

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Introduction: MoHoA guest editorial

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Abstract

This special edition of *Curator on Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene* draws on the 2nd International MoHoA conference of the same title held from October 26 to 28, 2022, at The Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London (UK), in partnership with the University of Liverpool's School of Architecture. As a global collaborative established in 2020, MoHoA is concerned with decentring the theory and practice of modern heritage and joins the wider global effort to decolonize institutional practices that engage with the research, collection, valorization, or transformation of material culture associated with our collective recent past—from museum curators and creative practitioners to academics, and the built environment professions. Founded on the fact that our precarious present reflects an inequitable past and a perilous future, MoHoA asserts that modern heritage—inextricably bound as it is to Western notions of progress, modernization, and modernity—conceptually, practically, and as artifact, uniquely and disproportionately privileges western, invariably white, experiences and values. Unlike other kinds or classifications of heritage, modern heritage also reflects the existential paradox central to MoHoA whereby the cultural legacies of our recent past are simultaneously of modernity and yet threatened by its consequences. Through its workshops, conferences, publications, and website, MoHoA provides a platform for sharing knowledge, methods, and approaches that challenge the modernist canon and support the construction of new epistemologies centered not on race, color, or ethnicity but on humankind and our self-inflicted precarious position on this planet. This epistemic and canonical reconfiguration

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has important implications for museums and heritage practice globally as the reconstitution of modern heritage and its associated modes of knowledge production and registers will direct the composition of collections, lists, and archives away from mythologizing hegemonic Western epistemic traditions, to reflect instead decentred planetary experiences, whether human or non-human. An important outcome of this collective and restitutive endeavor is the publication of *The Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage*, an equitable and decentering policy proposal presented to UNESCO and its advisory bodies in 2023.

KEYWORDS

Anthropocene, decentering, decoloniality, heritage, modern heritage, modernity

MODERN HERITAGE IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

This (second) special issue of *Curator: The Museum Journal* by the international collaborative MoHoA (Modern Heritage of Africa/Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene), draws from a critical selection of the 54 papers presented at the 2nd International MoHoA Conference *Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene*, held on October 26–28, 2022, and hosted by The Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, in partnership with the University of Liverpool's School of Architecture. The hybrid conference expanded MoHoA's aim of encouraging equitable approaches to modern heritage as an urgent and essential response to an age of planetary crises whose roots are entangled with centuries-old cultures of extraction, exploitation, and domination. By recognizing that our precarious present reflects an inequitable past and a perilous future, this conference not only emphasized the interconnection between these processes and the dawn of the Anthropocene but also acknowledged the existential paradox that the cultural legacies of our recent past are simultaneously of modernity and yet threatened by its consequences. This paradox of modern heritage was made explicit in the call for papers, which asked participants to recognize and respond to the planetary crises experienced, albeit unevenly and unequally, by all living beings.

MoHoA's focus on decentering the theory and practice of modern heritage joins the wider global effort to decolonize institutional practices that engage with the research, collection, valorization, or transformation of material culture associated with our collective recent past—from museum curators and creative practitioners to academics and the full spectrum of built environment professions. MoHoA is founded on the fact that modern heritage—inextricably bound as it is to Western notions of progress, modernization, and modernity—conceptually, practically, and as artifact, uniquely and disproportionately privileges Western, invariably white, experiences and values. Indeed, whiteness itself, as W.E.B. Du Bois noted more than a century ago, is “a very modern thing, a matter of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,” that created the “modern white man,” historically unrivaled for taking “himself and his own perfectness with such disconcerting seriousness” (Du Bois, 1920, 30–35). Cast in the same mold, modern heritage, more than any other kind or classification of heritage, reflects, to borrow from the philosopher and keynote speaker at an early MoHoA workshop, Professor Achille Mbembe, “a Eurocentric canon ... a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production” (Mbembe, 2015). The Anthropocene, as many scholars have

insisted, is inextricably bound to these historical inequities. While it frames a critical moment of the contemporary, the inequities, injustices, continued racism, and rise of neo-conservatism centered on “whiteness” are equally, if not critical, elements that comprise the biosphere (Haraway, 2016; Luke, 2020; Maslin, 2023; Satgar, 2019; Zylinska, 2018).

MoHoA's intention is to provide a platform for sharing experiences, knowledge, methods, and approaches that challenge this canon and, in light of our common precarity in the Anthropocene, support the construction of new epistemologies centered not on race, color, or ethnicity but on our “common humanity and a common destiny” (Du Bois, 2018, 138). This epistemic and canonical reconfiguration has important implications for museums and heritage practice as the reconstitution of modern heritage registers will direct the composition of collections, lists, and archives away from mythologizing hegemonic Western epistemic traditions, to instead reflect decentred planetary experiences, whether human or non-human. Under these circumstances, argues Mbembe, the museum “properly understood is not a dumping place. It is not a place where we recycle history's waste. It is first and foremost an epistemic space” (Mbembe, 2015).

