



# Cultural Base

Social Platform  
on Cultural Heritage  
and European Identities

## Can New Cultural Institutions and Policies Contribute to the Equalization of Conditions in Europe? Cultural legitimacy, heritage and identity politics

### AXIS 2. CULTURAL INCLUSION TF4. Inclusion and heritage

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## Introduction

In the last fifty years, cultural institutions have been questioned from various points of view, as producing purely nationalist narratives, as controlling the interpretation of icons and texts through symbolic violence, as reproducing social and cultural inequalities instead of reducing them, and, even worse, excluding the minorities from the cultural feast. The relative inefficiency of democratizing cultural policies is well documented now, and new initiatives have been developed to answer part of the questions raised by social critique. It is too early to come to conclusions concerning the outcomes of the first institutional devices aiming to produce an inclusive European cultural community. In this paper we would like to delineate what we call the new landscape of cultural legitimacy in Europe. The assault on dominant forms of culture has not put an end to the claim for recognition. If the dividing line between dominant culture and other forms of expression has been moved and sometimes been blurred, this does not mean that we have constructed an equalitarian cultural public sphere. Our further contribution to the project will address this issue more concretely. For the time being, we need to explore the conceptual frameworks through which we think of cultural meanings, and assess their recent transformations. In our paper, we will move constantly from concrete examples to more theoretical assertions. Our aim is to come to grips to the main topic through case studies and observation.

This is why we start with a concrete example. Budapest, August 2015. Sziget Festival. A cosmopolitan crowd of young people, coming mostly from Europe, rallied in Sziget Island, with the purpose to enjoy night and day a large offer of international popular music. Small groups waved large national flags or were clad in their country colors. They did not stop waving them during the concerts that could last for ninety minutes or more. When asked to interpret the gesture, organizers and older observers answered that it was not a nationalist statement, but rather the display of a sense of belonging and a way of being identified by others in a friendly way. No need to say that no European flag was waved in what remains one of the most important gatherings of European youth, Eastern and Western. In the meantime, the refugee crisis intensified and the Hungarian government decided to erect a wall made of barbed wire to stop the influx of migrants from Serbia. As the young and well-groomed young people were warmly



welcomed at the festival gate, the government subsidized huge posters along the highways expressing their discontent with the migrants. The conflation of those two images is an apposite symbol of what might be called the present cultural situation of Europe. On the one hand globalized cultural industries provide the public with a cosmopolitan offer. On the other hand we have a country that, though having been a member of European Union since May 2004, has developed a heavy nationalist rhetoric based on references to Christianity and to strong identity claims.

How to go further in order to make sense of those contradictory pictures? In this paper we seek to develop analytical tools that will allow us to deal with these transformations. This implies that many sociological categories developed either before those changes or during the time of their emergence are no longer fitted to give an precise account of the current cultural shaping of societies. If we take as a major reference the standard survey *Enquête nationale sur les pratiques culturelles des Français*, started in 1973 and undoubtedly a model of large-scale analysis of cultural behavior (Donnat 2010), we are doomed to overlook a significant part of the phenomena that we want to shed light on. The survey cannot grasp anything related to minorities, for instance. This is largely due to the peculiarities of the French statistical system that is itself dependent on an abstract and universal vision of the Republican contract. But the debates, that have frequently taken a true dimension of cultural war, are far from being reserved to France. If France seems constantly reluctant to “multiculturalism”, a confused notion that should be deconstructed, cultural conflicts arise in societies that have for a long time circumscribed a form of social space for “minorities”. Many of the debates are now transnational: this is largely due to the flows of communication initiated by the digitization of symbolic products, but also to the facts that major cultural struggles are no longer limited by national settings but tend to become globalized: in order to understand cultural changes, we must refer to emerging forms of collective action that are based on the rapid circulation of symbolic models, structures of meaning and processes of “framing”. Generally speaking, we are ill-equipped to deal with those issues in routinized sociological terms. The foundations of the sociology of culture have been seriously shaken in the last thirty years, but no alternative analytical frame has been developed either. The legitimacy theory (so central in Bourdieu’s *Distinction*) has undergone a legitimacy crisis (Bourdieu 1984). But this does not mean that forms of symbolic domination have vanished in the



air. One can assume that they exist in different ways. Creative society deserves our attention as a social phenomenon and as a cultural mythology (in Barthes' sense) but should not be welcomed by the "Hallelujah chorus" of the social scientists, as Philip Schlesinger appositely wrote (Schlesinger 2009).

