

Chapter 11

The Politics of Shared Heritage: Contested Histories and Participatory Memory Work in the Post-Colonial Urban Landscape



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Abstract Shared heritage is a concept that serves to address cultural ties between countries or people that emanate from colonial history, including conflicts and contestations as well as connections and commonalities. This contribution evaluates the potential of shared heritage to work as a tool for a transformative heritage management practice through exploring the post-colonial heritage landscape of Iringa, Tanzania. The historical dynamics of colonialism have left various tangible and intangible traces throughout Iringa Town and Region. Combining ethnographic and historical methods, this paper examines historical narratives of different social groups, representations of these trajectories in the regional museum, and community responses to buildings and sites of colonial origin in the cityscape. In line with UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach, observed applied conservation activities are discussed in the light of local development processes. I argue that shared heritage can serve as a viable concept to grapple with the colonial legacy vested in the HUL while at the same time using the discursive energy provided by these conflicts to support the cultural, social, and economic development of communities.

Keywords Shared heritage · Colonial history · Historic urban landscape · Iringa · Tanzania

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11.1 Introduction

This paper builds on a line of inquiry from my PhD thesis (Küever, 2021b) in developing the theoretical implications of the concept of *shared heritage* and its positioning within the heritage discourse. Among different readings of the concept, shared heritage serves to address cultural ties between countries or people that result from colonial history, seeking to negotiate conflicts and contestations as well as connections and commonalities emanating from this historical legacy. The evaluation is done through the lens of the post-colonial heritage landscape of Iringa, Tanzania – i.e., efforts of conserving elements in this landscape – as a particular case of shared heritage.

Iringa is a medium-sized town of about 150,000 inhabitants, and the surrounding administrative region has approx. one million inhabitants (United Republic of Tanzania, 2013) in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. Iringa harbours a diverse heritage landscape with various natural and cultural attractions, yet it is particularly known for the history of the rise and fall of the Hehe chiefdom during the second half of the nineteenth century, which culminated in a grim war of anti-colonial resistance against the German colonial conquest.

This paper investigates a bundle of applied heritage conservation and management activities that were part of the cultural heritage conservation and management initiative *fahari yetu Tanzania*, a programme that I established and coordinate in Iringa myself. *fahari yetu* – a Swahili term translating to “our pride” – combines academic research, historical restoration, museum exhibitions, professional capacity building, community outreach, and tourism commodification into a holistic heritage management practice (<http://fahariyetu.net>). In the following sections, I will show how colonial history emerges as shared heritage from the case, discuss community responses to the applied conservation of “shared” remnants of this historical legacy, and lay out concluding reflections of working towards a shared Historic Urban Landscape.

11.2 Theories and Methods

Shared heritage allows for various theoretical readings and applications in institutional policy and practice. First of all, the idea of sharing is inherent to the concept of heritage as a universal cultural archive or inventory to be made accessible for different people and cultures of the world as proclaimed in the UNESCO Conventions (1972; 2003). As such, it can be applied in transnational contexts to create new narratives of a common history, such as in the shared heritage programmes established by the national governments of France (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, n.d.) and the Netherlands (Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency, n.d.), which document and depict the historical connections of the two countries with other countries and places

around the globe and how these connections have contributed to shaping contemporary French and Dutch culture. Beyond national histories, the acknowledgement of transcultural dynamics transfers the concept to heritage communities emerging from the diversity of contemporary migration societies. This view recognises that heritage – whether places, landscapes, practices, or collections – is frequently connected with and valued by multiple and diverse communities who share a collective responsibility for its care and safeguarding (ICOMOS, 2020). From this perspective, shared heritage is not about identifying an original or rightful owner but seeks to elicit stories from objects, buildings, or sites, stories that are attached to the knowledge, skills, and values of different users and are passed on and transmitted between people and generations.

Furthermore, shared heritage is intentionally provocative and explores the ideas of cooperation against its counterpoints, contestation, and resistance (ICOMOS, 2020). In some cases, cultural features and values have been forced upon populations and resisted rather than collectively adopted. Thus, the value of places representing these features can be contested, leading to debates about their conservation. In this vein, a fourth reading of shared heritage addresses the historical injustice of colonialism and current post-colonial discourses that critically examine this heritage from the perspective of the colonized. This requires intensive cooperation and research in dialogue between representatives of both former colonizing and colonized cultures. Research and practice dealing with African colonialism and its ramifications in Africa and Europe use the term shared heritage in mainly two respects (Vanhee, 2016, p.6): The first is in reference to cultural property of colonial origin in African countries. These are buildings, monuments, and sites that were originally designed by metropolitan architects but are now appropriated by post-colonial users. The second, conversely, is in reference to cultural property that was created by Africans and collected by Europeans. This critical museum discourse also includes human remains that are now in European museum collections. Both, buildings of European origin in Africa and ethnographic objects of African origin in Europe, are called shared heritage because people feel that they say something about Africa as well as about Europe (Vanhee, 2016, p.6).

