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## The strategic internationalism of Rwandan heritage

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### ABSTRACT

Heritage, a practice shot through with political forces, is mobilized by states within their international relationships through methods such as heritage diplomacy. Focusing on the connections between Rwanda and Germany, this article traces how heritage serves as a technique of foreign relations for the Rwandan state. The uses of heritage are shaped by the state's higher-level political orientations, especially the project of *agaciro*, which pursues an agenda of increased sovereignty for Rwanda in relation to the rest of the world. This conditions how 'shared heritage' and heritage repatriation contribute to establishing strategic alliances and decolonizing, making heritage part of a suite of tools used to advantageously reposition the country in the international arena. The article deepens our understanding of the Rwandan state's governing techniques and examines heritage's role as a mediator of international relationships, even for less-powerful nations whose agency is sometimes neglected in discussions of heritage diplomacy.

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Cultural heritage is often understood as synonymous with material objects, such as monuments and artifacts of cultural property. But heritage is also a practice, tethered to the use of material things, by which contemporary social actors make the past in the present: 'Heritage is not a passive process of simply preserving things from the past that remain, but an active process of assembling a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future'.<sup>1</sup> This practice is subject to a wide range of sociopolitical forces, and as a result, much heritage scholarship is concerned with questions of power.<sup>2</sup>

The role of heritage in domestic politics, especially creating national identity and including its availability to nationalism, has been addressed in both heritage studies and archaeology.<sup>3</sup> Especially in post-colonial and post-conflict contexts, nations often seek 'usable pasts' via which to establish a new national identity, leading to an intensified interest in heritage in such situations.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in terms of international politics, heritage can function as a mediator of 'soft power' via heritage diplomacy, such as providing funding for heritage projects or expertise for heritage conservation.<sup>5</sup> These efforts are intended to

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improve the image of the supporting state and its relationship with the recipient state while satisfying the latter's technical, financial, or other needs. Focusing on heritage, then, allows us to investigate states' domestic and international politics. Far from simply designating inert cultural property, heritage in fact is a set of techniques available to use in pursuit of larger goals related to the politics of nation-building and international relations.

In Rwanda, these dynamics are visible in how the post-genocide government led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has mobilized heritage to political ends. Domestically, heritage such as genocide memorials,<sup>6</sup> museums,<sup>7</sup> and archaeology<sup>8</sup> serves to promulgate a unified national identity based on a singular history. This article focuses on the other side of Rwandan heritage processes: the role they play in the state's international relationships.<sup>9</sup> How does Rwanda's use of heritage contribute to its engagements with the rest of the world? Conversely, how do Rwanda's foreign policy orientations shape the state's uses of heritage?

As a case study, this article examines the relationship of Rwanda and Germany—one of Rwanda's former colonizers—as it is mediated through current heritage practices. Against a backdrop of aid flows and development efforts, the article shows that the countries are connected in two ways through heritage. One is via 'shared heritage': funding and collaborative efforts around heritage that entangle the two nations in a strategic alliance. Another is through the repatriation of cultural property from Germany to Rwanda, which allows the Rwandan state to reclaim a measure of power from a former colonizer and thus constitutes an avenue of decolonization. I argue that these heritage-based processes are shaped by the Rwandan state's higher-order political orientations, especially those aimed toward shoring up the country's sovereignty and *agaciro* (dignity, self-determination, and self-reliance) in relation to the rest of the world. In this way, the article demonstrates that heritage provides a mechanism through which the Rwandan state pursues its foreign policy agenda.

The dynamics outlined here extend our understanding of how heritage functions as a tool for managing international relationships. It is clear that the governing RPF seeks to improve Rwanda's international position in terms of its relationships with other countries. Rwanda has transformed into a 'savvy international player' which, even as a 'weak' state, pursues strategies for maximizing its agency and independence.<sup>10</sup> Still, the scholarship on African agency in international relations has not yet addressed the country to a significant extent,<sup>11</sup> and where it does look at Rwanda, such agency has been examined primarily through studies of aid and development.<sup>12</sup> This article indicates that the Rwandan government mobilizes heritage internationally to pursue its goal of agentive transformation.

The international political aspects of Rwandan heritage are also relatively understudied, with the exception of analyses of the Kigali Memorial Center as a setting for performances of international diplomacy<sup>13</sup> and the effect of foreign funding on genocide memorialization in Rwanda.<sup>14</sup> The bulk of scholarship on the international aspects of Rwandan heritage focuses on international tourism, especially to memorials,<sup>15</sup> which overlaps somewhat with the political questions addressed in this article, but does not fully address the RPF's political agenda as carried out through heritage processes. Examining the work of heritage against the backdrop of the RPF's international orientations gives us a better grasp on the state's techniques for engaging with the international community and a new frame for looking at Rwandan heritage.

The article also refocuses investigations of heritage diplomacy upon a less-powerful state. Heritage diplomacy is often a tool of states which have both adequate resources

to spend on heritage and an image problem, e.g. the United States in the Islamic world,<sup>16</sup> or rising powers that seek to increase their influence abroad, e.g. Turkey.<sup>17</sup> Heritage diplomacy is often seen as directional according to power: from a former colonizer to the formerly colonized, or from a proportionately richer country to a proportionately poorer one—‘the Netherlands to Indonesia, Japan to Egypt, the US to Iraq’.<sup>18</sup> By looking at how Rwanda is able to utilize heritage to establish strategic alliances and simultaneously assert international power, this article indicates that heritage diplomacy as a mechanism for international engagement is also available to less-powerful and formerly colonized nations. As such, the case connects to histories of heritage diplomacy by African countries during the course of the twentieth century, including Zaire’s uses of heritage to build a nation at home and abroad, and extends arguments about the mobilization of culture to establish and promote national identity in Africa (as in Nigeria and Senegal) toward additional international implications.<sup>19</sup> This broadens the perspective on the heritage-based tools available to African and Global South governments.

