FOREWORD

While heritage is about the past, namely the traditions and practices passed on from generation to generation, and the locations and material culture that provide identity for communities, nations, and humanity in general, its public recognition and appropriation are very much a matter of the present. With the broadening of the scope of the concept in recent years to include intangible as well as tangible heritage, immaterial as well as material culture, moveable as well as unmovable objects, natural environments and heritage locations of religious interest,¹ it presented itself as a productive, timely, and culturally relevant topic for the African Consortium for Law and Religion Studies, most especially in the context of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is internationally known for its rich cultural heritage, with sites such as Axum, Lalibela, and Gondar proving central to the country's tourist industry. Seven of Ethiopia's heritage sites have received the imprimatur of UNESCO World Heritage status. The question of cultural heritage in Africa more generally, particularly heritage of religious and spiritual interest, needs to be understood at multiple levels, whether local, national, or international. It also necessitates a range of approaches that address its definition, creation, conservation, management, mobilisation and commodification in the African context. Any one or combination of these areas could have legal implications.

As noted by a leading African scholar of world heritage and development in sub-Saharan Africa, Webber Ndoro, African voices and perspectives in shaping heritage legislation and commemoration have frequently been underrepresented and in fact may be at odds with the "precepts of preservation espoused by UNESCO and its expert groups from the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature".² He argues that international experts tend to overemphasise certain aspects of heritage such as architectural monuments, archaeological sites of ancient civilisations, and historic sites, while "failing to recognize others that are important to the African traditional definition of heritage, such as those related to African traditional religions, slavery, or colonial resistance".³ Another contentious issue in his view is the need to reconcile heritage conservation with socio-economic development around resource exploitation. He discusses how the development- and energy-oriented projects that African governments frequently promote "have come into conflict with the prospects for protecting

1 See the UNESCO Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest. Online at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/religious-sacred-heritage>

2 Ndoro W. 2017. "World Heritage and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa", *American Anthropologist* 119(1):129.

3 Ndoro, "World Heritage and Development", 129.

Foreword

and conserving World Heritage Sites".⁴ Other negative factors in the case of Africa include illegal activities, civil unrest, war and deliberate destruction of heritage. There are, however, signs, according to Ndoro, of greater awareness by African state parties of the 1972 World Heritage Convention and more visible actors on World Heritage issues at the local level.

Thus, it was not insignificant that the main conference theme on law, religion and heritage in Africa also included social development. For perceptions and appropriations of sacred histories, artifacts and heritage sites can be instrumental or antithetical to the goals of development and nation-building in Africa. As many of the essays in this volume demonstrate, attention to these questions provides much needed perspectives on the local dynamics of diverse African contexts. They also confirm the merits of the interdisciplinarity afforded by the fields of law and religion studies, with their attention to the sub-fields of education, media, and tourism, for example, where understandings of heritage can be naturalised and commodified.

Several of the chapters also attest to the value of considering the potential of national heritage policy and legislation to affirm or destabilise religion-state and/or interreligious relations in African states. Heritage should be viewed in relation to national, cultural, and global citizenship, as well as freedom of religion or belief. Preservation laws may be instrumental in shaping standards of authenticity, antiquity and aesthetics, which, in turn, may have consequences for the incorporation of religious, especially indigenous, perspectives in African settings. Sacred objects, symbols, and sites can be legitimated or delegitimated through heritagisation processes. As David Chidester has shown for South Africa, the political mobilisation of heritage can provide, sometimes controversial, opportunities for memorialising the past and recognising Africa's indigenous peoples.⁵ The negative influence of more revivalist forms of Christianity and Islam in many parts of contemporary Africa in this regard is also noted by several of the contributors. In sum, this timely publication brings new research and fresh perspectives on the legal and development ramifications of cultural and religious heritage for Africa and its peoples.

Rosalind I.J. Hackett

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4 Ndoro, "World Heritage and Development", 130.

5 Chidester D. 2012. *Wild Religion: Tracking the Sacred in South Africa*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.