The quest for a shared heritage theory and practice can be grounded in the *heritage for sustainable human development* paradigm as articulated in the *Cottbus Declaration* of 2012 and a number of subsequent publications (Albert, 2015; Albert et al., 2013). This paradigm advocates a critical pragmatism, which integrates two preceding theoretical approaches, the *Institutionalized Heritage Discourse* and *Critical Heritage Studies*. While the institutionalized UNESCO framework aims at the pragmatic identification, classification, and conservation of global heritage resources (UNESCO, 1972, 2003), Critical Heritage Studies is an ideological critique of this institutionalization that exposes its underlying conceptual biases and asymmetrical power relations (Smith, 2006). The above-named readings of shared heritage mirror this integration of structural-pragmatist with critical-constructivist approaches towards a transformative practice driven by community-based actors.

However, the theoretical underpinnings of the presented readings of shared heritage and implications for their integration seem to be in an early stage of development and thus require further substantiation. The investigated case of Iringa bears references to all of them. While the articulation and interpretation of its historical perspectives is a meaningful addition to the global heritage archive, which obviously touches on the common history between Tanzania and Germany as well as other countries, the third and the fourth reading of shared heritage provide the most constructive conceptual frame for the case analysis. Both are meaningfully supported and integrated through the *Historic Urban Landscape* (HUL) concept. Premised on “the dynamic nature of living cities”, the HUL is regarded as a configuration of material and immaterial elements that refer to the past of different groups and communities and the history of contact between them, seeking the “integration of historic urban area conservation, management, and planning strategies into local development processes” (UNESCO, 2011). The HUL focus ties in well with the idea of shared heritage as a transcultural thinking space emerging from a diverse community of contemporary users with diverging interests in conservation and representation. Furthermore, in a post-colonial setting, the HUL in many cases contains or is even characterised by architectural and memorial remnants from the colonial past whose present interpretation and representation are accompanied by controversies and conflicts. This paper is mainly an evaluation of such colonial remnants in the Iringa HUL, which also brought forward references to the debate on displaced cultural property and human remains.

In terms of methodology, the paper was inspired by Setha Low’s (2016) *ethnography of space and place*. Low’s (2016, p. 36) approach lends itself to utilizing ethnography in heritage studies and linking it with other fields concerned with space, place, and territory – such as urban studies and architecture. Low (2016, p. 68) supposes that space is socially constructed through structures of race, class, and gender, and transformations and contestations of space occur through people’s interactions, memories, and feelings. Embodied by the people inhabiting them, spaces have intersecting “trajectories” of their social construction (Low, 2016, p. 149–150). The concept serves to access the trajectories of the Historic Urban Landscape of Iringa with its contestations and examine historical sites and material objects in relation to people, stories, and conflicts through various data sources, including life story interviews, observations, and visitor testimonies. Moreover, assessing shared heritage touches on the relationship between heritage and history. According to Lowenthal (1998, p. x), investigating history as heritage work is not an inquiry into the past aiming to know what actually happened, but rather borrowing from historical inquiry to enliven historical study and interpretation. The paper implements this methodological notion by complementing ethnographic approaches with conventional historical inquiry into written sources, original diaries from past protagonists, and archive documents.

11.3 Colonial History as Shared Heritage

Iringa is particularly known for the history of the rise and fall of the Hehe chiefdom in the course of the booming slave and ivory trade during the second half of the nineteenth century. As a stronghold of anti-colonial resistance during the Hehe wars from 1891 to 1898, Iringa also played a prominent role in the history of German East Africa. In this section, I unfold this history through the entangled perspectives of two different social groups who contributed to building up Iringa Town and Region.

