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Rami Wadelnour and Tilman Musch take us on the desert roads of North Sudan and those between Niger and Libya, respectively. Both analyses are key reminders that roads and road-making are not the sole provinces of modern states. In adverse conditions, where roads are made ‘under the wheel’ and escape official regulation, Wadelnour shows how loading, passengering and driving are practices that require an altogether different type of skill, perception and sociability. In its turn, Musch insists on the importance of ‘solidarity’ between travellers to offset risks and make the journey successful.

The volume comes full circle with Kurt Beck’s chapter on the dialectics of road-making in Sudan. He traces ‘two regimes of the road’ – unsurfaced and asphalted roads – and the practices associated with each, in producing ‘technological dramas’ of ‘appropriation’ – frictions and disputes regarding the rights of use, regulation and control. Overall, The making of the African road offers superb local and comparative insights, decisively placing African roads into the global history and ethnography of modernity. The volume should be of interest well beyond Africanist circles, to all social scientists and experts interested in matters of road infrastructure.

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World Heritage on the ground is an edited volume composed of 11 chapters accompanied by an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction, the editors Christoph Brumann and David Berliner illustrate the aim of the volume, which is to understand what are the effects on the ground of the UNESCO World Heritage List, with a special focus on the social situation around the sites. The authors place their contribution among the anthropology of globalisation, as they believe these sites are ‘linchpins of global imaginaries’ (p. 3) in which the local and the translocal interconnect. In addition, they aim at contributing to the anthropology of international institutions, providing a closer look at how UNESCO works in both the introduction and the conclusion. The authors give an overview of the history of UNESCO and its definition of heritage. They also explain what is the iter that member Nation States must follow to propose a site, mentioning that the nomination documents have evolved from a couple of pages to voluminous dossiers that include audio-visual material as a result of the increasing competitiveness of the selection process. They end the introduction by giving a preview of the following chapters and the main themes of the book.

The chapters are divided into three sections which group case studies following UNESCO categories: ‘cities’, ‘archaeological sites’ and ‘cultural landscapes’. The editors have selected case studies from outside Europe because this is, in their opinion, where World Heritage has the greatest effects. All sites are struggle fields in which different interests and agendas compete. In each site, various stakeholders have different ways of making meaning of the listed heritage, as inhabitants’ traditional use of the sites contrasts with both the UNESCO conservation purposes, and the local authorities and private enterprises’ agenda for economic development. In all cases UNESCO emerges as a colonialist enterprise, imposing its definition of heritage.

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and its agenda of conservation upon locals who become alienated from their homes, from their traditional lifestyle and from their religious sites as many activities become forbidden with the aim of protecting buildings and heritage. Traditional lifestyles are threatened by mass tourism in Manon Istasse’s chapter on the Medina of Fez, in Yujie Zhu’s chapter on Lijang village, and in Keiko Miura’s chapter on Angkor. Issues of site management are explored in Lisa Breglia’s chapter on privately owned Chichén Itzá, and Lynn Meskell’s chapter on the extractive economies at Mapungubwe cultural landscape. In some cases, the conflicts of interest result in the damaging or destruction of contested sites, as exposed by Charlotte Joy’s chapter on Malian mosques and Jasper Chalcraft’s chapter on rock art sites in Italy, Libya and Tanzania.

The emotional dimension of these disputes comes to the fore in all chapters, in the form of attachment, nostalgia, and even resentment and anger towards UNESCO. Berliner’s chapter on Luang Prabang delves into the transformative aspect of nostalgia, as nostalgic imaginations stimulate practices of conservation which produce new landscapes. He juxtaposes UNESCO’s and tourists’ nostalgia for an idealised past, which he calls exo-nostalgia, with the nostalgia of Buddhist monks and local inhabitants for an experienced past that is still very tangible in their memories, which he calls endo-nostalgia.

The concluding chapter, by Christoph Brumann, aims at responding to the issues raised in previous chapters with an ethnography of UNESCO. Brumann goes into details describing how sites are assessed by specialists and decisions made by bureaucrats. He also includes a detailed report of a three-day meeting carried out at the same time the Malian sites were damaged (see Joy’s chapter), focusing on UNESCO reaction to the events. From the prevailing ‘keep to the agenda’ attitude, UNESCO emerges as a heavily bureaucratic, sluggish organisation, unable to respond dynamically to crises and to assess closely each site’s issues. The size of the organisation and its limited powers vis-à-vis local authorities are identified as the roots of UNESCO’s ineffectiveness on the ground.

All contributions derive from long-term ethnographic studies and place their observations in social, historical and political context. Their focus on the ground allows us to understand what heritage means to different stakeholders and how different agendas come into conflict. Though there is little cross-referencing throughout the volume, central themes, such as meaning-making, heritage regimes and heritage as commodity, emerge strongly and unite the chapters. The contributions answer the main question of the book, providing interesting and detailed case studies. Nevertheless, the book does not suggest avenues for the resolution of issues.

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Food culture is the second entry in a three-volume set, which aims to integrate nutritional anthropology more fully with the anthropology of food. This edited volume focuses most on the work in socio-cultural and linguistic anthropology and food studies. However, like the other volumes, it includes the introduction to the set,