This article’s investigation is based on long-term fieldwork in Rwanda and more recent research in Germany. Between 2012 and 2018, I spent a cumulative year and a half in Rwanda conducting a heritage ethnography<sup>20</sup> focused on the work of two Rwandan state heritage institutions: the Institute of National Museums of Rwanda (INMR, merged into Rwanda Cultural Heritage Academy in 2020) and the National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide, which, among other responsibilities, manages the national genocide memorials.<sup>21</sup> In 2019–2020, I also interviewed (mostly remotely, due to the coronavirus pandemic) interlocutors based at German cultural institutions, including the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz and the Jumelage Rheinland-Pfalz Ruanda.

Against this scholarly backdrop, the article next proceeds to the relationship between Rwanda and Germany and the two heritage-based connections of ‘shared heritage’ and repatriation. It then addresses RPF foreign policy and, subsequently, how heritage practices serve as techniques for relating internationally within the context of foreign policy orientations such as *agaciro*. This adds up to an argument for heritage as one of Rwanda’s strategic international engagements, pursuing increased agency by mediating flows of power between Rwanda and other countries.

## Rwanda and Germany

First, we turn to the connections between Rwanda and Germany, both historical and heritage-based. Why look at this relationship? Germany was Rwanda’s first colonizer, although this history is less prominent in Rwanda than that of post-World War I Belgian colonization; and Germany is only one of many aid donors to Rwanda today.<sup>22</sup> Rwanda was a relatively small part of the German colonial territory in East Africa, which has left it underacknowledged in Germany in recent years. This run-of-the-mill relationship means that Germany, while useful, is not exceptionally important to Rwanda, nor is Rwanda to Germany’s interests in sectors such as trade.<sup>23</sup> But perhaps it is this situation that enables the heritage-based engagements examined here, as the two countries do not operate under the constraints imposed by the more dramatic political pressures that shape the Germany–Namibia or Rwanda–France relationships.

## History

The history of German-Rwandan connections begins at the Brussels Conference in 1890,<sup>24</sup> when Rwanda and Burundi were claimed by Germany. Along with what is now Tanzania, this territory would become German East Africa. In the 1890s, the first Germans entered the Rwandan kingdom with an eye to establishing what they hoped would be lucrative cross-Africa trade routes.<sup>25</sup> Inserting themselves into a succession crisis at the central court, the Germans allied with the future King Yuhi V Musinga via the Queen Mother, Kanjogera<sup>26</sup>—an alignment which swiftly revealed itself as a ploy for colonization, such that Germany would rule indirectly through the court and help to consolidate its power.<sup>27</sup> Colonial settlement in German East Africa focused more on the area of Tanzania than on Rwanda, which primarily saw a few military outposts<sup>28</sup> that could only exert ‘very light administrative implantation’,<sup>29</sup> although German forces also engaged in punitive expeditions.<sup>30</sup> In the years following World War I, Germany’s colonial possessions were divvied up among other European powers. Administratively, Rwanda was placed under a League of Nations mandate in 1916 and a Belgian mandate in 1919; the colonial era ended with the Hutu Revolution, starting in 1959, and Rwandan independence in 1962.

German aid to Rwanda began in the 1960s and continued throughout the twentieth century,<sup>31</sup> including gifts from both East and West Germany after Rwandan independence<sup>32</sup> and major donations of emergency aid after what is formally known as the Genocide Against the Tutsi in 1994.<sup>33</sup> Aid continues to be a conduit for German-Rwandan connections, with money flowing for both financial and technical cooperation, prioritizing good governance and sustainable economic development initiatives.<sup>34</sup> Today, as an example, the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, administers some 78 million euros in projects; these run the gamut from infrastructure, economic development, and employment projects to security, reconstruction, and peace-building efforts.<sup>35</sup> Germany is also involved in joint programming on development efforts with other European Union states and Rwanda.<sup>36</sup>

The history of colonialism has created additional ties that are more difficult to manage. Colonization coopted Rwanda’s governing structures, actively intervening in its culture, society, and politics through mechanisms such as missionization; most violently, its deep entanglement with the causes of the genocide is well-known and officially recognized in Rwanda today. Colonial racial categorization was integral in transforming Hutu and Tutsi from flexible sociopolitical classifications to immutable racial categories.<sup>37</sup> This interpretation is not confined to academic analysis, but is also the government’s historical narrative: ‘The colonial power,<sup>38</sup> based on an ideology of racial superiority ... exploited the subtle social differences and institutionalized discrimination. These actions distorted the harmonious social structure, creating a false ethnic division with disastrous consequences’.<sup>39</sup> Seized upon by cynical political actors with their own purposes, these divisions enabled genocidal violence. As a result, then, colonialism is directly connected to the most devastating event of Rwandan history (even if, in Rwanda’s public memory and discourse, the more interventionist Belgian regime has somewhat overshadowed the German one).<sup>40</sup> The ongoing legacy of this history is visible not only in how Rwandans conceive of and manage identity today, but also in the evident priority that the state places on decolonization, as addressed further below.

## Heritage

This history of colonization shapes Rwanda's heritage landscape today. Some heritage produced by colonization has been mobilized in recent years as 'shared heritage', a framework that connects Germany and Rwanda in efforts to interpret history and develop heritage resources. Colonization also enabled the theft of Rwandan heritage: in addition to artifacts and artworks now held in European museums,<sup>41</sup> a large number of human remains were taken by German explorers for anthropological research. This latter collection is now undergoing a process of repatriation aimed at returning it from Berlin to Rwandan control.

