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Can Heritage be Transnationalised? The Implications of Transnationalism for Memory and Heritage in Europe and Beyond

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Introduction

This paper asks what happens to heritage when it is transnational, and also as it transnationalises? A major challenge is to relate transnational conceptions of history to the idea of heritage, such that a new and more relevant understanding of the European heritage could reflect Europe's transnational history.

We claim that emphasis on transnational heritage offers hope that the cultural memory of a continent can become transformative, possibly even enabling the cosmopolitan cultural memory that Europe often espouses. Unfortunately, too often Europe's memory projects have promised much but delivered more of the same: nationalism, and reified ethnopolitical and religious identities. They have revealed a continent ignorant of its real pasts, and unable to overturn its legacy of prejudice and discrimination towards both incomers and its historical minorities.

The last few decades have seen 'heritage' becoming a growth industry. This tangible way of representing and thinking about the past has become key to how European societies deal with the past. History, as a true(r) record of the past, no longer counts. National pasts have themselves become 'heritage cultures' (Wood 1999: 31), cut-adrift from the anchoring historical narratives that rightly or wrongly helped shape cultural memory. Now we are all making it up as we go along, individualising memory and ignoring the historical challenges to our personal and collective identities.

The transnational element of heritagisation is crucial to understanding broader shifts in the attitudes of societies to the past. Where this is leading is unclear and is complicated by different ideas and expectations of transnational heritage: it is seen as both a unifying cosmopolitan project as well as a breaking-up of bounded pasts linked to defined identities. Transnationalising heritage carries with it an implicit challenge for some identities: by recognising transnational heritages those identities that claim exclusive group membership are revealed to be anachronistic. What this implies is that a transnationalising heritage has the potential to make European identity a question of 'becoming minoritarian' (Braidotti 2006 and 2015); this means uprooting the old anchors of identity and recognising one's 'partiality', rather than blindly taking old identities (and heritages) as givens.

Although it does not necessarily follow, it is possible that a more transnationalised conception of heritage, in keeping with Europe's past, can offer contemporary societies a more cosmopolitan orientation to their identities.

1. Cosmopolitanism and Global Memory

Some of the most important developments for the contemporary understanding of heritage have come from changes in the nature of memory more generally. The distinction between what has been variously termed social memory and historical memory (Halbwachs, 1980) is particularly relevant here.

In recent years a new perspective has emerged with respect to the universalisation of historical memory: the notion of a global memory. In this the place and significance of the Holocaust looms large. According to Levy and Sznaider (2002; 2006) the Holocaust is no longer primarily a social memory but a historical memory that goes beyond the limits of a specific nation, it is a 'cosmopolitan' or a 'global memory'. This is possible, according to their argument, because the nation-state is no longer the container of memories and identities, which are now more likely to be shaped by global forces.

The notion of a global memory that provides the basis of a new and more cosmopolitan approach to heritage is very important. However, a transnational perspective offers a more nuanced approach than one that asserts a global memoryscape. Significantly, we need to locate the Holocaust alongside other competing narratives that have major significance for how heritage should be conceived today; it is not the only marker of transnational heritage.

Global heritage projects like UNESCO's attempt at a 'World Heritage' are cosmopolitan in their intent, but in practice normalize an expert-led and technical-bureaucratic idea of heritage. Transnational such regimes of memory may be, but they do not build shared pasts or foster the cultural humility necessary for majority cultures to work towards becoming minoritarian.

2. Transnational and Transnationalising heritages

What happens to heritages when they transnationalise? One of the most obviously 'transnational' heritage projects is UNESCO's World Heritage List (WHL), yet numerous case-studies detail how designating something as 'World Heritage' has too often just been used for place-marketing, city branding and national tourism promotion. This is because World Heritage has become an integral part of the global 'economy of prestige' (Hoelscher 2011, 302; see also Herrera 2014). By contrast, a genuine process of transnationalising heritage, and the recognition it gives to mixed-up and complicated pasts shows that a more equitable and less exclusionary relationship to the past is possible.

One of the key ways that heritage has been used recently is within development. This is both welcome and problematic. The ways in which it operates give an insight into which pasts are deemed suitable for conveying ideas of unity and transnational identification, and also how this kind of transnationalisation masks a neocolonial development agenda that can ignore local understandings and uses of heritage. Of particular interest is how certain pasts are more amenable to universal messages than others. This is the case in Tunisia where Roman archaeology has been used to locate Tunisia as part of a wider more secular world, one whose archaeological remains are selectively used to demonstrate past cosmopolitanism, and to create a 'heritage citizen' (Lafrenz Samuels 2012, 159).

Ancient history is good value for such imaginings, establishing incontrovertible value and guaranteeing tourist interest. What they don't appear to do is to critically engage with the broader and more problematic pasts, such as the legacy of European exploitation and colonialism, whose sites of violence rarely attract significant foreign interest.