This edition of *Curator* builds on an earlier special edition (Vawda & Denison, 2022a) following MoHoA's first conference—*Modern Heritage of Africa*—hosted by the University of Cape Town from September 22 to 24, 2021. Centring Africa and its diaspora was an important initial phase in which participants argued strongly for a reappraisal of the continent's contribution to modern heritage and a fundamental re-evaluation of universal assumptions based on definitions, values, and experiences derived largely from Europe and North America. *Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene* maintained this conceptual framework based on the key themes of decentring, decolonizing, and reframing, while casting them on a planetary scale.

Linking inequitable pasts to planetary futures and exposing the lasting and debilitating consequences of the harmful legacies of this association, is one of MoHoA's broad aims, pursued in this conference by inviting participants to make these links through research from around the world. The response was overwhelming, with contributions from diverse territories invariably but not exclusively geographically and intellectually beyond the historical gaze of what the author, educator, and theorist, bell hooks, calls dominator cultures. Providing a space in which encounters with modernity from and very often between diverse nations such as to name just a few, South Africa, Algeria, Iran, Israel, India, Singapore, Palestine, Senegal, Jordan, United Kingdom, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chile, Ireland, Italy, Cote D'Ivoire, Morocco, Uzbekistan, and China, can all contribute is testament to the intellectual appetite for new ways of thinking within and beyond the modern in a planetary age. As Mbembe explains in the essay *Planetary Entanglements*, “Africa is now not only a planetary question, but also and more specifically a Chinese question” (Mbembe, 2019, 38). The Anthropocene demands us to think between and beyond conventional categorizations of the modern forged by Eurocentrism, fuelled by racism and other dominator practices, and defined by inequitable histories, and instead draw connections across time and space in pursuit of a truly post-modern condition characterized by a common or shared sense of human, non-human, and post-human destiny. “Surviving the Anthropocene,” argues the philosopher, Professor Yuk Hui, “will demand reflection upon – and transformation of – the practices inherited from the modern, in order to overcome modernity itself” (Hui, 2016). Transcending modernity, as Denison has argued elsewhere, is an existential imperative for our species and rests on us attaining a planetary consciousness, which “will mark the advent of a genuine state of post-modernity” (Denison, 2018, 40).

The planetary frame is vital because it is not only the scale at which the consequences of human actions that define the modern age are now felt by all living beings, but it is also increasingly the conceptual context through which modernity is experienced by humans. Over the last century, modernity and its impacts have outpaced our conceptualization of these forces,

consistently underestimating their import in the post-imperial era with inadequate framings that began at the national level and progressed through the international to arrive at the global. One of the reasons the Anthropocene is helpful as a conceptual formulation, beyond its acceptance as a geological fact, is that it impels us to think and act at a scale, temporally, socially, morally, geographically, geologically, and ecologically, that matches our planetary experience in the twenty-first century and beyond. Many contest this position, from geologists to cultural theorists. Donna Haraway's *Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene* (2016) or Joanna Zylińska's *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse* (2018), for example, provide excellent critiques of the Anthropocene or Anthropocenic thinking. However, as Professor Mark Maslin (2023) argues in *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* (2018), the “key concept of the Anthropocene is to put [climate change, the biodiversity crisis, the pollution crisis] all together and say humans have a huge impact on the earth ... that holistic approach then allows you to say: ‘What do we do about it?’” As Zylińska (2018, p.44) asks, “if unbridled progress is no longer an option, what kinds of coexistences and collaborations do we want to create in its aftermath?” This goes to the heart of MoHoA's collaborative agenda. Irrespective of one's personal or disciplinary leanings or the choice of terms that best reflect this position, what is at stake here is the common understanding and urgent need to decentre humans (especially those representing historic privilege and dominant cultures) from the past, present, and future of our planetary existence.

Fortunately, there are few fields of intellectual enquiry expanding as rapidly today as those concerned with the confluence of historical inequities responsible for our present planetary precarity. Whether from a South African view such as Vishwas Satgar's *Seven Theses on Radical Non-Racialism, the Climate Crisis, and Deep Just Transitions: From the National Question to the Eco-cide Question* (2019) or Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), MoHoA joins a planetary movement for change. One of the most prominent and consistent voices in this change process has been Professor Dipesh Chakrabarty, from his early work with *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000) to his most recent book *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021), Chakrabarty, like Gosh, Satgar, and others, points out that humankind's arrival at this point of the Anthropocene is the embodiment and consequences of industrial modernity, primarily based on fossil fuels, which paradoxically can only be sustained by the continued pursuit of inequitable and unsustainable practices.