The indigenous perspective is represented in the story of Mpangile Wangimbo, which is set at the crossroads between Iringa's old days as a powerful chiefdom and a new era of colonial administration (Küver, 2021a). Mpangile is born around 1870 (Nigmann, 1908, p. 20) during the tribal wars marking the rise of the Hehe chiefdom under his father, Chief Munyigumba. During the reign of his famous older brother, Chief Mkwawa, he becomes a Hehe warrior and fights in the war of resistance against the Germans during the early 1890s. In an effort to "divide and rule", the Germans try to harness Mpangile's popularity to undermine Mkwawa's influence and install him as "native chief" in the newly established Iringa Town on Christmas Day 1896. Only 2 months later, they publicly execute him at the gallows, based on allegations that he was aiding his fugitive brother Mkwawa in the anti-colonial resistance. In the context of the current shared heritage discourse, Mpangile's story specifically touches on current negotiations about the provenance and possible restitution of cultural property and human remains between Tanzania and Germany. Archival records show that Mpangile's head was taken to and kept in the *Museum for Völkerkunde* in Berlin (Brockmeyer et al., 2020, p.129–130). It is, therefore, part of the prominent "Hehe case" that also includes the skull of his brother Mkwawa, which was restituted under British administration in 1954, and the skull and bones of their father Chief Munyigumba, which German records claim were removed from the gravesite in Iringa during the war (Brockmeyer et al., 2020, p.129–130).

The second perspective is that of what is remembered of the *Schutztruppe* in Iringa, which I trace through the story of the Hans Poppe family. The so-called 'protection troops' were deployed in Iringa in the course of the war against Mkwawa and consisted of German officers and African soldiers, the *Askari*. The story begins with German officer Max Poppe coming to Iringa as a *Schutztruppe* officer during the First World War. In Iringa, he engages in a relationship with the daughter of one of his *Askari* comrades, and his son Hans is born and grows up with his mother's family in Iringa. Hans serves in the British and independent Tanzanian military police before he is killed in a border clash with Idi Amin's Ugandan forces in 1971. Two of his sons follow in his footsteps and become pilots in the Tanzanian military. Instead of serving their government, they use their position in a failed coup d'état against president Nyerere in the early 80s and are sent to prison (Mwakikagile, 2010, p. 693–690). After being pardoned a decade later, they become wealthy businesspeople after the country's shift towards a capitalist economy during the 1990s.

11.4 Shared Heritage Sites and the Community

The historical dynamics of colonialism have left various tangible and intangible traces throughout Iringa Town and Region. The examination of three prominent aspects of this shared heritage from the fahari yetu case serves as a lens to magnify the entanglement of the historical trajectories introduced above.

11.4.1 *Iringa Boma – The Building*

The term “shared heritage” was first commonly used in the context of architectural heritage (Vanhee, 2016, p. 6). Accordingly, a notable number of German colonial buildings and monuments are listed in Tanzania’s national cultural register (Kamamba, 2017, p. 320). One among these buildings is the old German hospital in Iringa, whose historical restoration and re-opening as *Iringa Boma – Regional Museum and Cultural Centre* has been the central measure of the fahari yetu programme. The building was designed by the German administration in 1914 and built by Askari soldiers just before the outbreak of WWI, designed to serve as a hospital for the growing European population in Iringa (Tanzania National Archives, G7/191, n.d.). After the war, the British colonial government made it the regional administrative headquarters, a use that was kept by the Tanzanian government after the country’s independence. fahari yetu took over the building from the District Commissioner in 2014 and performed restoration works from 2015 to 2016 before re-opening it in June 2016 (Fig. 11.1).

Some people have the notion that – because this is a German building – what is presented inside must be the German version of the history. That is why they are reluctant to embrace the Boma. (Deborah, exhibition coordinator, personal interview in December 2018)

The critical question was how the local community would receive the new Boma museum and cultural centre. Laurajane Smith (2006, p. 81) asserted that all heritage is uncomfortable to someone and is thus necessarily contested. Applied to the Boma, we have observed that restoring the building has brought a submerged



Fig. 11.1 Iringa Boma during British administration (Troll, 1934, left), after restoration in 2016 (right). (Note. Photograph (right) by fahari yetu Tanzania. Printed with permission)

post-colonial consciousness back to the surface. In his comparative investigation of coastal Swahili townscapes, Heathcott (2013, p. 22) employs the term *instabilities of heritage* to describe how dynamics of social inequality can undermine the economic development potential of historic preservation by creating resentment in the community against perceived nostalgia of colonial history. Applied to the case of Iringa, the exposition of the Boma through restoration brought the buildings' colonial association back into public awareness, and it was resented by parts of the community as an effort of reconstructing colonial nostalgia for tourist consumption. The former Boma exhibition coordinator remembers a visitor who contrived a conspiracy theory according to which the Boma restoration was to be seen as an attempt of the Germans to re-colonize the Hehe land. Whether or not this is a rare individual view, local people have repeatedly expressed the notion that the Boma is a German place until today and that we had restored something German with value for European foreigners.

