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**Post-colonial African heritage archivalisms and  
the politics of dependent stewardship**

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## **Post-colonial African heritage archivalisms and the politics of dependent stewardship**

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This paper proposes to extend the category of archive to take in the range of institutions, programmes and activities that have emerged in different parts of the African continent in the name of conservation and heritage. By utilising and deploying the notions of archivalisms and archivalities to refer to meta-archival practices and discourses, the paper analyses different manifestations of African heritage - listing, inventories, conservation management planning and heritage nominations (akin to collections management) - and how these are embedded in an international network of conservation institutions and professional bodies. Considered together these have come to constitute an order of knowledge through which an unequal division of labour has been created and reproduced between technicians and thinkers, and where the work of African heritage professionals has been framed as practical and technical as opposed to intellectual.

The influence of ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) and ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) in particular has seen the emergence of African heritage bodies and initiatives such as EPA (Ecole du Patrimoine Africain), CHDA (Centre for Heritage Development in Africa), Africa 2009 and the African World Heritage Fund, through which increased access to heritage training has sought to improve the work of heritage site conservation and to enlarge the number of African world heritage site nominations. The work of these bodies has also seen the technical skills of heritage site preparation, listing and nominations incorporated into an 'empire of knowledge' and a framework of development co-operation within which the scope for critical heritage approaches beyond celebration is severely limited.

Alongside this, in a world after colonialism, as questions begin to be asked about the future of museum collections, where and by whom they are held, and about the ethics of their histories of collection, calls for repatriation are counterposed by assertions by some European museum of their 'universal' status. This debate, of course, is one about the assertion of the nation in the form of national museums and national collections, and belongs to the association of archives, museum collections

and heritage sites with conceptions of the nation. These heritage archivalisms occur within the limited frameworks of stewardship and preservation, which belong to the discourse of the nation.

Notwithstanding these dominant frames, there are some signs that postcolonial approaches to heritage and archive have begun to transcend stewardship and pose epistemological questions about histories of classification. The deaccessioning and return of African human remains collections from museums in Europe and Africa have also started to pose questions about the legitimacy of museums as collecting institutions. At the same time, new post-collecting approaches to museums have also emerged, through which museums have been reconfigured as spaces of knowledge transaction and exchange. These new archivalisms suggest that a postcolonial museum and heritage practice need not be driven by stewardship, celebration and the nation.