We need to reassess the concepts that we use in order to account for the emergence, stabilization and decline of cultural forms. The instant disenchantment that followed the end of existing socialism has added a new weight to the phenomenon and increased what we may call the symbolic crisis of Europe. This discrepancy between institutional discourse and "popular" feelings and resentment is now a major dimension of our symbolic world. More than the critique of the radical left, that remains to a large extent a middle class phenomenon (dominated by white and educated people), the main outcome of the political-symbolic crisis is the emergence of new types of conservative discourse, either the neo-nationalism of white dominated classes or the neo-religious claims of a part (seemingly expanding) of the migrant workforce and their inheritors. Cultural clashes develop along these lines rather than about the stratified tastes that Bourdieu identified in *Distinction*. It is not easy to give a precise picture of the situation, since statistical apparatuses are not fit for making those new cleavages visible and since sociological observers may be misled by some actors who are more vociferous than others and whose weight is overestimated.

Our contribution to the project is twofold: the first goal is to unpack various cultural contents, either produced by recognized cultural institutions or delivered by cultural industries out of any legitimate claim. The issues related to minorities (and to migration too) can be taken up from an institutional perspective: how cultural agencies, museums and theaters deal with the problem constitutes a necessary step. But we should not forget in future work less visible phenomena that appear in cultural habits as well as in religious claims. In this respect, we want to analyze processes rather than entities. This paper is undoubtedly a first step and its construction makes sense only if it can trigger reactions from the stake holders. Our second objective is to revisit sociological and political theories that deal with the rise of minority cultural claims. How is the cultural public sphere reconfigured by those claims? Where is the locus of legitimacy and recognition in a fragmented world? Knowing that cultural institutions as we know (and sometimes cherish them) are the outcome of nation-building processes, what is the main



building force of current cultural constructions? How can we live together, equal and different, as Alain Touraine once put it (Touraine 2000) ? What type of cultural covenant is possible? Are we doomed to the cultural war of all against all (*culturale bellum omnium contra omnes*)? How can we insert into the frame a type of cultural and emotional experience that is more and more central, largely due to the circulation of images, namely a new form of banality of evil, terrorism in everyday life? The globalization of everyday life is experienced through the blind killings that affect every day large parts of the world and quite frequently Europe now. European construction was justified by providing peace and abundance to all citizens. The recent killings in Paris clearly illustrate the phenomenon, coming after other cases in London, Madrid and other places. G r me Truc has recently analyzed what he calls "concernment" about deaths that do not occur in our neighborhood but strongly affect our structure of feelings (Truc 2014). They have obviously very different symbolic and political weights, as the comparison between the emotion triggered by the bombings in London and Madrid and the reaction to the mass drowning of migrants in the Mediterranean clearly shows.

We do consider that a reassessment of the concept of legitimacy is a necessary step to reconstruct a valid set of analytical tools for analyzing cultural dynamics. The first part of our paper is devoted to this issue. The concept of legitimacy is to a large extent obsolete and in the mean time continues to frame a large part of the debate, that deals with the recognition of forms of expression. Another way of presenting the question we want to raise is the following: from legitimacy to recognition. Thus, in the second part, we will try to identify the new paths of recognition by which previously dominated culture come to institutional existence.