The term 'shared heritage', designating heritage resources which originate in the colonial past and today make up part of the history of a postcolonial nation, can be found in cases such as the engagement of the Netherlands and Indonesia.<sup>42</sup> The 'sharedness' of heritage has been used in Germany to argue for the retention of colonially-gathered collections.<sup>43</sup> As used in Rwanda, the term aligns with 'heritage of dual parentage', a definition initially developed to refer to colonial-era heritage in Sri Lanka. This descriptor indicates that 'the colonial past is part of the nation's history, and so the heritage created during that period stands as testament to the combined works of native and colonizer groups'.<sup>44</sup> Sites relating to German colonization in Rwanda have been framed as 'shared' by both German and Rwandan representatives.<sup>45</sup>

The 'sharedness' of some heritage resources is limited to historical origin or interpretive framework. For example, INMR identified as a potential heritage tourism site a boat, dating to the early twentieth century, which was used in World War I by the German military to fight Belgian forces on Lake Kivu and is now buried on the shores of the lake.<sup>46</sup> This is one of a slate of Germany-related cultural and natural heritage sites to be developed,<sup>47</sup> some of which are linked as the Richard Kandt Trail. Named after the former Resident of Rwanda (an administrator for the German colonial regime), the trail connects such sites as Kandt's former home in Shangi and the 'Source of the Nile', which Kandt claimed to have discovered, in Nyungwe National Park.<sup>48</sup> For such heritage, what is 'shared' is the historical significance.

But for others, 'sharedness' has effectively drawn funding, expertise, and resources from both nations. After a German delegation, including the president of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK, a German federal foundation and cultural institution), attended a 'shared heritage' roundtable at INMR in 2015,<sup>49</sup> recent years have seen the renovation of Kandt's former Kigali home. Once the INMR's Natural History Museum, the new Kandt House Museum focuses the bulk of its exhibitions on the period of German colonial rule in Rwanda. The renovation of Kandt House was supported financially by a number of German institutions, including the German Embassy in Kigali, the Goethe-Institut, and the state of Rheinland-Pfalz,<sup>50</sup> which has a longstanding partnership with Rwanda (since the early 1980s)<sup>51</sup> that today includes support for certain heritage projects.<sup>52</sup> Both Rwandan and German experts were involved in developing the exhibitions now on view at the museum.

Kandt House's displays include materials collected by Germany's Mecklenburg Expedition. Led by Adolf Friedrich, Duke of Mecklenburg, this group canvassed parts of German East Africa, including Rwanda, in 1907-1908. The mission of the ten Europeans on the Expedition, who relied on the labor of hundreds of Africans, was to

undertake ‘systematic scientific research’ in anthropology, zoology, botany, and other fields.<sup>53</sup> The material that they collected, including artifacts, dictionaries, photographs, and phonograph recordings, was divided between museums in Berlin and Leipzig.<sup>54</sup> Many items are now held by the SPK, which also possesses another category of Expedition-collected items: human remains.

These were gathered by a Polish-born anthropologist, Jan Czekanowski, who worked for ethnologist Felix von Luschan at Berlin’s Royal Museum of Ethnology. Seeking to add to the museum’s collection of human remains for anthropological study, Luschan ‘engineered’ the inclusion of Czekanowski in the Expedition.<sup>55</sup> Exploiting local methods of exposing rather than burying the dead,<sup>56</sup> Czekanowski gathered and remitted to Germany over a thousand skulls, of which the vast majority came from Rwanda.<sup>57</sup> In Berlin, the skulls joined what was known as the S-Collection. Over the course of the twentieth century, the skulls were periodically transferred to different owners;<sup>58</sup> although intended to serve as a teaching and research collection, they were largely kept in storage. With much of their associated documentation lost and their condition deteriorating,<sup>59</sup> the skulls entered the collections of the SPK’s Museum of Prehistory and Early History in 2011. During 2017–2019, SPK archaeologists and researchers undertook a joint project with INMR and the University of Rwanda to establish the skulls’ provenance, assemble relevant documentation, and record related oral histories.

The project also aimed at the possibility of repatriation to Rwanda.<sup>60</sup> This would move responsibility for the collection from the SPK and Germany back to Rwanda, where the government would need to decide how to manage the returned remains. Rather than being framed as ‘shared heritage’, the return of this collection is more frequently discussed as a mode of restitution, the restoring of control over heritage and heritage itself to its place of origin. Such returns open up new possibilities in terms of international politics which are quite different from the collaboration-oriented ones involved in shared heritage, including issues of decolonization and sovereignty. It is to such political ramifications and purposes that we now turn.

## **Heritage and international relationships**

The heritage-based connections between Rwanda and Germany are shaped by higher-level political questions, especially for the RPF, and ultimately serve the purposes of these larger politics. To examine this, it is necessary to first trace RPF foreign policy and international relationships, focusing on the dynamic of dependence and independence: how the RPF simultaneously identifies aid dependence and foreign involvement as problems, and pushes for increased independence and functional sovereignty. These goals are grounded not only in practical concerns but also in the principle of *agaciro*, a philosophical orientation that guides the RPF’s international entanglements. Heritage, I argue, plays into these broader dynamics and becomes a mode for mediating international political goals.

### ***RPF foreign policy***

Foreign policy is a surprisingly understudied aspect of the post-genocide Rwandan state, given that its governance of Rwanda as a whole is an object of intense scholarly interest.