As a consequence, we had to find and engage in the right efforts to make the people own the place. Such measures included advertising the conference room, which has become a popular venue for wedding committee meetings among the long-established population of Iringa; promoting the Boma Café, which has become a meeting point for the local chapter of the ruling political party in Tanzania; developing upstairs workshop and office facilities, which have drawn in various cultural artisan groups and local businesses; and convening cultural events and art exhibitions, which have garnered a following among musicians, artists, and expatriates. All these activities and services brought community actors with their interests to embrace and appropriate the space, and Iringa Boma now provides a safe and inclusive public space that offers educational, recreational, and business opportunities for various local constituencies.

11.4.2 *The Exhibition*

The exhibition consists of an introductory section and five thematic rooms, each with a specific theme: “Iringa history”, “Iringa worship and healing”, “Iringa culture and ethnography”, “interactive display”, and “explore Iringa Region”. In the community perception of the exhibition, the above-mentioned instabilities of heritage became evident. Most notably, community members contested the way colonial history and anti-colonial resistance were narrated in Room 1:

My feeling was that the exhibition avoids to show the true nature of the colonial relationship. On some panels, it sounds like it was a partnership between the Hehe and the Germans. But colonialism was never a partnership but always a forced and unlawful appropriation of land and people. Even if it was a long time ago, the people cannot honestly leave that experience of violent oppression and humiliation behind and be OK with it. (Clara, exhibition visitor, personal interview in August 2020)

Clara's concern about not sensitively reflecting the injustice and brutality of the colonial relationship in the exhibition reminds us that shared heritage remains a highly contested idea. Indeed, many voices speaking from the side of the former

colonized – in the academic discourse and beyond – are rejecting the term “shared” in relation to colonial history and heritage. Mirroring the partnership statement in particular, van Beurden (2018) admonishes that the use of the seemingly neutral “shared heritage” suggests an equilibrium that pre-emptively erases the context of inequality in which cultural exchange took place in the colonial system. Yvonne Owuor (2020) vividly raises the question of how to deal with the brutality experienced by Africans in the course of colonial history as a shared experience and forcefully dismisses the shared history concept as yet another neo-colonial instrument of cultural appropriation through levelling historical power asymmetries.

Instabilities of heritage also surfaced in the local community perception of the Boma museum in general. First of all, we realized that many people in the community did not share the European notion of a museum as an exhibition of things from the past. Second, most of those who were actually aware of the idea seemed to understand the museum exhibition as a European concept, as a place meant for foreigners and tourists. Luntumbue (2015, p. 17; as cited in Vanhee, 2016, p. 6) rejects the idea that the colonial past would constitute a shared history, reminding us that history is always written from a specific viewpoint. His reminder allows us to interpret the community understanding as a perception of the museum writing history and culture from a colonial point of view, which excludes the local perspective.

Our approach to counter the local perception was to actively involve the indigenous community in exhibition design. In the course of the Coronavirus outbreak in Tanzania in spring 2020, the Boma launched a workshop series on traditional healing and the use of medicinal plants, which were conducted by well-known local healers. The performative workshops successfully broke with the Eurocentric exhibition concept and strengthened the museum’s acceptance within the community. The same applies to a new exhibit showcasing folktales from the rural communities of Iringa Region, which was under installation by the time of writing this paper.

11.4.3 Reaching Out into the Cityscape

Another ongoing fahari yetu key activity is the integration of the Boma with the surrounding Historic Urban Landscape through the development of an international standard history trail. The trail development includes the restoration and enhancement of specific target sites. The target sites include the remaining building structures of the old German military station, which was built as the first building of Iringa Town in 1896. Today, the dilapidated main building serves as a storage facility for the Iringa central police, and the surrounding barracks accommodate police officers with their families. fahari yetu has proposed to restore and refurnish parts of the property as a historical hotel and guesthouse.

In front of the military station stands the Maji Maji Memorial. The Maji Maji war was an armed rebellion of a united front of different ethnic groups against German colonial rule in the south-eastern part of German East Africa from 1905 to 1907. The memorial was erected by the German station commander after the war to honour the Askari soldiers from Iringa who fell in the fight against the Maji Maji

rebels. Despite being right there in the city centre for more than a hundred years, most people in the community apparently do not know its meaning. In order to raise awareness, fahari yetu renovated the monument in cooperation with the central police in summer 2021. Whether this measure will prove successful or not, the question of whose history the monument tells remains. Is it German heritage because it was built by the German colonial administration? Is it Askari heritage because it commemorates fallen Askari soldiers with their names and ethnic origin? Or is it anti-colonial resistance heritage because it reminds us of the lethal fight against the oppressors? The example shows the lines we have to think along when we imagine shared heritage, that it is shared from ambivalent and diverse perspectives.