## **1. Beyond cultural legitimacy**

### *1a. Culture, symbol, belief*

The history of cultural sociology shows clearly that attempting to develop a unified field of research is an impossible task. We would like to clarify the meanings of culture, at least tentatively. If we stay close to classical anthropology, we have to take into account the fact that culture means all the symbolic devices which allow us to acknowledge the coherence of a social group through all the signs and the practices it uses in an organized and somewhat homogeneous space. We need



then to focus on the proceedings which guarantee a stabilized meaning, through varied, but coherent means in a given culture, to rituals, practices or objects. Culture is here the other name of a universal symbolic ability (Sperber 1974), about which social sciences must describe variations in space and time: there is a permanent tension involved between the transhistorical symbolic capacity and the inexhaustible diversity of local cultures, which is the result of the infinite combination of cultural objects by which a culture is actualized. The notion of symbolic system is located at the crossing of those two dimensions : it allows to decode a culture, which means that a systematic encoding is presupposed, even if there is no real anthropological interest in code construction.

The attention paid to an encoding process raises the question of the historical constitution and the non genetic transmission of symbolic systems, but also the question of their possible obsolescence and of the reroutings and reappropriations they undergo through time, whatever the systemic level of stability. All the symbolic orderings are simultaneously historical and cultural : they exist only if members develop beliefs about them and if they adhere to them, which does not mean that they are fully submitted to them or complete fools. Studying the modes of belief must be included in the analysis of symbolic systems. The decline of institutions by lack of belief leads to the waning of cultural objects inasmuch as they are meaningful. If they survive to "cultures" as institutional proceedings grounded on a definite type of coherence and cohesion that actualized them in a given time as supports of belief, it is because they are reinvested by different acts of belief which reenact them in a new symbolic ordering : this appears clearly in the diversity of revivals, reuses and inventions of tradition.

How can we describe the coexistence of the different cultural forms present simultaneously in a given society ? Above all, we have to reconsider the interpretative systems that we have resorted to in order to analyze the diversity of cultural products and their corresponding consumption styles by relating them to a theory of symbolic domination based on the observation of the existence of a legitimacy scale In fact, we often forget that social agents perceive in a variety of ways (and as a rule indistinctly) the cultural hierarchies to which sociologists assign very precise social ranking functions.



*1b. Under what conditions can we talk about cultural legitimacy?*

Here, we analyze legitimacy in its strongest use: when it is linked to a theory of power. Obviously, it is in Max Weber's works that we find its first formulation, through a general legitimate violence theory, of which the educational system theory elaborated in *La Reproduction* in reality constitutes only one particular application (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970). The strength of the legitimacy of an action or a symbolic device is derived, ultimately, from the force of the groups whose interests it expresses. In the case of education (and particularly for the situation in France in the 1960s), the solid character of the inculcation device (demonstrated through pedagogical authority) makes it easy to update the structural affinities between the values of the privileged classes and the particular systems dedicated to the scholastic reproduction of legitimate culture.

Things get complicated when we export the idea of legitimacy towards social universes that can be less easily described in terms of a system. Such is the case with cultural production and consumption, which appear like so many "worlds", to use Howard Becker's fruitful notions, characterized by specific histories and codes (Becker 1982). In the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sociological work on culture has concentrated instead on re-examining the effectiveness of the division between learned and popular culture when this division is dissociated from the historical process of its emergence. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Mukerji and Schudson 1991) observed that work on popular cultures played a central role in the social sciences during the last quarter of the century: the innovative capacity of popular cultures is primarily based on the fact that their rapid development has shaken up the presuppositions that held together the constituted knowledge in this domain, and challenged established disciplinary boundaries. It is true that the spectacular appearance of communication and cultural studies departments, to say nothing of specializations concerning minorities, owes much to the academic observation of the established cultural order – an observation that cannot be dissociated from the morphological upheavals that occurred in the Western academic world-popular culture being synonymous here with subordinate culture, expression of the situation of minorities and offering a choice of ammunition to newcomers in academic competition.