The RPF engages in ambitious programs of change targeting diverse areas of Rwandan life,<sup>61</sup> from justice<sup>62</sup> to gender and peacebuilding<sup>63</sup> to land and the physical environment.<sup>64</sup> The RPF's international relationships, on the other hand, have attracted less attention, and have appeared in scholarship most often via studies of foreign aid and development.<sup>65</sup>

But beyond its status as an aid recipient and developing country—a condition that in itself brings Rwanda face to face with foreign states and international development discourses—how does Rwanda under the RPF operate in relation to other international actors? One significant lever here for Rwanda is the use of the memory of the violent past in order to maximize the state's agency vis-à-vis other actors.<sup>66</sup> Some scholars have called this the 'genocide credit',<sup>67</sup> saying that the RPF utilizes the history of genocide and international inaction to manipulate international actors for Rwandan benefit: 'demand[ing] specialised treatment in terms of receiving foreign aid and deflecting current accusations concerning [the Rwandan government's] domestic human rights record'.<sup>68</sup> The idea of the genocide credit has been deployed within analyses of governance and aid dynamics,<sup>69</sup> although it remains unclear if this has actually produced donor favoritism toward Rwanda.<sup>70</sup>

Less attention has been paid to other driving forces behind Rwanda's international orientations or to foreign policy beyond aid and development. Beswick offers a useful analysis of the ways the RPF attempts to maximize agency through 'balancing' threats and opportunities in order to achieve leverage, but her attention is directed toward aid relations.<sup>71</sup> Beloff offers a broader analysis of RPF foreign policy, arguing that an agenda of increased security, developmental growth, and reduced dependence on outside forces shapes the RPF's international interactions.<sup>72</sup> In part, he suggests that this agenda is carried out through the agenda of *agaciro*, a Kinyarwanda term indicating self-reliance, dignity, and self-determination. *Agaciro* has been called a 'moral underpinning' for RPF decisions.<sup>73</sup> Identified by its promoters as rooted in the precolonial cultural past,<sup>74</sup> *agaciro* is not a formal program but rather an ideological orientation on which are built practical efforts. For example, *agaciro* has guided state efforts to manage genocide heritage in alignment with its inherent principles of dignity and self-respect,<sup>75</sup> and it is also at work in areas such as trade policy, where it was used to justify Rwanda's ban on imports of used clothing from the United States.<sup>76</sup>

Given that one of the country's primary axes for international relationships is aid and development, *agaciro* also helps to steer the RPF's efforts in this arena. Because Rwanda remains relatively impoverished, it is still dependent on foreign aid to support large proportions of its budget: up to 40% in recent years, according to the World Bank.<sup>77</sup> But dependence on foreign aid leaves Rwanda vulnerable to changes in aid flows, as was seen in 2012, when a number of donors suspended, postponed, or altered aid in response to Rwanda's support of the M23 militia in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>78</sup> Such troubles with aid only solidify the RPF's conviction that Rwanda needs to be more self-reliant in order to no longer be vulnerable to this sort of leverage.<sup>79</sup> It is not coincidental that *agaciro* lent its name to the Agaciro Development Fund, 'dedicated to increasing the financial autonomy of Rwanda and ... shielding Rwanda from potential external economic shocks',<sup>80</sup> meaning aid disturbances and stemming in particular from the M23 incident.<sup>81</sup>

To some extent, Rwanda is already more self-determined than might be expected for an aid-dependent country. Despite the strings that generally attach to development aid,

Rwanda has been able to ‘retain considerable power over policy and its implementation’.<sup>82</sup> Scholars have explained this as a result of many things: good technocratic governance and donor inattention to poor political governance;<sup>83</sup> the effectiveness of the RPF’s aid coordination;<sup>84</sup> smart rhetorical positioning by the RPF along with domestic support for the RPF in donor countries;<sup>85</sup> or donors’ need for a development aid success story.<sup>86</sup> Whatever the cause, Rwanda is a relative outlier among aid-dependent states in its ability to ‘create and use policy space while maintaining an ever-increasing supply of funding’.<sup>87</sup> Still, aid dependence represents a vulnerability, and seeking self-reliance—through economic development, gradual disentanglement from aid, and push-back against foreign interference—is a significant goal.

The *agaciro* principle thus has concrete effects in the field of foreign policy, where it drives the government to vigorously pursue increased sovereignty: ‘the ability of a nation-state ... to genuinely exercise policy control over its future direction based upon indigenous needs and expectations’ in both a juridical and empirical sense.<sup>88</sup> As in other formerly colonized countries, the question of sovereignty is entangled with the issue of neocolonialism: ‘when external actors are able to compel, coerce, or co-opt African governance officials to such a degree that decision-making is no longer primarily based upon national interests’—which accords a country *de jure* without *de facto* sovereignty.<sup>89</sup> Limiting neocolonial influence is clearly very much upon the mind of Rwanda’s leadership. President Paul Kagame has announced repeatedly that he will defend Rwanda against foreign incursions—not only in the sense of protecting its territorial and human security,<sup>90</sup> but also in terms of resisting the push toward particular forms of democratic governance and civil rights. He reiterates to Rwandan and international audiences that Rwanda will rely on ‘African values’ rather than yield to outside pressure.<sup>91</sup> When running for a previously-unconstitutional third term in 2017, a decision that sparked a certain level of international consternation, Kagame stated at a campaign stop, ‘This is about making our own choices. We do not claim to know what is best for others but we will choose the path that is best for us’.<sup>92</sup> He went on to connect this principle of self-determination to self-reliance: ‘We are not looking for people to feed us, we are looking to make our own living and feed ourselves ... For too long, Africa has been seen as deserving of charity and not prosperity and self reliance’.<sup>93</sup>

These rhetorical tactics indicate how the philosophical orientation of *agaciro*, with its implications for self-respect for the nation, is also bound up with the externally oriented discourses and politics of sovereignty. *Agaciro*, then, as one of the government’s guiding principles, is involved in both nation-building and nation-repositioning—affecting how Rwanda relates to foreign actors. The RPF seeks to change the country’s place in the relative balance of international power: to make Rwanda less dependent and more functionally sovereign. This has clear implications for sectors such as aid and development; but how might it also intersect with heritage?

