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In the lead up to the 2010 Commonwealth Games, anxieties in India extended far beyond collapsing bridges and unfinished accommodation facilities. The country was intensely nervous about the possibility of widespread violence in the wake of a High Court ruling on the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi site in Ayodhya. Considered by Hindus to be the sacred ‘birthplace of Lord Rama’, the site was home to the Babri Mosque until it was destroyed by Hindu nationalists in 1992. In subsequent rioting across the country 2000 people were killed, and the site has remained a source of intense hostility between Muslims and Hindus ever since. The court’s verdict, stretching over thousands of pages, drew extensively on archaeological knowledge in an effort to create a peaceful and just resolution to a history of competing ‘rights’ and assertions of ownership. Ayodhya is a reminder of how, in an age of sensationalist media coverage and thriving radical conservatism, archaeology is becoming increasingly enmeshed in the highly charged, fraught arenas of identity politics and human rights.

In this regard, and with the urgent need for considered academic analyses of such issues, Cosmopolitan Archaeologies represents an extremely timely and valuable contribution, and an altogether excellent read. Lynn Meskell has brought together authors with a real diversity of interests, managing to get them to speak to an important and productive analytical thread. For those interested in the connection between archaeology and its links into the socio-politics of cultural arenas of identity politics and human rights.

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In what is one of the book’s most illuminating chapters, Alfredo González-Ruibal considers the arena of international archaeological programs in Ethiopia and Brazil. Suspicious of ‘some community-oriented, multicultural, and multi-vocal archaeology that is being carried out nowadays’, he argues many ‘colonial and neo-colonial archaeologists work on the short term, on the surface, they rarely address structural problems and their projects are meant to fail’ (pp. 113–15). What he correctly points to here is how researchers and heritage practitioners are often unaware of the complex political contexts within which they operate, and how they unwittingly advance ideological agendas such as neo-liberal development of states and bodies like the World Bank. González-Ruibal advocates for a more critical engagement and a reflexivity towards the ways in which archaeology often becomes a medium through which forms of exploitation, marginalization and neo-imperialism are advanced. The chapter by Hugo Benavides on Ecuador pursues a parallel argument. Oriented by its ethnographic approach, this fascinating account of the country’s pre-hispanic culture highlights how difference and authenticity act as vehicles for reproducing hegemonic categories of race and culture. Working within the tradition of Latin American Cultural Studies, Benavides is highly critical of the ways in which today’s global capital relations enmesh culture in new forms of coloniality. For those teaching advanced courses in the area of ‘the politics of heritage’, these two chapters would work excellently as assigned readings.

The legacy of colonialism is a theme that runs through a number of chapters. Present in the above, it is also central to Sandra Arnold Scham’s analysis of some of the ways in which Middle Eastern pasts continue to be misunderstood. To illustrate this she draws upon Derrida’s notion of ‘hospitality’ to interpret the interactions between western researchers and local partners. However, in what seemed highly reminiscent of Mauss’s account of ‘the Gift’, I was less
than convinced by the author’s assertions that regional or cultural specificities were at play here. Moving to Thailand, Denis Byrne takes up ‘The Fortress of Rationality’, as he calls it, which continually excludes the magical supernatural. The chapter considers the circulation of amulets in popular culture, and as a feature of Thai modernity, wherein the scientific and supernatural can be practiced simultaneously. For Byrne then, a more cosmopolitan archaeology and heritage discourse is one that moves beyond an a priori privileging of the scientific rationality familiar to Western modernity, by engaging seriously with ‘the mind-expanding benefit of cross-cultural conversations’ (p. 88). The chapter by Meskell on Kruger National Park in South Africa approaches similar issues but from an altogether different perspective, that of the arbitrary division in conservation between nature-culture. She illustrates how ‘Biodiversity’ as a language of nature conservation trumps other understandings of the landscape, including archaeological. As such, land and history are subsumed and dissected within knowledge practices that draw heavily on scientistic constructions of culture and nature, which emerged from the eighteenth century onwards. I found this chapter particularly interesting and valuable as a critique of the culture-nature divide pervasive in heritage conservation, but was left wondering about its relevance to the theoretical thrust of the book.

The naturalization of the nation-state and its institutions of cultural governance is one of the biggest problems facing the heritage sector today. New pathways that unsettle prevailing state-centric discourses of ownership, memory and history are urgently needed. *Cosmopolitanism Archaeologies* represents an important and thought-provoking addition to this program. Its encouragement to academic researchers and practitioners alike to be more engaged and reflexive about the contemporary political and economic contexts within which they operate is a trajectory I wholly endorse. For those unfamiliar with debates about the politics of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism this book provides a relatively gentle way in, as it deals with complex debates without resorting to obtusatory prose or jargon. Many of the chapters make for excellent reads in themselves and could be assigned to students working at the advanced undergraduate level upwards. When read together though, the unity of voice is compelling. *Cosmopolitanism Archaeologies* brings the past and the present together: calling for an engagement with the political, a sensitivity to the ethical and a reflexivity towards possible complicity; difficult, but essential questions all of us working in the arena of cultural heritage must continue to address.

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