Basically, the main interest for maintaining the reference to the idea of legitimacy lies in its capacity to explain the selection process of works or genres that transform the social contexts of their consumption and produce new configurations of meaning. Although quite old now, Lawrence Levine's work shows how Shakespeare, whose works served as a medium for genuine popular entertainment during the nineteenth century in the United States, became at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the very example of high culture (Levine 1988). The change of status of Shakespeare's works is strongly associated with social and cultural transformations: the decline of rhetoric and oratory art in education, for which Shakespeare's works were a preferred medium, but also in social and political life, cumulated its effects with the progressive segregation process of the audiences; the theatre ceased to be a meeting place for different social groups. Since that period, a growing fragmentation has characterized the cultural offering in the United States. Levine's work illustrates the fertility of a study of cultural goods in terms of process rather than in terms of a homologous stratification of objects and publics. But it also invites to consider with suspicion the mechanical use of the high/low or learned/popular pairs, which leads to considering culture on a vertical plane, and to being trapped by homologies that dissimulate both the historical production processes regarding the meaningful contexts of works, as well as the multiplicity of forms of relationship to works.

## **2. The paths of generalized recognition**

It thus seems useful at this point to leave theory aside in order to attempt to describe today's regimes of production of cultural legitimacy. We will successively deal with four topics. The first is that of the new forms of heritage preservation that have recently invested various spaces. The second is that of the ever widening of the circle of recognized objects. The third is that of the development of communal cultures. We will close this part by examining the process of "heritagization" of the Other.

### *2a New conditions for preserving national heritage*

If we consider the question of national heritage, we easily see that the legitimate criteria about what should be preserved have been the subject of diverse extensions. The extension of the objects available for illustrating national memory,



or more recently European memory, has been the most striking feature of heritage procedures in various countries. If the nation-state was the first provider of norms of protection and restoration, we are now confronted with the multiplication of agencies devoted to the constitution of heritage lists and with – to the inexhaustible domains of cultural diversities that multiple territorial, professional and other collectivities represent, as well as to diverse historical experiences largely exceeding the strict definition of national history. The Unesco World Heritage List is a case in point: first because it is based on diverse forms of campaigning about a place of interest through the accumulation of symbolic capital, that may be close to a traditional definition of heritage or incorporate elements of identity or historical claims. The nation-state is no longer detaining the ultimate canons of legitimization. We are witnessing, not always very clearly, the explosion of the taken for granted notion of national history in favor of the diversification of the components of public interest. The partial decentering of procedures of protection, present in various European countries, is the consequence of taking into account the recognition of the multiplicity of viewpoints about national heritage: the state is no longer the only one to speak, even if it still has the last word most of the time. Besides traditional normative speeches, nowadays we also hear different voices impersonating local interest or minority interest. Elected officials and cultural agents are mobilizing various resources so that the urgency or inanity of such and such a measure is recognized. Regarding national heritage, public interest is henceforth defined, partially at least, from a local space of negotiation.

The result can only be the growing heterogeneity of protected heritage, which is none other than the sum of the politico-administrative conjunctures that surrounded the decision-making process. The multiplication of heritage agencies and agents is undoubtedly a relatively minor matter. More profound is the ambiguity of the message delivered by the new normative process: the prevailing cultural relativism, which leads to believing that all forms of architectural expression are equal, or more exactly, that they all correspond in their way to a specific legitimate order, can only end up in the convulsive multiplication of related to heritage preservation gestures, never allowing a glimpse of a possibility of establishing coherence. In this, policies on national heritage preservation simply translate one of the dominant forms of contemporary cultural sensitivity based on the apparent de-hierarchization of forms of expression and their generalized



equivalence.

The social networks from which are organized – or that give rise to – processes for national heritage preservation constitute an essential dimension of the re-composition of “learned” and “popular”. The identification of local heritage in its diverse components occurs, in fact, through the refined description of forms of association on social “stages”. Meeting on these stages are professional historians, with their activities and specific demands; the public “at work”, with activities that question the dividing line between producers and consumers; and symbolic resource centers (archives, libraries, museums), whose forms of constitution and access condition local history while being conditioned by local history. As such, the erudite local is simply a face among others, even if he is central: a member of several learned societies, he crosses affiliations that intersect other types of relationships (kinship, locality, sociability).

### *2b. Equalization of expressive forms*

The second empirical observation concerns the permanent extension of the circle of recognized cultural forms of expression. It is not just in the academic field that the dividing line between high and low has been questioned. I will take just one example, which also represents a classic case. Jazz, defined in the hierarchy built by Pierre Bourdieu as an art on the path to legitimization, is alternatively qualified today as the most learned of popular music or as the most popular of learned music, while it is perhaps neither one nor the other. It offers the occasion at least to raise the question about the reality of changes in social status of a symbolic form over the course of history. The very idea according to which jazz could have hefted itself, by a series of successive efforts, to the level of learned music is very largely an illusion.