### ***Heritage as a technique for relating internationally***

As outlined above, numerous heritage processes today connect Rwanda and Germany, from ‘shared heritage’ to heritage repatriation. This heritage-making mediates the international relationship between the two nations in ways shaped by larger dynamics in both

countries. Heritage thus becomes a technique of foreign relations, guided by politics of reputation, alliance, and sovereignty.

Studies of soft power and heritage diplomacy have highlighted the utility of heritage as a diplomatic tool for richer, more powerful, and former-colonizer nations which are seeking a reputational advantage. In Germany, the decolonization debates of the last several years have sparked a reassessment of the country's relationships to its former colonies, especially in the heritage sector. Coalescing around museums, decolonization politics have focused on provenance research and repatriation (especially of human remains).<sup>94</sup> One can view German involvement in heritage projects in Rwanda as simply responding to these public pressures toward decolonization and attempting to grapple with colonial history through restitution. A more cynical perspective might take these actions as a form of whitewashing, skirting the colonialist problems inherent in the development regime<sup>95</sup> by performatively operating assistance projects: another instance of heritage diplomacy as it is commonly practiced to improve the image of the funding country abroad.<sup>96</sup>

Still, there are real impacts in terms of funding flows and the development of heritage resources. Kandt House *has* been renovated, and *does* now contain exhibitions focusing on the impact of colonization on Rwanda; the human remains collection at the SPK *is* expected to return to Rwanda. These are tangible benefits for Rwanda, not only Germany. In order to examine this heritage-mediated relationship as more than a single-sided one of reputation laundering for Germany, it is worth first considering the language used by officials involved in the German-Rwandan 'shared heritage' projects. Public statements frame this as a partnership: 'What is really important to me is how we can develop, strengthen and enforce [Rwanda-Germany cooperation] further in the future', the then-Ambassador of Germany to Rwanda stated upon the occasion of Kandt House's opening, in language echoed by Rwandan officials.<sup>97</sup> The partnership language relating to 'shared heritage' may be public relations spin, but spin is a mechanism for changing perceptions. Heritage is not the end goal: heritage is the method. An altered international relationship is the goal—from colonizer and colonized to partners who 'share' heritage. 'Shared heritage' serves to create international alliances that are advantageous both to German and Rwandan governments and public relations endeavors.

But the Rwandan government sets limits to the ultimate 'sharedness' of this heritage. In relationships mediated by heritage diplomacy, it is easy to dismiss 'recipient' countries as just that: recipients, rather than active participants. However, as noted in the earlier discussion of aid dynamics, Rwanda is in relatively strong control of its policy space, even in the face of aid dependency. Despite the practical constraints of being a 'developing' country, sovereignty and self-reliance are clear goals for Rwanda's ongoing development, and aspects of the RPF's governing agenda—like *agaciro*—are intended to lead toward full control of Rwanda by and for Rwandans.

Based in a philosophical framework of *agaciro*, the pursuit of full independence (and Rwanda's ability to be *more* independent than its power position might indicate) is not likely to be less applicable to heritage than to other sectors. This is intensified by the importance of heritage to building the post-conflict and post-colonial nation, of which the Rwandan government is well aware.<sup>98</sup> This supports an interpretation of Rwanda not being simply subject to the whims of foreign donors, but rather possessing significant

agency. The Rwandan heritage sector maintains control over the heritage initiatives that proceed on Rwandan soil, whether or not they involve or are funded by Germany. For example, an INMR archaeologist indicated the limits to the ‘shared heritage’ narrative: ‘This is Rwandan property now, and part of our history’.<sup>99</sup> Rwandan heritage production is dominated by the government, specifically because of the high stakes of the project of establishing national identity through heritage.<sup>100</sup> Although support from external actors is welcomed where useful, control over heritage remains with the Rwandan state and its institutions: despite assistance and expertise from Germany, for example, the redevelopment of Kandt House was ultimately determined and approved by the Rwandan government in line with Rwandan needs. This dynamic has similarly played out in other heritage contexts, where Rwandan actors strategically determine which partnerships and elements of foreign influence to claim, utilize, and adapt for local purposes.<sup>101</sup>

The case of repatriating heritage is, similarly, subject to multiply directional power dynamics which trend toward Rwandan control. Sparked by the SPK, which contacted Rwanda—Rwandan officials had not known that Rwandan human remains collections were held in Berlin<sup>102</sup>—the research project that is expected to lead to the return of the skulls gathered by Czekanowski could be understood primarily as a German-initiated effort. At the same time, Rwandan participation in the project (involving representatives of both the University of Rwanda and the INMR), and repatriation itself, indicate a change in power balances. Not only are Rwandans joining a major international research project as partners, but repatriation, as an issue, centers around the right to control cultural property. The fight to regain power over cultural heritage through such returns also serves to restore cultural self-determination itself to those who have been injured by colonial theft.<sup>103</sup> Through the physical transfers and changes in control inherent in repatriation, heritage becomes a ‘resource for the process of decolonization’ and the ‘construction of postcolonial sovereignty’.<sup>104</sup> The ultimate repatriation of the collection will revert certain powers to Rwanda, whose capacity to manage its own cultural heritage was transgressed by the colonial collection of the remains. This mirrors the attempts by the Rwandan government to attain increased sovereign power in other areas, such as over domestic policy in the face of aid pressures. The very shift of the collection from one nation to the other is a flow of power which the Rwandan government can frame as simultaneously indicating a constructive partnership with Germany and its own sovereignty over heritage.

