

Decolonizing Heritage:
Critical Perspectives on Sustainability through a Cultural Studies Lens
READING GUIDE

Pierre Verger (1902-1996) was a French photographer, ethnologist, and researcher who became a leading authority on Afro-Brazilian and African cultures. Based in Bahia from 1946, he was initiated into Candomblé and received the name Fatumbi. His extensive work documented cultural connections between Brazil and West Africa through over 62,000 photographs and numerous publications. Verger pioneered the study of intangible heritage decades before UNESCO's formal recognition. He documented religious traditions, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, oral histories, and cultural exchange networks between Brazil and Africa. His intuitive understanding that cultural treasure lay in living practices, transmitted knowledge, and meaningful cultural expressions anticipated modern concepts of intangible cultural heritage preservation.

Verger's work can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Szvx3XpeFp0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eq0MHhoV0Rw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M28zx5-BXT0>

Antônio Bispo dos Santos (1959–2023) was a quilombola leader, political activist, and Brazilian intellectual. Drawing from his experiences in the Quilombo Saco Curtume (Piauí-Brazil), he offers in his 2022 work **A terra dá, a terra quer (The Earth Gives, the Earth Wants)**, a critique of colonial thought based on a quilombola epistemology that questions the eurocentric foundations of constructing the categories of “culture” and “sustainability”. By proposing the concept of “contracolonization” as an alternative to academic decolonial thought, the author uniquely articulates how quilombola communities understand land not merely as a resource, but as a living and ancestral entity – a perspective that fundamentally challenges western notions of cultural and natural

heritage as separate categories. The very way Bispo writes – mixing orality, ancestry and theory – exemplifies a decolonial methodology that enriches analyses on how to rethink cultural heritage studies.

Batoto Yetu Portugal – Cultural and Youth Association (BYP) is a non-profit cultural association founded in 1996 with the support of the Oeiras City Council and the Luso-American Foundation for Development. Since 2016, the guided tour project entitled “Spaces of African Presence in Lisbon” has proposed concrete practices of heritage decolonization, challenging hegemonic narratives about Portuguese cultural identity and revealing continued African presences since the Moorish period. Batoto Yetu’s work connects cultural heritage issues with social justice, working specifically with marginalized communities and creating counter-narratives that challenge common stereotypes related to heritage and tourism.

Stuart Hall’s 1999 article “**Whose Heritage? Un-settling ‘The Heritage’, Re-imagining the Post-nation**” offers a powerful critique of how heritage is constructed and mobilized within national narratives. He exposes the ways in which dominant heritage discourses often exclude marginalized voices, reinforcing colonial hierarchies and cultural homogenization. Hall reframes heritage as a site of political and cultural contestation, urging a move toward plural, inclusive, and dynamic interpretations of the past. His insights challenge cultural institutions to engage with memory, identity, and power critically. By advocating for heritage practices rooted in social justice and diversity, Hall’s work contributes to more ethically grounded, decolonial and sustainable approaches to cultural preservation and representation.

The 1993 Ellipsis Arts compilation album **Global Celebration: Music From Festivals & Celebrations Around The World** challenges the western-centric conception of music and harmony. Featuring 54 tracks from diverse cultures, the four-disc set showcases the richness and complexity of global musical traditions tied to community rituals. By thematically organizing the music – through religious celebrations, nature cycles, life transitions and festive gatherings – it emphasizes shared human experiences while celebrating cultural specificity. The inclusion of “worldbeat” hybrids such as Trinidadian soca, South African township jive, New Orleans Mardi Gras music, modern Celtic folk and African American gospel undermines the dominance of western harmonic

conventions, inviting listeners to appreciate alternative musical logics, aesthetics and worldviews.