



# Anthropology Book Forum

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## Clarifying Heritage

Review by Uzi Baram

*Heritage Keywords: Rhetoric and Redescription in Cultural Heritage*

by Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels & Trinidad Rico (eds)

University Press of Colorado, 2015

Late in the 20th century, David Lowenthal (1996) famously wrote that heritage was everywhere. Americans who had watched the 1964 Broadway musical and popular film *Fiddler on the Roof* and read the 1976 book *Roots* and the follow-up television mini-series were part of that expanding social phenomenon. The intersecting interests in genealogical research and felt connections to the past foster as well as misrepresent history; preoccupation with the past continues to expand as a social and political concern. There is even a tourism focused on heritage. As academics have accelerated their research and publications, the vocabulary has become convoluted, with popular discourse and academic characterizations being intertwined in nonsystematic ways. *Heritage Keywords* addresses the need for consideration of keywords and enlivens that agenda by approaching heritage as rhetoric.

Heritage, as the editors remind us, is about change and requires persuasion. Their concern for rhetoric opens up the terminology and the volume describes fifteen terms in anthropological perspective. The influence of Raymond Williams' 1976 *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* is made explicit by co-editor Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels in a thoughtful introduction explaining the goal of the project. Samuels critiques attempts at codifying terminology, instead advocating for theorizing heritage by playing attention to rhetoric. The introduction offers intellectual pillars for navigating the nuances of the arguments describing complex, and often contested, phenomena, concluding with an optimistic view of the creative capabilities of heritage.

Throughout the volume, the keywords are described through descriptive examples. Chapter 2 offers an ethnographic view from Vientiane, Laos; Anna Karlström explains Buddhist approaches to

open up the most contested of heritage terms: authenticity. Sadly relevant right now, Sigrid Van der Auwera, in chapter 3, reflects on experiences across multiple locations to connect the rhetoric of heritage preservation and armed conflicts to a consideration of civil society. Chapter 4 has an ethnographic presentation of the African and Maya History project in Belize; Alicia Ebbitt McGill provides a thoughtful consideration of the negotiations between citizens and their national government with the discussion of nationalism, education, and tourism illuminating the tensions between national identity and cultural diversity. National and internationalism are the basis for the UNESCO World List, so chapter 5 explores the limitations of cultural property; Alexander Bauer offers the French Regional and American Museum Exchange as a model for collaborations among museums. Chapter 6 calls for self-reflection for projects seeking more just heritage representations; informed by democratization, Cecilia Rodéhn analyzes 140 articles and books to explore the divide between publications and practices for museums.

Reading through the chapters, the achievement of the volume is exemplified by the discussion of terms with multiplicity of meaning and assumptions. For chapter 7, heritage is not only about pride in the past; Joshua Samuels provides a case study for Sicily where the ethnographic research, surprisingly, found appreciation for the legacies of a difficult heritage, that of the Fascist period. The lessons on such material legacies are worth further exploration.

Recently anthropologists, particularly archaeologists, engaged with communities have advocated for social justice. Chapter 8 recognizes the goals for equity but asks if heritage management is the avenue; Jeffrey Adams reminds us that what people need in least developed countries are cameras and computers, what he calls the basics, rather than promises of equity. The rhetoric of heritage includes, maybe is even dominated by, the concept of heritage at risk; Trinidad Rico examines risk as a driving force is critiqued as a modernist discourse. Much of heritage scholarship focuses on Britain and Malcolm Cooper provides the case study for heritage discourse in relation to cultural resource management; in this chapter, Authorized Heritage Discourse is presented as dynamic, requiring more investigations.

Even more challenging for heritage studies is intangible heritage; Klaus Zehbe offers an interesting discussion comparing intangible heritage and brain death. Chapter 12 is a self-conscious polemic on memory, with Gabriel Moshenska calling for fixing the damage from memory studies. Nature is part of heritage but the environmental movements rarely include material heritage; Melissa F. Baird stresses the import efforts by several anthropologists as a corrective, or in the terminology of the volume's subtitle, a redescription to integrate the major divide for heritage.

Robert Preucel and Regis Pecos express the complex intersections among place, heritage, and

cultural resources in an illuminating discussion for a case study in the United States; a detailed description for the Cochiti Pueblo of New Mexico opens up the place-making possible for a people even in a colonial situation. Chapter 15 focuses on the political and historical context for the Roman period site of Uthina/Oudhna in Tunisia; the ethnographic insights by Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels explains the intersections of neoliberalism and human rights, with suggestions for the imaginative possibilities enabled by heritage. The increasing complexities for heritage rhetoric concludes with sustainability; Paul J. Lane explores the websites of travel organizations and non-government organizations encouraging an image of the Maasai as ecological stewards, creating a double bind and pitfalls for their future. As these concluding studies show, the keywords are entangled with each other. The conclusion, cleverly titled “After Words,” explicates how each keyword illuminates the dynamics and complexities of heritage. Co-editor Trinidad Rico centers on the way forward and encourages “in all directions and at once.”

*Heritage Keywords* offers case studies and textured descriptions for heritage studies, as suggestions for further research and for debate. The studies are limited to the Anglophone world but that is complicated enough. As with any edited volume, the chapters vary in tone and approach; some authors chose to argue their keyword via in-depth descriptive accounts of their case study while others explored the term and its wide-spread implications. There are more terms in heritage studies than are covered, with the volume encouraging several productive approaches to thinking carefully about the words we use for heritage studies and preservation of the past. The editors hold the volume together by stressing heritage as discourse and exploring its rhetoric. Their goals for redescribing the keywords aim toward participatory approaches to communities and mechanisms for positive social change is especially relevant as popular interest and academic study of heritage expand and overlap. *Heritage Keywords* will prove useful for students grappling with anthropological heritage studies and should encourage even more productive investigations of the continuing expanding heritage phenomenon.

## **References Cited**

Lowenthal, David

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