The assertion of sovereignty, reclamation of power, and decolonization are all larger goals of the Rwandan state. In relating to Germany as a partner in shared heritage, or in benefiting from the repatriation of heritage to Rwandan control, Rwanda’s position of relative power shifts. In addition to having cultivated a strategic friend in Europe, Rwanda is able to pursue a symbolic decolonization that is also a practical decolonization in terms of control over heritage. Collectively, these two dynamics create a push–pull between alliance and interdependence on the one hand, and sovereignty and independence on the other. This can be shorthanded as the *strategic internationalism* of heritage: the incorporation of heritage into foreign relations dynamics as a way to mediate larger flows of power and encourage shifts in international relationships. In the Rwandan case, the use of ‘shared heritage’ and repatriation in relation to Germany collectively serve the Rwandan state as it attempts to reposition the country in the international balance of power, as guided by the RPF’s foreign policy agenda more broadly.

Heritage is thus part of a toolkit used by the Rwandan government in its international relationships to support the growth of Rwandan power and reputation: not only the maintenance of policy space, but also President Kagame's rhetoric, the *agaciro* project, military intervention in neighboring countries, and increasing contributions to UN peacekeeping missions elsewhere in the world, among other techniques. All of these efforts combine to indicate that Rwanda is *no longer* many things—no longer dependent, no longer a recipient, no longer colonized—even as its practical situation remains less than fully self-determined. In this landscape, heritage is not static, but rather an active strategy for managing international power. This indicates that far from being limited to the production of national identity and unity, the processes of nation-building within which we often see states utilizing heritage, heritage in Rwanda is also a contributor to a larger politics of sovereignty that engages strategically with international actors.

### Rethinking heritage and international relationships

To return to this article's initial questions, where does Rwanda's use of heritage fit into its international relationships, and how do Rwandan foreign policy orientations affect heritage practices? This case shows that the guiding principles which shape Rwanda's foreign policy, grounded in *agaciro* and efforts toward decolonization and sovereignty, condition the country's particular uses of heritage. These include mobilizing 'shared heritage' to develop strategic alliances, within limits, and using repatriation to reclaim power through decolonizing Rwandan heritage. Further, Rwanda and Germany's heritage-based relationship opens up understandings of how less-powerful states can use cultural heritage in the international arena.

While Rwanda remains a relatively weak state in terms of its international power, it also deploys techniques for repositioning the nation in this power landscape, from *agaciro* to the use of the genocide credit. Just as Rwanda has sought to establish policy space within aid relations, so too does it strategically mobilize heritage within international relationships. In this, heritage serves as a connection along which power flows in both directions—from Germany to Rwanda, and from Rwanda to Germany.

By fleshing out the techniques available to the state in its engagement with the rest of the world, this has implications for the scholarly consideration of Rwandan governance. Looking at heritage as a mode of mediating international relationships adds to our understanding of the RPF's foreign policy efforts and how one of the philosophical underpinnings of these efforts, namely *agaciro*, plays out in practice. It also expands the field of view of Rwandan heritage, from its domestic, especially nation-building, efforts to its international capabilities. This refocusing is useful both in studies of Rwanda and in heritage studies more generally. We know less about how 'recipient' countries or 'weak' states engage in heritage diplomacy, even as their agentic engagement in these relationships can have significant impacts on how such initiatives proceed and the outcomes for both sides.<sup>105</sup> This article contributes a case of a 'weak' state engaging in the strategic use of heritage for mediating international relationships—power flowing uphill.

With these bilateral dynamics in mind, I suggest that it is productive to consider the strategic internationalism of heritage, where heritage serves as a useful tool in the management of international relations. While this article focuses on Rwanda, its analysis of heritage diplomacy can extend to other countries in Africa and the Global South.

Rwanda's example helps to rethink the dynamics of heritage diplomacy and the agency of weaker states, reframing heritage as a strategic element of foreign policy for any nation that seeks to claim it, not merely those with more power and resources. Rwanda's case demonstrates an expanded role for heritage in making the post-colonial and post-conflict future: it is a tool for building not only the nation itself, but also its international powers.

## Notes

1. Harrison, *Heritage*, 4.
2. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Harrison, *Understanding the Politics*; Harrison, *Heritage*.
3. See e.g. Meskell, *Archaeology Under Fire*; Kohl and Fawcett, *Nationalism, Politics*; Diaz-Andreu and Champion, *Nationalism and Archaeology*; Hamilakis, *The Nation*.
4. Lane, "Possibilities"; de Jong and Rowlands, *Reclaiming Heritage*; Van Beurden, *Authentically African*.
5. Nye, "Soft Power". While scholarship on cultural diplomacy often defines it as the mobilization of a nation-state's own culture for diplomatic purposes abroad (see Mark, "Rethinking Cultural Diplomacy"), states can also conduct cultural *heritage* diplomacy by supporting heritage-related work across national borders; see Winter, "Heritage Diplomacy". See also Kersel and Luke, "Civil Societies?".
6. Ibreck, "The Politics of Mourning," "A Time of Mourning"; Sodaro, "Politics of the Past"; Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide*.
7. De Becker, "Imagining the Post-Colonial".
8. Giblin, "Decolonial Challenges"; Giblin, "Political and Theoretical Problems".
9. The heritage sector in Rwanda is state-driven and museums and memorials are largely government-run, with other sectors involved mainly via tourism; the heritage sector and the state's higher-level politics and policies are therefore entwined.
10. Beswick, "From Weak State".
11. Mwambari, "Emergence," 119–20.
12. See the "RPF Foreign Policy" section.
13. Giblin, "Performance of International Diplomacy".
14. Ibreck, "International Constructions".
15. Friedrich, Stone, and Rukesh, "Dark Tourism, Difficult Heritage"; Giblin, Mugabowagahunde, and Ntagwabira, "International Heritage Tourism"; McKinney, "Narrating Genocide"; Bolin, "On the Side"; Gayongayire and Nyiracumi, "Breaking Silence"; Mara, "The Remains of Humanity".
16. Luke and Kersel, *U.S. Cultural Diplomacy*; Remsen and Tedesco, "US Cultural Diplomacy".
17. Kersel and Luke, "Civil Societies?," 84–87.
18. Winter, "Heritage Diplomacy," 1009. See also, e.g., Akagawa, *Heritage Conservation*; Labadi, *The Cultural Turn*; Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy*.
19. On Zaire: Van Beurden, *Authentically African*; on Nigeria: Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*; on Senegal: Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow*.
20. Because heritage itself is the use of the past in the present, its study requires a 'hybrid practice' (Meskell, "Archaeological Ethnography") that focuses both on the materiality of the past and present-day interactions with it. My fieldwork has used a range of methods: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, site visits, photography, archival research, and attention to media and popular culture.
21. See Bolin, "A Country Without Culture".
22. Grimm et al., "Coordinating China"; <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/332.html>, [Accessed 8 December 2020]; [https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDDACAidataglancebyrecipient\\_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display\\_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDDACAidataglancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no), accessed [16 December 2020].