Located just across from the memorial is the old market, which was built by the Germans in the early 1900s as an effort of relocating the commercial centre of Iringa Region to the new German town settlement. The original building structure is still intact yet obscured on all sides with iron sheet-covered shop frame constructions. For the case of the market in the Old Stone Town of Zanzibar – a similar example in which a market originally engineered by colonial forces was re-designed in a makeshift fashion after independence – Heathcott (2013, p. 24–25) observes how conservation officials decry the ramshackle additions and emphasize architectural form over social utility and human creativity. Similarly, my own as well as my colleagues' ideas for rehabilitating the market in Iringa envisage its dismantling to restore the visibility of the colonial structure. At the same time, we are well aware that the makeshift additions serve the livelihoods of many shop-owners and petty business operators, and any intervention with this business microcosm would stir up serious contention and conflict.

Heathcott (2013, p. 35) proposes the concept of *investment parity* to help reconcile such conflict of interest. Investment parity advocates a linked development process where investments in restoring “historic” neighbourhoods are matched by similar investments in “non-historic”, especially low-income neighbourhoods. The idea was reflected in our discussions with local government officials who emphasized that heritage conservation projects should ensure immediate socio-economic counter value. In the case of the military station, replacing the run-down garrison barracks with the construction of a modern residence building could create such value and give the conservation positive PR in the local community. For the case of the market, a similar replacement with a new building to accommodate the petty traders living off the makeshift additions was suggested (Fig. 11.2).

Yet, from the local perspective, the question of why colonial sites should be preserved remains. How can the people be brought on board in conserving this historical landscape? fahari yetu's response is to ensure investment parity through connecting the urban history trail with Chief Mkwawa's late nineteenth century Hehe capital in Kalenga, by then an industrious town fortified by an impressive stone wall. Today there is only a village left, home to the Mkwawa memorial museum in which the famous skull of the Chief is displayed since its restitution in 1954. The reconstruction of a part of the old stone fort wall would support the museum in evoking Kalenga's pre-colonial glory. Such reconstruction would connect well with the restoration of the German military station in town, both representing political and military power and its transformation over time.



Fig. 11.2 Old market in 1908 (upper row left) and 2019 (upper row right), inside the market in 2016 (lower row left and right). (*Note.* Photograph upper row left, by Manfred Baumann. Printed with permission. Photographs lower row left and right, by fahari yetu Tanzania. Printed with permission)

11.5 Concluding Reflection – Towards a Shared Historic Urban Landscape

First of all, the case has shown that the controversy around the shared heritage concept is yet to be resolved. The disempowerment and dispossession of the colonized cannot be undone by branding what happened “shared history” (Vanhee, 2016, p. 7). But the applied conservation and representation of buildings and sites can signify that disempowerment and dispossession as integral parts of their history. An appropriate representation can only be realized by putting in place modes of inclusive community participation, modes that require full participation in both the creative process and decision making (Vanhee, 2016, p.7.). Under this prerequisite, shared heritage can become a useful tool of sensitive confrontation with the past and forge a shared understanding from which to investigate the post-colonial urban landscape with its diverse perspectives.

The production of shared heritage requires a careful examination of the conditions in which a building or site was created and how its use and meaning transformed over time, with consideration given to the agency of all those involved and implicated. The highlighted sites and representations all show that colonial history carries ambiguous connotations across different social constituencies and that its

memory cannot easily be harnessed in a collective gaze. Neither should a collective gaze be the aim, but rather the multivocal articulation of different perspectives, whether it be historical narratives and experiences, representations in museum exhibitions, interpretations and usage options surrounding historical sites, or associations of local culture with physical remnants of colonialism. From this point of view, shared heritage serves as a viable concept and practice to grapple with the colonial legacy vested in the Historic Urban Landscape, to embrace the ambiguity and multivocality of this legacy, and to transcend the common notion of exclusive ownership of heritage along the colonial divide. It can thus be regarded as an element of a transformative practice, which addresses the injustice of the colonial past but at the same time uses the discursive energy provided by these conflicts to support the cultural, social, and economic development of communities.

Of course, the results of this paper call for further research on shared heritage as an evolving practice. The case has shown that there is a multitude of voices beyond the colonizer and the colonized emanating from shared heritage, a diverse range of perspectives further research should strive to explore in full. It has also become evident that the Historic Urban Landscape of Iringa is being haunted by expatriated cultural collections and human remains, calling for joint provenance research, restitution, and exhibition projects. Lastly, further research needs to tackle the issue of positionality in developing the concept of shared heritage, addressing such questions as who is comfortable speaking of shared heritage and why and how we can utilize these positions in creating sustainable development output from heritage.

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