Chakrabarty was a keynote speaker at the MoHoA workshop *Conceptualising Modern Heritage of Africa* (available online at www.mohoa.org) on April 26, 2021, underscored the importance of the planetary in his book, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. Drawing attention to a growing planetary awareness arising through the confluence of “the current pandemic, the rise of authoritarian, racist, and xenophobic regimes across the globe, and discussions of renewable energy, fossil fuels, climate change, extreme weather events, water shortages, loss of biodiversity, the Anthropocene, and so on,” he argues that “the planet, however, dimly sensed, is emerging as a matter of deep human concern alongside our more familiar apprehensions about capitalism, injustice, and inequality” (Chakrabarty, 2021, 1).

Both Chakrabarty and Mbembe have been vital contributors to MoHoA not only for their experience and intellectual direction but also as role models in embracing the planetary in their scholarly practice and as a way of demonstrating the importance of connecting deep and inequitable histories with the need for decentred and decolonized futures. *Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene* and its forerunner *Modern Heritage of Africa* share these concerns in calling for new approaches to the past and the present that might inspire more equitable, just, and sustaining futures not just for modern heritage, but also for all research and practice concerned with the recent past. As this collection of papers attests, participants rose to the occasion.

Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene takes the position that the modern and modernity are intimately entwined with the rise of global interconnections that extend beyond the emergence

of the European colonial project and the resulting order marked by globalization. Forged in the violence that “inaugurated an unprecedented era of globality,” this “world-constituting force,” to paraphrase the Ethiopian-American political scientist Getachew (2019, 3), established unequal structures of power that led to the creation of much of what is today considered to be modern heritage, as well as the system by which this heritage is defined, valorized, and safeguarded. The unequal exchanges that characterized the colonial project's domination of others at best condemned the cultures of the colonized as merely traditions and at worst denied them not only a history, but also, consequentially, a right to modernity. It is these unequal structures of power and their legacies that MoHoA seeks to challenge.

The idea that modernity beyond Europe was neither dependent on nor necessarily referential to Europe or its associated colonial projects is not new. What is, however, fast gaining acceptance in receptive academic circles is not merely the plurality and independence of non-Western modernities from those of the West, but the debt that Western modernity owes to others. As the scholar and journalist Howard French claim in *Born in Blackness* (2022), modernity began not in Europe, but in Europe's “first contact,” as David Olusoga (2018) describes these initial encounters, with sub-Saharan Africa in the fifteenth century when Portugal acquired its appetite for West African gold. Other European nations swiftly participated in what became a half-millennium-long imperial project unparalleled in the harm it inflicted, adding cotton, sugar, and other global commodities, most infamously humans as part of a Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which saw the displacement and forced migration of more than 12 million Africans. French asserts that this first contact, and its enduring consequences, are the subject of a collective amnesia that prevents us from understanding how the modern world was really built. “This elision,” he argues, “is merely one of numerous examples in a centuries-long process of diminishment, trivialisation, and erasure of Africans and people of African descent from the story of the modern world” (French, 2022, 2–3).

Many Europeans may deem this farfetched, but to descendants of African slaves or later waves of African migration, the French is merely narrating a common lived experience. The American novelist Toni Morrison (2020, 9) drew from her childhood memories in the mid-twentieth century to remind us how, “unlike starving China ... Africa was a huge and needy homeland to which we were supposed to belong but that none of us had seen or cared to see, inhabited by people with whom we maintained a delicate relationship of mutual ignorance and disdain, and with whom we shared a mythology of passive, traumatized otherness cultivated by textbooks, film, cartoons, and the hostile name-calling children learn to love.” Similar books, sources, and feelings had the same diminishing, trivializing, and erasing effect, to use French's terminology, that motivated Morrison's contemporary and fellow novelist, James Baldwin. In his famous debate against William Buckley at Cambridge University in 1965, Baldwin evoked comparable memories to vent his tempered anger: “When I was growing up, I was taught in American history books that Africa had no history, and neither did I. That I was a savage about whom the less said the better, who had been saved by Europe and brought to America. And, of course, I believed it. I didn't have much choice. Those were the only books there were. Everyone else seemed to agree” (Baldwin, 1965).