### *2c. The development of communal cultures*

The internationalization of cultural goods markets has favored the development of a cultural object status as identifying and as the vector of a communal identity. This type of association is not new insofar as the mobilization of specific cultural traits, whatever their real age, authenticity or native character, is constitutive of identity construction.



Contemporary styles expressing are no longer associated with a state apparatus understood as a device producing legitimate symbolic violence. The cultural identity demands that have appeared since the sixties rarely have a monopolistic character, with the exception of those understood to be a prelude to constitution of a state. If they do not always escape the temptation of withdrawal, confinement or regression, if they are sometimes lead unconsciously to reactivate reactionary schemes of thought, it nevertheless remains that they very rarely have a monopolistic ambition. Rather, identity appears through these cultural objects as the ambition to practice on an egalitarian stage where old distinctions have disappeared. Cultural objects in this case are much more objects of identification than of distinction. It goes without saying that the production of these differences supposes mutual recognition of a common space in which they can be represented, failing which the specter of "cultural war" can find a reason for renewing itself. One of today's big cultural stakes lies in the constitution of a genuine multicultural stage, which one can legitimately believe has nothing to do with a world folklore meeting, or with neo-colonialist exploitation of "world cultures" on the stages of northern countries.

#### *2d. The heritagization of the internal Other*

The recognition of multiple memories in a single society that are equally worth preserving are to some extent the consequence of the weakening of a central normative discourse. Cultural policies "avant la lettre" accompanied the building of the nation-state and offered a coherent picture of the cultural order: on the one hand, the national culture, conveyed by great institutions and embodied in heroic figures and in great works, forming a pantheon; on the other hand the folklore as a way of dealing with the residual symbolic matters, always anonymous, anti-heroic and doomed to be mute unless accounted for by a learned interpretive frame. The folkloric model was exported to the colonies in order to produce a cohesive image of the colonized as bearer of an anonymous set of traditions which were made meaningful if the colonial administrator, officer or anthropologist provided a symbolic grid. This process has been described after the end of formal colonialism in a book that triggered a controversy almost as heated as the one that Max Weber launched with his *Protestant Ethic*. Edward Said's *Orientalism* made explicit the process of construction of otherness as a mode of domination and brought in a



form of suspicion concerning all the cultural devices developed along modern history to give an account of the non-Western symbolic and life forms. Preceded by anti-colonialist accounts such as Fanon's violent attack on colonial violence and followed by subaltern, feminist and queer studies, *Orientalism* has become the central part of a now dominant narrative about the forms of European cultural domination over the rest of the World. Clearly more attention is paid to the wrongdoings of European imperialism, particularly British and French, rather than to the expansion of new ones. Of course, historical analysis can be exported or reemployed to account for the current situation: but most of the time, European history, from the Enlightenment on, is blamed first. It comes as no surprise then that the Charlie killings in January 2015 were explained by prominent US leftist intellectuals as the consequence of "French cultural arrogance".

The popularization of post-colonialist theses has had important consequences on the public management of memories. Nations or social groups within nations continue to bear the crimes of their ancestors and they must be accountable for them. Most of the repairs that are claimed are situated at the memory level and they may be materialized in terms of museums, cultural centers or monuments. As the state has no longer the monopoly of public memory, a competition develops between groups unequally equipped with symbolic resources. As the memory of the extermination of European Jews has been the object of an intense memory work since the late 1940s, it stands out as an exemplar of cultural and political recognition and is frequently taken as a standard for different mobilization. This attitude ignores the exceptionality of Shoah and the peculiarities of the post-war political context, particularly, but not only, in Germany. The production of a public memory dealing with the extermination of Jews- inscribed in cultural or educational institutions was precisely linked to the reconstruction of nation-states and to the emergence of a new European public conscience. Armenian and Palestinian claims are the most frequent examples of the quest for what might be called "a Shoah equivalent", but less tragic historical conjunctures may be the object of analogous justifications too. The public sphere tends to become a huge forum for minority claims, as the frame of the nation state is less and less able to cope with the issues. More than that: the global public sphere is increasingly constituted by these types of claims, as the study of transnational mobilizations clearly show (Tarrow 2005).



