

In Whose Place? Confronting Vestiges of Colonialism and Apartheid

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Introduction

Most African countries have been moving relatively slowly since independence from colonial rule in terms of dismantling the legacies of colonial domination. They remain a constant reminder of the magnitude of oppression that Africans across the continent had to endure. The fundamental question remains: Which of the legacies of colonialism are worth preserving and why? That also brings into question the historical narratives that should be embraced as part of nation-building and the ones to be negated. The most challenging aspect is the historiography in postcolonial Africa. Ideally, all histories should be captured objectively regardless of their status and impact on broader society. The contestation of historical narratives should be navigated with extreme caution to prevent historical bias and subjectivity. The book, therefore, seeks to unravel such dichotomies. It highlights the roles that historians, heritage practitioners, anthropologists, and political activists should play in helping the nation re-position itself and map its vision for the future. History education becomes a key driver in shaping discourses and determining the goals pursued in the postcolonial dispensation. The book deals specifically with the remnants and relics of colonialism that continue to permeate our environmental spaces. The current debates, particularly in South Africa, are centred around preserving colonial infrastructure to embrace diversity, while its removal is perceived as promoting political expediency.

Analysis and Critique

The cover and design of the book are eye-catching. It is attractive to a reading audience. The title has been spelt out and quite intriguing. It leads a reader to navigate the vestiges of colonialism and apartheid in a South African context. It also provides a summary on the cover page of the key aspects and issues to be tackled in the book's chapters. The literary style is user-friendly. It enables the reader to quickly grasp the essence of the fundamental problems that the editors seek to address. Although it exhibits a rich vocabulary and good choice of words, it is written in a simple language that falls within acceptable levels of intellectual capacity. However, it has a limiting factor in that only highly learned, intellectually intelligent people can fully grasp the narratives that the scholars in the book drive. It leaves little room for the uneducated, creating a disjuncture between the educated and ignorant people in broader society.

The chapters have been well-structured and carefully woven together to drive the narrative coherently.

Chapter 1 deals with the collapse of infrastructure, particularly in the city of Durban, as a direct consequence of the government's reluctance to preserve national heritage sites throughout the country. It questions the level of historical consciousness among South African citizens and the extent to which people are educated in the ideals of the sentimental values of monuments and heritage sites in our country. The editors lament the politics of ownership, which sometimes is not congruent with the historical underpinnings. Furthermore, debate platforms have thus been created to correct distorted histories. It has translated into the reclaiming of some buildings within the city as community spaces.

Chapter 2 navigates the resilience of communities in fighting the scourge of forced removals in South Africa. It is part of an ongoing campaign by various communities across the country's nine provinces to reclaim what they believe is rightfully theirs. Historian Ali Khangela Hlongwane took it upon himself to dig for historical evidence to validate these claims. Fietas Museum and Heritage Trail in Johannesburg provided oral testimonies and archival material. In this chapter, the writers illustrate the magnitude of unresolved histories and the importance of historical evidence to appropriate historical narratives.

Chapter 3 looks at the removal of colonial legacies from public spaces. The fortress of Cacheu in Guinea-Bissau and the Portuguese colonial legacy are brought into sharp focus. In this chapter, the scholars interrogate the logic behind the removal of colonial statues after independence. In South Africa, most of the statues associated with colonialism were removed from public spaces. However, no clear-cut direction regarding the history ideal for

postcolonial Africa exists. The politicisation of history can impose limitations and partiality on the entire historiography. Including such concerns in this chapter would have been more welcome.

Chapter 4 laments the demolition of derelict buildings within the city of Johannesburg. These buildings should be preserved as part of our heritage and historical legacies. In the main, this chapter navigates the conflict between preservation and urban development.

All chapters in this volume lament the preservation of colonial infrastructure throughout the country and the demolition of buildings and community structures that bear historical significance.

Recommendations and conclusion

The book provides a tapestry of narratives that seek to interrogate the past to challenge motives in the present. It further probes the extent of colonial impositions on African people since independence. The colonial legacies continue to linger on in our society. Therefore, the book becomes a valuable tool and a guiding light regarding our history and future possibilities. The authors are highly commended for sharing incisive accounts of the vestiges of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa.

Finally, in light of the extensive coverage of pertinent issues around history and heritage, this book is recommended to all South African citizens and the entire global community seeking critical engagement with unresolved histories in a postcolonial era.