The task of countering these historical narratives is at last breaking free of the relatively niche field laid by the likes of W.E.B. du Bois at the start of the last century, and cultivated at the end of it by scholars such as Edward Said and Frantz Fanon. In the twenty-first century, confronting historic privilege has become a mainstream concern of contemporary scholarship, although it will take decades, centuries even, to reverse half a millennium of historiographical inequity. MoHoA partner and co-editor of this special edition, Professor Shahid Vawda reflects on this in writing about the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa. Somewhat contemporaneous with the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, these and other social justice movements share the same deep sense of injustice born out of centuries of subjugation by different kinds of dominator cultures. For Vawda, Rhodes Must Fall “served as a reminder of

the coloniality of the present, and the immense intellectual effort and organizational work required to contextualize the past and the present for the future toward a decolonial democratic practice” (Vawda, 2023, 16).

Decoloniality, as method and practice, is central to MoHoA, but, as many presenters and participants have pointed out at various workshops and conferences, it is not without its problems, not least its association with and derivation from deeply embedded Western structures of knowledge, power, and privilege. As the term has grown in popularity, especially in Western academic discourse where it is ever more and liberally applied, it risks losing its essential meaning and becoming tokenistic or, worse still, a clone of the privileged and dominator cultures and practices it set out to dismantle. Mbembe expressed these fears when drawing on the work of Fanon in response to the fallout from the events surrounding the toppling of the statue of Cecil Rhodes on the campus of the University of Cape Town in 2015. In a public lecture at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) and later published in a paper titled *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive*, Mbembe, like his fellow South African public intellectual, Neville Alexander, forewarned against those determined to “bring white supremacy to its knees” seeing “no contradiction between wanting to topple white supremacy and being anti-racist while succumbing to the sirens of isolationism and national-chauvinism” (Alexander, 1985; Mbembe, 2015).

Most of the papers in this edition confront this question, explicitly or implicitly, by challenging hegemonic assumptions of Western or white epistemic traditions and their universal claims to modernity. Some papers ask different questions to achieve similar ends. Is a decolonial approach effective or even viable for territories, sites, or experiences that were not the subject of coloniality? And what of those that were? Is decoloniality effective in charting new approaches that are genuinely free from colonial practices or is it, by its very nature, constrained by its inherent confinement within a colonial experience, mindset, and framework? Vawda challenges us to confront this paradox: “The question needs to be asked whether the onus of decision-making power and knowledge in the representatives and experts of the post-colony replicates power shifts significantly away from entrenched colonial practices” (Vawda, 2023, p.7). As Mbembe points out, the problem for modern heritage, reflected in curatorial and heritage practices as well as in academia, is not simply the existence of this hegemony, but the way in which it “actively represses anything that actually is articulated, thought and envisioned from outside of these frames” (Mbembe, 2015). This has been a prominent theme in MoHoA, born out of one of its motivating features, namely the conspicuous absence of modern heritage on the UNESCO World Heritage List from outside or not referential to Western contexts, experiences, and territories.

Corresponding historical inequities remain common in Western academia, where the repression of voices from or research related to what the educator and anti-racist scholar Rosemary Campbell-Stephens (2021), refers to as the *global majority*, is routine, albeit increasingly subtle. The legacies of the myth of European ascendance born out of centuries of inequitable knowledge production are deeply ingrained and institutionalized in professional practices associated with our collective pasts. Whether curatorial, cultural, heritage, or built environment, these dominator cultural practices have, and mostly still do, disproportionately privilege European, or more accurately white or global minority, precedents and experiences over those of the global majority. This is certainly still true in Western academia and in heritage practice, where global minority perspectives, values, and interests predominate, whether in the literature offered to students or in other forms of referentiality, or in the treatment of global majority students and faculty and assumptions often made about their experience and knowledge. The privilege afforded to global minority teachers to speak with authority about any context in the world is one seldom afforded to their global majority colleagues, even though, as Mbembe points out, “Human history, by definition, is history beyond whiteness.” In line with MoHoA's agenda, he adds: “Human history is about the future. Whiteness is about

entrapment. Whiteness is at its best when it turns into a myth. It is the most corrosive and the most lethal when it makes us believe that it is everywhere; that everything originates from it and it has no outside” (Mbembe, 2015). For MoHoA, this is why academia is where decolonization must start, decolonization both of the university as an Institution and of knowledge and its production, and where Mbembe argues decolonization's recent global revival has two sides:

The first is a critique of the dominant Eurocentric academic model – the fight against what Latin Americans in particular call ‘epistemic coloniality’, that is, the endless production of theories that are based on European traditions; are produced nearly always by Europeans or Euro-American men who are the only ones accepted as capable of reaching universality; a particular anthropological knowledge, which is a process of knowing about Others – but a process that never fully acknowledges these Others as thinking and knowledge-producing subjects. The second is an attempt at imagining what the alternative to this model could look like.