23. See <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/DEU/Year/2016/TradeFlow/EXPIMP> and <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/RWA/Year/2016/TradeFlow/EXPIMP> [Accessed 9 March 2020]. Note also that Rwanda is geostrategically important in terms of the peace and security landscape in the sometimes-volatile Great Lakes region. Germany, for its part, touts a good relationship with Rwanda; see <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/ruanda-node/rwanda/233806> [Accessed 17 December 2020].
24. By using a neutral term like ‘connections’ I do not mean to erase the violence of colonialism, only to indicate that this article covers both colonial-era and post-colonial conditions of encounter.
25. Louis, *Ruanda-Urundi*, 34.
26. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 24–25; Watkins and Jessee, “Legacies of Kanjogera”.
27. Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 62.
28. Des Forges, *Defeat*, 24.
29. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 25; see also Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 63; Vansina, *Antecedents*, 179.
30. Reyntjens, “Understanding Rwandan Politics,” 517.
31. Hayman, “The Complexity of Aid,” 48.
32. Schilling, *Postcolonial Germany*, 123–26.
33. Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 89.
34. See [https://www.bmz.de/en/countries\\_regions/subsahara/ruanda/zusammenarbeit/index.html](https://www.bmz.de/en/countries_regions/subsahara/ruanda/zusammenarbeit/index.html) [Accessed 9 March 2020].
35. See <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/332.html> [Accessed 8 December 2020].
36. See <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/joint-programming-tracker/rwanda> [Accessed 16 December 2020].
37. Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression*; Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*; Eltringham, “Invaders Who Have Stolen”.
38. While here the colonizing country is unnamed, the document later refers specifically to Belgium (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, “Rwanda Vision 2020,” 4). See also endnote 40.
39. Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, “Rwanda Vision 2020,” 4; see also Shyaka, “The Rwandan Conflict,” and Kimonyo, *A Popular Genocide*.
40. In Rwanda today, responsibility is more frequently assigned to ‘colonialism’ collectively than divided between specific colonizers, although Belgium is more prominent in the historical imaginary. Still, German indirect rule through the Tutsi royal court initiated this process of ethnic solidification that intensified over the twentieth century. Moreover, in terms of shaping ethnic division, there was no clear differentiation between the racial views espoused by colonizers from either country, both of which identified Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa as racialized identities, ascribed to them specific characteristics, and institutionalized discrimination (Eltringham, “Invaders Who Have Stolen,” 431–32).
41. Heritage from Rwanda can be found in German museums such as those of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (beyond the human remains collection discussed here) and other prominent European institutions such as Belgium’s Royal Museum for Central Africa (AfricaMuseum).
42. Yapp, “Define Mutual”.
43. Parzinger, “Geteiltes Erbe”. I thank Margareta von Oswald for a discussion on this topic.
44. Ndoro and Wijesuriya, “Heritage Management and Conservation,” 140.
45. Federal Foreign Office, “Rwanda”; Hudson Kuteesa, “Exhibition Showcases German Cultural Preservation in Rwanda,” *The New Times*, 10 February 2019. <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/exhibition-showcases-german-cultural-preservation-rwanda>; Jean d’Amour Mbonyinshuti, “New Museum to Showcase Rwanda’s Colonial History Launched in Kigali,” *The New Times*, 18 December 2017. <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/225813/>.
46. Louis, *Ruanda-Urundi*, 209; Neumann, “Gustave Neumann”.