The theoretical basis of the process is undoubtedly the concept of multiculturalism. Advocates of multiculturalism plead for “group-differentiated rights”, according to Will Kymlicka’s well-known definition (Kymlicka 1995). The basic unit is no longer the individual, but the group, that is presupposed as homogeneous and non-stratified: the condition of possibility of the minority claims is based on the sameness of the members of the group. Collective identity is strong, and it transcends other differences. There is a well noted paradox here: in a time when the identity of the individual has been challenged by literature and the social sciences, collective identity is more and more taken for granted, as if minorities were less individualized than majorities. Economic, political or cultural handicaps are always seen through the lens of the group and not as the effects of class domination or the division of labor. Another striking point: the group is never defined as a transitory reality, susceptible of being changed through collective action. The equalization of objective conditions should lead to the disappearance of the group claims and consequently the group as “truly disadvantaged” (Wilson 1992). Multiculturalism has turned culture into a political concept. Cultural claims are central political claims, perhaps the only legitimate ones. Of course, the concept of culture remains vague and its manifestations are more religious, ethnic and linguistic than strictly cultural.

In this respect, migration museums are worth examining, since they offer, within national frames, a tentative response to the accommodation of some dose of multiculturalism. Joachim Baur has shown the importance of migration museums in « recentering » the nation in a more multicultural dimension in Australia, Canada and the United States (Baur 2009: 20). Of course, the practical effects of this form of display have not been fully measured yet and we can just assess their institutional presence in society and their legitimizing capacity. Recent migration museums have changed the point of view on the nation-building process in a direction more sympathetic to the immigrant. This position has clearly been easier to defend in the “new world” where immigration was inbuilt in the national narrative. It has been less simple in Europe, particularly in France: we have more difficulties Claire Sutherland’s analysis of the Museu d’Historia de Catalunya sheds light on this process: “The exhibition features the theme of migration throughout; it emphasizes Catalonia’s Mediterranean and to a lesser extent, European context; it presents Catalonia in contrast to a range of Others; it acknowledges Catalonia’s cultural expansionism...These features serve to highlight the changing, porous



nature of territorial borders and the impact of immigration, trade and conquest throughout history..." (Sutherland 2014:122). In the museum narrative, Catalonia is constantly oriented toward the sea and very seldom towards Spain. Thus migrants flow are considered as "constituents components of Catalan national identity" (Sutherland 2014: 123). The acknowledgement of migration as a key-part of Catalan history is undoubtedly commanded by the new national narrative that tends to ignore Spain and to stress the peripheral elements in the construction of a new country. This example shows how the dynamics of neo-nationalism in Europe can make some room for multicultural components. \ One can say that the migration or indigenous institutions have known a greater development in the new world, for two reasons: first, the process is never a hidden part of the "imagined community" (Anderson) but a strong component of the founding myth of a nation; second, the indigenous people are no longer a significant actor onstage. In Europe, things are most difficult since the migratory dimension is seldom a component of the national founding myth. On the contrary, the process of unification presupposes a form of ethnic homogeneity, even when it is defined at a very abstract level. Second, the issues related to post WW2 immigration, are still very hot and one of the main resources of the neo-nationalist far right movements that prosper in Europe now. New museology is a very interesting sub-discipline, but it lacks the dimension of reception studies on a broad scale: not much can be said concerning the symbolic and political effects of these new cultural institutions, at least for the time being.

This paper is a just of point of departure. We aim to start a fresh discussion with the stake-holders of the program. We have decided, for methodological reasons, to break away from stereotyped visions of Europe that are the natural consequence of the bureaucratic development of the Union. We wish to maintain the conditions of a critical discourse that should not be a dismissal of the European construction, but on the contrary, a way of advancing together.

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