(Mbembe, 2015)

Increasingly, scholars and practitioners are proposing alternative formulations of the post-colonial for the planetary age. Major figures such as black consciousness activist Steve Biko in South Africa as well as Kenyan literary theorist Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and recently, African decolonial theorist, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012), among many others in the context of Africa, have argued for a decolonization of the mind and of practice. These ideas can be traced further back to Du Bois, Césaire, Senghor, and Fanon, among others, that decolonization is not per se about being anti-European, but about the entanglement of colonialism with its colonial subjects and its consequences. While decentring Europe has been an important first step, recentring perspectives that can allow us to see ourselves clearly, in relation to other humans and non-humans, including systems of unequal colonial imbrications, has been a significant theme in MoHoA's work. It is this entanglement that MoHoA has highlighted and from which it has created a platform for positing alternative heritage futures by inviting, documenting, and disseminating contributions by diverse global audiences, from members of the public to guest speakers, including Sumayya Vally's architectural practice, Ekow Eshun's decentred curatorial practice, David Olusoga's black British historiographies, Rosemary Campbell-Stephens' decolonizing narratives of the global majority, Peter Braithwaite's insurrection and black portraiture, Dipesh Chakrabarty's planetary histories, and Achille Mbembe's Afropolitanism, to name just a few.

Uniting all these collaborators' contributions are their attempts to lay the ground for planetary futures that are truly free from different kinds of referentiality to privileged pasts, whether historically or methodologically. Urging MoHoA to move beyond the African frame and to embrace the planetary, Mbembe spoke in the online workshop, *Conceptualizing Modern Heritage of Africa*, in 2021, of worldliness: “The business of heritage, the real name for heritage, modern or not, has been worldliness; ways of inhabiting one's own time and the world at large, and in the process, learning how to take care of the world at large in one's own times, and learning how to repair our world” (Vawda & Denison, 2022b, 28–31). Mbembe's worldly conceptualization of reparative care aligns with and mirrors MoHoA's planetary framing of an equitable, restitutive, and restorative agenda. Confronting inequitable pasts and how we deal with them in our respective practices are among the great imperatives of our collective present so that we do not allow them to define, inhabit, or inhibit our collective futures. Historiographical inequity and the intergenerational trauma it has sustained can be overcome. There can be an end. As Morrison writes in the context of race, “although historical, race bias is not absolute, inevitable, or immutable. It has a beginning, a life, a history in scholarship, and it can have an end” (2020, 37).

In making this small contribution to the hastening of this end through the much larger restitutive process that is underway, MoHoA's initiatory focus on Africa aligns with French's argument and Morrison and Baldwin's formative experiences, while also underscoring the importance of expanding these within a planetary frame in the manner of Chakrabarty, Ghosh, Mbembe, and many others. Africa, as with most non-European regions and territories, has not only suffered the indignity of being simultaneously denied a history and modernity, but it also risks being denied a future, as the consequences of centuries of extractive, exploitative, and exclusionary processes that fashioned the modern world herald the existential crises associated with the Anthropocene.

It is at the nexus of these expanding global relationships that arise iniquitous, unjust, and unbalanced approaches to modern heritage, which contradict the founding themes of world heritage based on tolerance of difference and the respect for all peoples, their histories, and their cultures, within and between (in the parlance of the UNESCO system) state parties. Indeed, as most articles in this special issue demonstrate, it is not only nation states in which modern heritage must be located, but simultaneously also in a set of complicated uneven linkages from quintessentially local expressions of heritage, to the search for its intimate value and concrete aesthetics displayed in tangible and intangible ways through official, statal, and world heritage. Nothing less than the recognition and institutionalization of these globalized expressions of the local, state and world heritage that valorise the hidden, erased, dissonant, difficult, and often conflictual outcomes of centuries of oppression, exploitation, and injustice, is the sine qua non for modern heritage. In this sense, a shallow inclusivity and tolerance, often the heart of prevailing approaches to heritage, should be challenged and re-configured, not simply as an index of perfunctory consultation by experts, but as a much more complex dialogue and part of a comprehensive approach to modern heritage that has equity, justice, and restitution at its center and as an inalienable objective.

Creating a policy framework through which these ambitious outcomes can be attained has been one of MoHoA's principal objectives from its inception in early 2020. The result is a collective attempt not merely to imagine what an alternative model could look like but to actively propose an alternative formulation of post-colonial heritage policy for a planetary age. Therefore, one of the most significant outputs from these conferences and their associated workshops has been the compilation and publication of *The Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage*, presented to UNESCO and its advisory bodies in 2023. By acknowledging the role of inequitable and unsustainable practices and dominator cultures that gave rise to and often characterized modernity—slavery, imperialism, colonialism, and fossil fuel dependence—*The Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* is a decentring and restitutive framework aimed at identifying and sustaining modern heritage for future generations in a cohesive, inclusive, and equitable way. A copy of *The Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* appears in this journal (pp. XX–XX). A first draft, completed after the Cape Town conference in 2021, was published in the previous MoHoA edition of *Curator*, in August 2022 (Volume 65 (3), 497–508).