So, how might heritage professionals and activists actually practice the transnationalisation of heritage? One way may be to simply abandon representing the collective identities that museums and memorialisations have tended to reify. Heritage – even in its most overtly transnational form of UNESCO's WHL – makes distinct identities more evident. Heritage professionals and museum curators can

instead focus on the objects and places, finding narratives that emphasise other kinds of identification, that create less ethnically-bound forms of cultural memory.

Other strategies involve privileging the heritagisation process itself as a way to overcome contestation over the past. For example, the Swedish NGO Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB), has been running projects in the Balkans aimed at creating networks which override such ethno-nationalist identities, but that also promote the idea of heritage as both a right and a resource (Walters 2014: 97). A crucial element of success in their Regional Restoration Camps, run twice a year in Gjirokastra, has been the way engaging in physical restoration and reconstruction creates dialogue amongst the camps' participants, and thus also a transnationalisation of perspectives over both the deeper past and more recent conflict. CHwB show that heritage is theoretically a process that can help build new communities and break-down divisions.

3. Multidirectional Memories, Hybridity and the Entanglement of Heritage

What does a visitor to Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe experience? What kinds of cultural memory are these public representations? Much debate has hinged on the exceptionality of the Holocaust, how no other genocide comes close in scale, inhumanity or horror. This is the idea that 'the Nazi past is too massive to be forgotten, and too repellent to be integrated into the "normal" narrative of memory' (Friedlander 1993, 2, cited by Winter and Sivan 2000, 7).

These are big questions, and the best way to answer them is with a theoretical toolkit capable of reconciling cultural memory with historical reality. The toolkit we propose combines multidirectionality, hybridity and entanglement. At the base of this is Michael Rothberg's (2009) influential book *Multidirectional Memory* that shows how memories interact with each other, and so should not be seen in isolation from another. Memories are multidirectional. The result is that fundamentally different memories converge producing new narratives, and – potentially – a more cosmopolitan relationship between different historical experiences. Rothberg's multidirectional memory also demonstrates the entanglement of different pasts and the hybridity that can emerge from these.

While Europe acknowledges the Holocaust, it does so only partially, masking key aspects and complicities, as well as its links to other horrors. For example, few in the West remember the atrocities committed by the colonial powers on their subject peoples: these dirty histories remain hidden. The rest of Europe needs something like Germany's self-critical *Vergangenheitsbewältigungswille*, the will to face down the dark aspects of one's past (Müller 2010, 659-60). The lack of visibility of dark pasts beyond the Holocaust demonstrates that Europe's cultural memory does not yet demonstrate its multidirectionality. To do so would be to admit guilt, both with past and recent horrors. In fact, Pakier and Stråth (2010, 8-9, cited by Löytömäki 2014) argue that the continued focus of the European Union on the Holocaust in recent years has been a politically useful foil against criticisms of the EU's own recent failings. Srebenica is one shameful recent example close to home, Rwanda one further away, and the relatively invisible genocide of European Roma one further back in time.

Heading further back into Europe's dark pasts, we share connected heritages of imagined racial superiority and subjugating minority populations. Recent representations of the slave trade demonstrate this. For example, whilst Great Britain has celebrated its efforts to institutionalise the 1807 Slave Trade Abolition Act and presents this as part of its democratic tradition, Britain's responsibility for globalising the slave trade in the first place (as well as the massive financial compensation of slave owners in the 1830s) has been downplayed. The nationalist ideological appropriation continued during the Bicentenary of Abolition in 2007 with New Labour validating its own development agenda. It drew explicit transhistorical parallels between historic slavery and the inequities of contemporary globalisation, but the solution was presented as Britain's Department for International Development, whose work would guarantee that rights would be respected, and lives saved (Biccum 2014). This was not then an attempt to atone for the past, but the politicisation of the past that suits British national identity. In this case then, transnational heritage was *renationalised*.

It would be better for governments that really care about dealing with their difficult pasts to fund heritage processes that engage citizens with their complex interwoven heritages in the long-term.

4. Migrant, Diasporic Heritage

Migration is a key heritage issue. It is particularly so for Europe, not least for the continent's own internal migrations which from the 1700s onwards shaped its shift from a rural agrarian continent to a predominantly urban industrialised one. Beyond the need to understand and create public recognition of migration as normal, it is important for two main reasons: first, heritages themselves migrate; secondly, the categories used to think about, bureaucratically process, and ex- or in-clude migrants and asylum seekers, are racialised and typologized on the twin legacies of slavery and colonialism. Public discourse in European mass and social media has focused on difference, and especially on seemingly incompatible religious difference. The result is that the right of incoming communities to self-representation and their own heritage is a mess, right across Europe. In public policy, control over heritage representation is not seen as a rights issue, more as an opportunity to buy into national narratives that sometimes (as in the UK) celebrate a European 'unity in diversity' type narrative through multicultural policies.