47. James Karuhanga, “How a WWI Boat Is Turning a Local Village in Rutsiro into a Tourist Attraction,” *The New Times*, 22 April 2018. <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/how-wwi-boat-turning-local-village-rutsiro-tourist-attraction>
48. James Peter Nkurunziza, “Destination Kivu Belt - A New Hiking Trail Is Set to Boost Cultural Tourism and Inform about Colonial History,” *The New Times*, 22 August 2019. <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/featured-destination-kivu-belt-new-hiking-trail-set-boost-cultural-tourism-and-inform-about>.
49. Institute of National Museums of Rwanda, “A Round Table Discussion on Rwanda-German Shared Heritage,” 2 March 2015. [https://museum.gov.rw/index.php?id=14&id=14&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bnews%5D=69&cHash=6a149f4117f609bd5d74c4110da0d53b](https://museum.gov.rw/index.php?id=14&id=14&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=69&cHash=6a149f4117f609bd5d74c4110da0d53b)
50. Mbonyinshuti, “New Museum,” Op Cit; Federal Foreign Office, “Rwanda”.
51. See <https://www.rlp-ruanda.de/home/> [Accessed 24 March 2020].
52. There are other cases of German involvement in heritage in Rwanda that fall outside of the ‘shared heritage’ remit. Rather, they are development assistance projects that use heritage as a vehicle: for example, the Eco-Emploi program, implemented by GIZ, which has supported the development of cultural trails in Nyanza district; see [https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/Factsheet\\_2019-EcoEmploi.pdf](https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/Factsheet_2019-EcoEmploi.pdf) [Accessed 7 December 2020]. I thank David Nkusi for pointing me to this program.
53. Stelzig and Adler, “On the Preconditions”.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid, 163. See also Kunst and Creutz, “Geschichte”.
56. Teßmann and Kowalak, “Die Schädel,” 226–27; Misago and Van Pee, *Rwanda*, 83.
57. Teßmann and Kowalak, “Die Schädel”.
58. Stoecker and Winkelmann, “Skulls and Skeletons,” 9.
59. Kunst and Creutz, “Geschichte”.
60. At the time of writing, this repatriation is anticipated but has not yet occurred.
61. See Straus and Waldorf, *Remaking Rwanda*.
62. See Clark, *The Gacaca Courts*; Ingelaere, *Inside Rwanda’s Gacaca Courts*; Chakravarty, *Investing in Authoritarian Rule*.
63. See Berry, *War, Women, and Power*; Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us*; Purdeková, *Making Ubumwe*; Mwambari, “Women-Led”.
64. See Newbury, “High Modernism”; Shearer, “The Kigali Model”; Ansoms, “Re-Engineering Rural Society”.
65. Behuria, “Learning from Role Models”; Beswick, “From Weak State”; Hayman, “Rwanda: Milking the Cow” and “From Rome to Accra”; Marriage, “Aid to Rwanda”; Marysse, Ansoms, and Cassimon, “The Aid ‘Darlings’”; Zorbas, “Aid Dependence”.
66. Mwambari, “Emergence”.
67. See Beloff, “Viewing the World,” 116–17.
68. Beloff, “Viewing the World,” 116.
69. For a few examples, see Hayman, “Rwanda: Milking the Cow”; Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*; Reyntjens, “Post-1994 Politics”; Reyntjens, “Constructing the Truth”.
70. Desrosiers and Swedlund, “Rwanda’s Post-Genocide Foreign Aid”.
71. Beswick, “From Weak State”. See also Mann and Berry, “Understanding the Political Motivations”; but this is concerned primarily with the RPF’s domestic agenda, although some of the motivations identified overlap with those examined by Beloff, in “Viewing the World” and *Foreign Policy* (e.g. prioritization of security).
72. Beloff, “Viewing the World” and *Foreign Policy*.
73. Behuria, “Countering Threats”.
74. Rutazibwa, “Studying *Agaciro*”.
75. Bolin, “Dignity in Death”.
76. Wolff, “The Global Politics,” 13–14.
77. Ishihara et al., “Rwanda Economic Update”.
78. This included Germany, which was also the first country to restore aid afterwards.

79. Beloff, "Viewing the World," 44–45.
80. See <http://www.agaciro.rw/index.php?id=39> [Accessed 5 March 2019].
81. Behuria, "Countering Threats"; Beloff, "Viewing the World," 44–45.
82. Hayman, "Rwanda: Milking the Cow," 168.
83. Reyntjens, *Political Governance*.
84. Klingebiel, Negre, and Morazán, "Costs, Benefits".
85. Zorbas, "Aid Dependence".
86. Marriage, "Aid to Rwanda"; Zorbas, "Aid Dependence".
87. Hayman, "Rwanda: Milking the Cow," 173.
88. Langan, *Neo-Colonialism*, 23–24.
89. *Ibid.*, 23.
90. Beloff, "Viewing the World".
91. See for example, Anver Versi, "Paul Kagame: No Compromise on African Values," *New African*, 7 February 2020. <https://newafricanmagazine.com/22114/>. Note also that Rwanda's domestic development and governance efforts also involve the creation of 'home-grown solutions', which are supposed to be based on Rwandan history and culture, revitalized for contemporary use. As domestic politics, such programs align neatly with resistance to international interference as well. See Gatwa and Mbonyinkebe, "Home-Grown Solutions".
92. Kwibuka, "Rwandans Will Choose".
93. *Ibid.*
94. This reflects what may be a rising tide across Europe, as seen, for example, in a major report and policy guidelines on restitution from French museums (Sarr and Savoy, "The Restitution"). For some of the changes in German museums as a result of decolonization efforts, see Catherine Hickley, "Culture Ministers from 16 German States Agree to Repatriate Artefacts Looted in Colonial Era," *The Art Newspaper*. 14 March 2019. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/culture-ministers-from-16-german-states-agree-to-repatriate-artefacts-looted-in-colonial-era>; and see German Museums Association, "Guidelines for German Museums".
95. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*; Escobar, *Encountering Development*.
96. Kersel and Luke, "Civil Societies?".
97. Mbonyinshuti, "New Museum," Op Cit.
98. Ministry of Sports and Culture, "National Culture Heritage Policy".
99. Karuhanga, "WWI Boat," Op Cit.
100. Bolin, "A Country Without Culture".
101. Bolin, "Temporal Palimpsests and Authenticity".
102. Agence France Presse, "Germany to Probe Origins of Colonial-Era Rwandan Skulls." *Daily Nation*. October 6, 2017. <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/world/Germany-to-probe-origins-Rwandan-skulls--/1068-4127640-590f87/index.html>
103. See, for example, Colwell, "Plundered Skulls".
104. Van Beurden, "The Art of (Re)Possession," 162–63.
105. Winter, "Heritage Diplomacy," 1007, 1011. An important counterexample to this trend is Van Beurden's examination of claims to cultural property by Mobutu's Zaire—a study that centers Zairean, rather than Belgian, factors in the international negotiation of control over cultural heritage (Van Beurden, *Authentically African*).

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