Presenters and participants at *Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene* were invited to reflect on and critique the draft *Cape Town Document*, making important contributions before its completion at a post-conference expert meeting hosted by the University of Liverpool's School of Architecture on 29 October 2022. With the support of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Research Networking Grant, MoHoA held a series of additional regional workshops across Africa between April and June 2023 to disseminate MoHoA's activities and to widen and deepen the participation of various stakeholders, from creative practitioners and museum curators to students and members of the public. The first was hosted by Iziko Museums of South Africa in Cape Town, and the University of Cape Town (South Africa), followed by the Swahilipot Heritage Hub (Mombasa), and the National Museums of Kenya, and concluding with the Direction du Patrimoine Culturel (Senegal).

The workshop hosted by the Iziko Museums and University of Cape Town from April 18 to 19, 2023, comprised presentations and representations by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the state-party of South Africa represented by the Department of Sports Arts and Culture, a variety of civic organizations, experts from the Universities of Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Cape Town, Pretoria, Stellenbosch and Western Cape, independent scholars, and MoHoA participants, who attended this hybrid event both in-person and online. Supporting MoHoA's agenda to prioritize young professionals and early career researchers, nine students from the Universities of Cape Town and Pretoria made presentations. One of the highlights of the workshop was an interactive walking tour examining the contributions to Cape Town's development made by various enslaved and indentured peoples. It was directed to raise awareness of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) guidelines, emphasizing the creation of the contemporary urban landscape through the connections made by waves of historic migrations, coloniality, and enforced movements of people, goods, and ideas from many parts of the world, including Brazil, Philippines, China and Japan, and their engagements within and outside different empires. Presentations also highlighted that none of these connections as manifested in Southern Africa can be understood without the acknowledgement and inclusion of intangible aspects of history and heritage. A key recommendation that emerged was that the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention be combined to become a single updated and reformulated World Heritage Convention.

The following month, a 1-day workshop was hosted by the Swahilipot Hub Foundation, Mombasa (Kenya), on May 31, 2023. Designed to strengthen and build research networks across different types of heritage practice in the East Africa region, this workshop also focussed on the youth participation from the city of Mombasa. The research networking workshop followed the first MoHoA workshop in July 2021 and the MONDIACULT 2022 Globinar under the topic "New Heritage Dimensions for the 21st Century," in September 2022. The Globinar was a side event organized by the UN-Habitat UNI metro hub consortium and on the theme of *Heritopolis: Heritage and the Metropolis* during the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development from September 28–30, 2022. Building on these previous collaborative global events, the National Museums of Kenya, Swahilipot Hub Foundation, and Technical University of Mombasa held this 1-day workshop focusing on heritage research with the youth in the city of Mombasa to discuss how the youth interpret and engage with modern heritage within their city and across the wider East African region. The lively and well-attended workshop brought together different practitioners, including academics, artists, and heritage professionals to strengthen existing research networks and build new ones with the aim of supporting and developing current heritage practices and paradigms within the city of Mombasa and the East Africa region. As a result of the workshop, participants and partner organizations are keen to focus on different kinds of research methods and approaches through models like intergenerational forums that can deconstruct knowledge production and place more emphasis on the documentation of modern heritage. The workshop opened new avenues of practice that allow for more research approaches toward showcasing and juxtaposing traditional and modern heritage models and practices.

The third and final workshop was held on July 26, 2023, at the Théodore Monod African Art Museum in Dakar (Senegal) under the theme "Dakar, African City Port: Challenges and Opportunities of the Safeguarding of Traditional and Modern Cultural Heritages." Organized in collaboration with the Directorate of Cultural Heritage of Senegal, the University College of Architecture of Dakar (CUAD), and the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar (UCAD), the research networking event brought together a variety of participants including public actors, architects, students, PhD candidates, as well as representatives from civil society. It was attended by more than 50 participants and widely covered by the local media. The discussions gave an overview of the cultural and maritime heritage of Dakar and the issues and challenges they face. They also highlighted the possibilities of cohabitation between traditional and

modern heritage in the capital associated with its status as a port. The main conclusion that emerged was that there is no boundary between traditional and modern heritage, whether tangible or intangible. Both contributed to forging the image and cultural identity of Dakar and its inhabitants. The event also exposed how much work still needs to be done to raise awareness of the importance of research in preserving this heritage. The discussions have enabled the enrichment of the subject of modern heritage and to mobilize other partners to support the project through a traveling exhibition on the maritime cultural landscape of Dakar organized by the Directorate of Cultural Heritage in early 2024.

