



Managing Heritage, Building Peace: Museums, memorialisation and the uses of memory in Kenya



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A Collaborative Research Project 2008-2011

- **Investigates** the many different ways in which Kenyans are engaging with heritage, history, memory and identity, at both state and non-state level
- **Involves** a wide range of heritage stakeholders, from National Museums of Kenya to civil society groups, citizens and students
- **Focuses** in particular on community-led initiatives e.g. community peace museums, commemoration of heroes, conservation of sacred forests and rock art
- **Examines** and where appropriate compares these activities with state-run initiatives e.g. displays in state museums, commemoration of heroes including the building of mausoleums and other monuments, support for cultural festivals

Hypotheses/starting points:

- › **We see heritage as a contested notion, constructed and reconstructed by a wide range of stakeholders for various political, social and economic reasons**
- › **Kenya faces a continuing crisis over nationhood, identity, history and memory that is manifested in contemporary heritage developments. This was acutely apparent during and after the 2007/8 post-elections crisis**



How, where and why?

- **How and where we are doing research:**
- multi-sited, at selected sites in different parts of Kenya inc. Lari, Embu, Mfangano Island, Kyanzasu (Machakos), Olosho-oibor (Ngong Hills), Othaya, Nyeri, to a lesser extent Nairobi, Malindi, Nandi Hills, Mukogodo
- often working through Kenyan NGOs & CBOs, who run community peace museums and mobilise people around sites of memory e.g. sacred forests and sites linked to heroes & key historical events
- through interviews and more informal conversation; participant observation; collaborative photography (giving cameras to key informants to record what they see as important); archival research

- **Why?**
- Research of this kind, into community-led initiatives in particular, has not been carried out before at these sites
- It is highly topical, relevant to people's lives, and could have practical and policy benefits, e.g. encourage the state to value community-driven heritage activities more, promote inter-ethnic peace dialogue, encourage Kenyans to appreciate their shared history and heritage



Some research questions

- What does heritage mean to Kenyans?
- Who controls heritage?
- What is being 'forgotten', what 'remembered', and why?
- How is Mau Mau being memorialised, and is this problematic?
- Do citizens' expressions of social memory contest state systems of history, knowledge and power? If so, how and why?
- What is the link between community-led heritage initiatives and grassroots peace building, and what difference can these initiatives (e.g. peace education in schools) make?
- Why and how have community peace museums and other community-led activities developed at this particular time?



Karima Forest

- Site of memory for Gikuyu community
- Contains tree shrines gazetted by NMK
- Mau Mau fighters said to have used it as hideout
- But are the activities around it an example of reclamation of cultural heritage?



Former Mau Mau fighter Paul Thuku addresses community members at Karima Forest, on the importance of conserving and reclaiming it.



Villagers listen to speakers after an eco-mapping exercise, Karima Sacred Forest, Othaya District. Photo: Lotte Hughes





With thanks to

