rock to build a walkway ("to improve the viewing angle for visitors" (236)); legislation that had long annoyed resident by prohibiting road construction, near another site in Valcamonica, was suspended for the convenience of archaeologists; and in Tadrart Acacus, residents of the buffer zone maintained a relationship of mutual disregard with tourists and heritage workers. It is hard to creatively resist, appropriate, or reinterpret exogamous influences, form alternative imaginaries, or contest 'UNESCO's universalizing gaze' when one has been overlooked altogether. (Indeed, Chalcraft remarks, graffiti as one of the few options actually available to people to register alternative views, or 'decolonize' heritage sites.) In the next chapter, Peter Probst writes about the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, (a 'cultural landscape'

inscribed in 2005 and one of Nigeria's largest tourist attractions), where each year in August officials make a sacrifice said to go back to the city's founding, when its first king made a sacrifice to Osun, conveying the sincerity of the promise to protect the goddesses' homestead. (The goddess, in return, agreed to ensure the city's prosperity and protection.) Probst draws on Marcel Mauss to discuss the double nature of heritage; it is an exchange that involves a "horizontal" politics of recognition among the living, that is, among states, and "vertical" obligations to remember ancestors and to pass along their benefits to generations to come. Control over the media of the circulation of mutual recognition and obligation is fraught, then, because heritage can be converted not only into (global) recognition, but also economic capital. Lynn Meskell picks up these themes in her discussion of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape in South Africa, a collection of Iron Age sites and rock art that extends into Botswana and Zimbabwe. Though the property was inscribed in 2003 on the merits of its archaeological remains, these aspects have been downplayed to encourage safari tourism: rhinos were moved into the park, fences were removed to allow elephants to roam the site, lions and leopards were encouraged to enter (making it too perilous to "enjoy the archaeology on foot" (280)), and mining licenses were issued within the buffer zone for open pit mining, threatening to obliterate archaeological remains.

The fact that UNESCO is an institution dedicated to the high-minded pursuit of global peace through intercultural dialogue and the preservation of culture, but perennially short on cash and staffed by temporary workers, interns, and delegates who lack the time to read nomination documents and—"when they are not involved in often poorly concealed horse trading among peers" (13)—are more concerned with state-level international relations than local conservation, no doubt helps to explain why so much of this volume has been written in a mood of dejection. Heritage encounters lead as often to conflict as to mutual understanding, and the benefits of global patrimony are unevenly distributed: the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape is threatened by open pit mining and residents of the Yin Xu Archaeological Site protection zone struggle to make a living; about ninety-five per cent of the income brought in by Chichén Itzá left the municipality; and Naxi families in Lijiang have been reduced to eking out a living by wearing "traditional" clothing for tourists, whose money goes to the local government, tourism operators, and businesspeople from elsewhere in China: "I feel like I am treated as a museum object,

instead of a human being," a man whose courtyard had been opened to tourists tells Yujie Zhu (92).

But this collection is not merely a catalogue of disappointments and failures, bleak indictments of heritage practice, or deconstructions of the idea of 'authenticity' (though readers looking for these things will not be disappointed). "World Heritage on the Ground" is particularly interesting for the light it sheds on the intermediary institutions that make up global heritage regimes: antiquities, tourism, and parks departments, Heritage Police, city councils and regional authorities, semi-public institutions and NGOs, private tourism companies, heritage consultancies, departments of archaeology, and the like, which occupy the space between UNESCO and World Heritage properties. With so many intermediaries, "stakeholder engagement" is rarely guided by the idea that everyone who might be affected by a decision ought to have a role in making it and residents are often overlooked. By providing a kind of buffer between UNESCO and "local residents" these institutions also risk putting up impediments to participation in heritage work and setting its priorities. And this risk has not always been avoided. In the collection's conclusion Christoph Brumann explains why there is such a gap between Committee sessions and the social situations at World Heritage sites. The World Heritage Committee meets each year for about twelve days, during which time delegate review roughly 200 sites (nominations, renewals, changing listings to "in Danger," and so on). Since reading all this information would mean reading many thousands of pages, delegates are very susceptible to being swayed by any official who turns up after having actually visited one of the sites and reluctant to challenge any given state's official account of what is going on there, even when they receive a report, for instance, about a "huge, unapproved and problematic-looking reconstruction project" happening at a World Heritage site (304).

"World Heritage on the Ground" is an engaging collection of essays that be will be of interest to anthropologists, heritage practitioners, UN- and NGO-graphers, and others. Readers are presented with a diverse range of theoretical approaches, themes and sub-themes, and rich ethnographic and historical work. The book would make an excellent contribution to syllabi on heritage studies, globalization, and critical development studies.

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