A fourth event, a one-day collaborative workshop on June 26, 2023, at The Bartlett School of Architecture, titled *Referentiality: Towards a Decentred Future*, sought to synthesize the themes of the conference and its many associated workshops and to develop them further by linking them with inter- and trans-disciplinary academic research and creative practice. The overarching theme of referentiality was drawn out of the ideas and reflections from the conference and to question the growing ubiquity of the term decoloniality. To avoid the limitations of the (de)colonial frame, referentiality sought to interrogate different approaches to decentring futures by posing the question: “In this time of planetary reckoning – when racial, social, and environmental inequities of multiple pasts inhabit our present and inhibit our future – is it possible to enable change and envisage futures that are not primarily deferential or referential to the structures of power of these pasts, whether colonial, imperial, ethnic, economic, geopolitical, cultural, etc.?”

With invited speakers and special guests, the aim was to build and strengthen research relationships through artistic, curatorial, policymaking, academic, and other forms of creative practice. The event brought together colleagues, students, and practitioners to raise critical awareness of and demonstrate new research approaches to subjects that have endured cultural, historical, and intellectual marginalization, trivialisation, and neglect. Taking aim at the structures of power and privilege that have enabled and sustained the unsustainable, this open-to-the-public research networking event asked invited participants and the audience if it could be possible to imagine and realize futures free from the combined legacies of historic privilege and inequitable power structures. Celebrating creativity that disrupts, deposes, and decentres, the event's central theme of referentiality invited academics and creative practitioners to contemplate approaches free from, or independent of, referential relationships with historical structures of power and instead to center the experience of the disempowered. The event began with a roundtable discussion in which invited academics and researchers shared and debated their work, joined by representatives of the three Africa workshops, each of whom presented summaries of their events and their respective outcomes. Speakers included: Dr Nick Beech, Associate Professor at the School of Social Policy, University of Birmingham; Jhono Bennett, tutor at the Bartlett School of Architecture (BSA); Dr Alistair Cartwright, Research Fellow at the University of Liverpool; Jumana Emil Abboud, PhD candidate at the Slade School of Fine Art (UCL); Shahed Saleem, Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture and Cities, Westminster University; Kay Sedki, Lecturer at the BSA; Vasundhara Sellamuthu, a London based Indian artist; Adefola Toye, PhD candidate at the University of Liverpool; and Doron von Beider, an architect, researcher, and academic teaching at the BSA.

The roundtable was followed by a series of conversations between established creative practitioners in front of a public audience. These included a discussion between the architect and Honorary Professor at the BSA, Sumayya Vally, whose work includes the 2021 Serpentine Pavilion (UK), the Asiat-Darse Project (Belgium), and the Islamic Arts Biennale (Saudi Arabia), and the curator and author Ekow Eshun, curator of *In the Black Fantastic* at the Hayward Gallery (UK) and the forthcoming *The Time is Always Now: Artists Reframe the Black Figure* at the National Portrait Gallery, UK. The conversation was hosted by Professor Amy Kulper, Director of The Bartlett School of Architecture (BSA), and Felicity Atekepe, Director of Practice at the BSA.

Another conversation was between the celebrated dance artist and choreographer Kenneth Olumuyiwa Tharp CBE, and the acclaimed baritone Peter Brathwaite on *Insurrection: A Work In Progress*, which explores the history of resistance in Barbados through Peter's personal story, as well as his ongoing work, *Rediscovering Black Portraiture*. The conversation was chaired by Maxwell Mutanda and Dr Emily Mann, both of the BSA. A further conversation was chaired by Nana Ocran, founder and Editor of People's Stories Project, between Christopher Samuels, a multi-disciplinary artist whose practice is rooted in identity and disability politics, and Valerie Asiimwe Amani, visual artist, and incoming Clarendon Scholar at the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford, on the topic Contemporary and Modern Art Practices Beyond the Canon.

Mirroring these important conversations, was a series of preparatory workshops preceding the conference designed to widen participation. The workshops explored issues of exclusion and inequity, and the way in which researchers and practitioners from different disciplines were approaching heritage in the Anthropocene. Setting an important framework for the conference on May 26, 2022, was Rosemary Campbell-Stephens' *Global Majority: Decolonising Narratives in Education*. Co-hosted by the MA Architecture and Historic Urban Environments program at the BSA and the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion program at The Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment (UCL), Campbell-Stephens explained and emphasized the necessity of a Global Majority Framework at all levels of education. Based on decades of experience as a global leader in education encapsulated in her book, *Educational Leadership and the Global Majority* (2022), Campbell-Stephens advocates a mindset that promotes equitable restoration by challenging individualism, patriarchy, competitiveness, colonialism, linearity, and hierarchy. Arguing for a collective "we" that echoed Mbembe's "worldliness" at the MoHoA workshop the previous year, Campbell-Stephens made a case for the 85% of the world's population she refers to as the global majority, who have largely been excluded from the international and global narratives of what constitutes humanity.