More horrifyingly perhaps, the pragmatics of exclusion which have been explored recently in Ruben Andersson's powerful ethnography *Illegality, Inc.*, demonstrate that concentration camps, barriers, and containment are not just a heritage issue for Europe: from Italian concentration camps in Cyrenaica in the 1930s, to today's fences in Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta, and on Italy's tiny island of Lampedusa. So, if heritage is an 'industry' (Hewison, 1987), we do well to remember that migration is too, both illegally with Libyan people smugglers, to legally with Frontex, and that the polemical aspects of migration being exploited by Europe's far right help mask Europe's own complicity. This is a complicity in denying both Europe's own historical migrations, and its colonial exploitation of the forebears of those who now land on its shores and drown in its oceans.

5. European Heritage

Europe is a victim of its past horrors and past successes. But must Europe always remind itself of the evils it gave birth to and inflicted on the world?

The pasts that are universally seen as credible are few and far between. The Holocaust provides us with a clear example: few historical events have been as well documented, and it has played a key role in Europeans' understandings of their shared past, but – in truth – this has largely depended on Germany shouldering the weight of *Vergangenheitsbewältigungswille*, whilst other European nations (especially collaborationist France, Belgium, Holland, Hungary, Croatia, Fascist Italy and technically 'neutral' Fascist Spain) have not engaged in such unsettling memory work.

This is an ongoing issue, as the continued battle for wide recognition of the Armenian Genocide has demonstrated. It has been surprising to see the continued capitulation and deference to a Turkish view of the past by a number of European states during this year's Centenary, who still refuse to use the 'G' word (e.g. Great Britain).

It is easy to pick examples of heritage that ought to be transnationalised and made materially present to global publics. Similar to the Armenian Genocide are the numerous colonial massacres and atrocities, most of which are unknown and absolutely unrepresented to European publics. One good example: the Italian Fascist massacre of the citizens of Addis Ababa 19-21 February 1937, when between 18 to 20% of the civilian population were killed, possibly as many as 30,000 people. It is worth noting too that Italy still has no national museum of the Holocaust, and even its recent efforts for a Museo della Shoah which began in 2009 are still uncertain. This slowness of many European states to make meaningful heritage out of their *shared* dark pasts seems to complicate Rothberg's multidirectional memory thesis. However, perhaps it is this greater weight of connected histories - Italy's concentration camps in Cyrenaica, Britain's brutal torture of anticolonial 'Mau Mau' insurgents, the horror of the Algerian War - that prevents broader recognition. States believe that representing complex and messy pasts is politically dangerous. But this is of course intellectually and ethically weak, and suggests Europe's citizens are incapable of creating a positive and mutually tolerant identity from the smoking ruins of the continent's own barbarism and parochialism.

In the European Commission's *Draft Council Conclusions on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage* from November 2014 an explicit recognition of, and commitment to, the tough memory work that is needed to balance national pasts with messy historical realities is lacking. This position follows the 'unity in diversity' conception of European identity wherein the emphasis is rather more on diversity than unity. However this leaves uncertain what exactly is European about Europe. Yet, we do believe that it is possible to speak of the European heritage in ways that do not simply refer to the totality of national and local memories and heritage.

Conclusions

Can heritage be transnationalised? We have argued here that not only can heritage be transnationalised, but that there are clear advantages in doing so. For example, recognising the transnational aspects of heritage helps promote the idea of 'heritage rights', not as something one inherits from previous generations, but as a right people everywhere should have to 'fulfil their capabilities' (Hodder, 2010, 861). As the archaeologist Ian Hodder argues, talking about heritage as a right to be involved in representing one's own culture is a useful counter to the expert-led conservationism that tends to dominate heritage management. He has little faith in 'human rights' as having any legal ability to better lives, but the dialogue of 'rights' does help, promoting a broader 'social negotiation' (2010, 866) that may help offset the tendency of heritage to be appropriated by sectarian and commercial interests.

This paper has shown how the Holocaust has become the symbol of a public memory that knows no borders, and yet it both enables other memories (e.g. of anticolonial struggle and recognition of slavery), whilst also enabling European states to gloss over their complicity in other genocides and horrors.

Whilst critical of the heritage industry because of these simplifications of the past and reifications of national, ethnic and religious categories, we have seen that there is potential in the transnationalisation of heritage for helping to create a cosmopolitan cultural memory. Leaving aside the ethical case for promoting a transnationalising heritage, there are other reasons why Europe should turn its pasts inside-out. If we follow Aimé Césaire we realise that the risk to Europe is

great: hiding from its dark pasts and refusing to do the necessary memory work risks undermining not only the positive aspects of Europe's shared heritage, but also the very existence of the continent. Europe has come too close to the edge too often, and the spectres of its unresolved transnational pasts continue to shade European identity formation. In other words, if Europe wishes to re-civilise itself, it might well start by looking at its uncivilised transnational heritages.

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