Other preparatory workshops included Decolonising Heritage Futures (June 13, 2022) and Archive and/or Memory of Heritage (June 20, 2022) hosted by the BSA in collaboration with the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies (UCL) and chaired by Dr Lakshmi Rajendran and Maxwell Mutanda respectively. The first workshop focussed on how globally different practices by diverse actors, including institutions, researchers, activities, and citizens, decolonize the understanding, perception, production, and consumption of heritage, opening up new futures through their engagement with decolonial heritage research and practices in the present. The second workshop explored how heritage is archived and/or remembered across varying geographies by divergent actors, including, but not limited to, research institutions and creative enterprise in global majority contexts. It questioned how colonialism, patriarchy, and environmental degradation have influenced what is or has been, preserved, valued, or left out of contemporary urban historiographies.

Drawing on the lessons learned from these workshops, as well as the first MoHoA conference and its preparatory workshops, which included a series of online events with hundreds of participants, and keynotes by Professor Achille Mbembe and Professor Dipesh Chakrabarty, the Call for Papers generated an exceptional response. Due to the demand, presentations were arranged over 3 days in parallel and roundtable sessions, and divided into the following key themes:

- Coloniality and Modernity
- Transcultural Identities and Global Connections
- Memories and Heritage Futures
- Absence and the Archive
- Heritage Narratives
- Sustainability

- Conflict and Traumatic Heritage
- Hidden Histories and Marginal Voices
- Challenging Heritage Policy, Practice, and Pedagogy

These papers were supplemented by invited keynote and plenary speakers, including Rosemary Campbell-Stephens; the filmmaker, broadcaster, and historian, David Olusoga; the historian, educator, and exhibition maker, Professor Samia Henni; and Professor of Biogeomorphology and Heritage Conservation at Oxford University, Heather Viles.

Measured against MoHoA's first conference, *Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene* placed greater emphasis on referentiality and a consideration for what arises from the ruins of colonial modernity, from the promise of post-colonialism, from the threat of planetary crises, and from the challenges of the Anthropocene. Reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of modernity and questioning the concept of heritage in a new geological age precipitated by our species, were overarching themes of most papers. This sense of disciplinary, and often deeply personal, reflection and reflexivity are suggestive of the transitional moment we find ourselves in—a world conscious of the redundancy of past narratives, methods, and approaches, but yet to generate, less still implement, viable alternatives.

Providing a platform in which these concerns can be aired and shared so that alternative conceptual thinking, disciplinary methods, and approaches to heritage research and practice can be realized has been one of MoHoA's principal aims through this conference. It has been a privilege to observe how so many keen minds, young and old, have taken this platform and seized the opportunities it has afforded them. Of the more than 50 papers presented, 18 were selected for publication in this edition of *Curator*. Selection followed a peer-review process based on short versions of the papers submitted for the *Conference Proceedings* (ISBN 978-1-3999-6193-6) (Vawda, S. & Denison, E. (eds) 2023). In line with MoHoA's founding agenda of equity, diversity, and inclusivity, the papers reflect a wide cross-section of themes, expertise, and approaches, from a variety of contributors. In addition to the 14 main papers are four papers by early-career academics and practitioners, which represent the research, and in some cases work-in-progress, of tomorrow's leaders.

A common characteristic in all the papers is an acutely critical eye on the past, a deep sense of concern for the present, and a profound hope in the future. Within this way of thinking, modern heritage in the Anthropocene is seen less in terms of historical periods or styles defined within binary structures of power, and more as a constantly evolving restorative process and epistemological endeavor that transcends the limits of linear and periodised thinking. MoHoA's equitable approach is not to deny history, but to widen, deepen, and enrich it, making it plural and inclusive, encouraging and securing new and equitable structures of thinking beyond merely adding more historical events to an already saturated dominant view of history, heritage, and our collective pasts. To paraphrase the current Deputy Director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, Dr Jyoti Hosagrahar (2005, p.6), from her book, *Indigenous Modernities, Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism*, our task is not to champion the inclusion of global majority experiences and knowledges in existing privileged accounts of modernity constructed over centuries by the global minority, but to institute an entirely new structure and narrative for a planetary age based on an equitable, restitutive, and restorative system of knowledge production.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest related to this article.

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