

Re-visiting the Past and Shaping the Future in the Cultural Practices of Young People

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This special issue was born out of the international project Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF) funded by the European Commission within the Horizon 2020 programme. The project focuses on youth's cultural socialisation in various educational settings through formal schooling, intergenerational interactions in the family, taking part in civic society activities, informal friendship groups and at heritage sites by conducting multi-method research in nine countries across Europe and beyond, including the UK, Germany, Latvia, Slovakia, Croatia, Spain, Turkey and India. The project aims to explore how these diverse educational environments overlap and influence the process of young people's identity construction as well forms of inter-cultural communication. One of the key research questions addressed by CHIEF is whether existing discursive practices in engaging with history, the past and culture in their institutionalised and informal modes contribute to or hinder the emergence of a more inclusive understanding of culture, identity and heritage among youth.

Arguably, since the 1980s at least, the social sciences have been undergoing a turn towards public history, cultural memory and heritage in societies across the globe, as the past has become a resource that is mobilised for identity-formation purposes under the socio-economic transformations (see Pine, Kaneff, Haukanes, *Eds.*, 2004; Assmann, Shortt, *Eds.*, 2012; Shaw, Chase, 1989; Verdery, 1999). Such an engagement with history and heritage is one of the manifestations of 'past presencing' (Macdonald, 2013) that provides a safer format for the re-negotiation of the nation's and group's identities.

Perhaps the Black Lives Matter movement's challenge to the established discourses framing the national past and identity in the USA, UK and elsewhere in Europe is the most recent example of how cultural heritage becomes a field in which the present racialised social inequalities are combatted by rethinking the past colonial self.

This special issue aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on the transformative potential of heritage in its tangible and intangible forms in the globalised world (Novicka, Rovisco, *Eds.*, 2009; Macdonald, 2013; Feldman, 2008). In doing so this collection of articles joins the growing body of critical heritage scholarship that provides examples of how new forms of articulation and contextualisation of the past do not merely reflect the cultural changes but also trigger public debates about the future trajectories of societies. History and heritage are called on as 'moral witness' in clashes around the issues of (to name a few) migration and integration, the right to public spaces in the context of neo-liberal economic practices and gentrification, and the inclusivity and emancipation of minority groups. These debates are often at the heart of broader economic, political and cultural processes that shape the meanings of belonging, citizenship, nation and identity.

The CHIEF approach to heritage, which underpins the conceptual frameworks of the papers in this special issue, challenges the Western (and Eurocentric) understanding of culture that is largely blind to diversity and the interconnectedness of the cultural experiences and histories of people in contemporary Europe and across the globe. Indeed, the notion that culture is a tool for enhancing a shared European identity has been the focus of policy and academic research over the past few decades (Shore, 2000; Sassatelli, 2010; Patel, 2013; Calligaro, 2013). Political documents adopted by the European Union institutions and the concepts of *culture*, *cultural values* and *cultural identity* used therein shape a special policy-oriented discourse. To specify the abstract political idea of a common European identity, this discourse draws on the concept of European cultural heritage, highlighting its commonalities. References to "common heritage" and "common values" reveal a polysemy and betray a variety of goals. Both the common heritage and values relate to different actors in the political, social, ethical and religious fields. The idea of the common, while downplaying human agency and creativity, is an attempt to encompass both tangible and intangible realities: sites and monuments, cultural productions, traditions, historical experiences etc. (Vecco, 2010). Since the current economic and social processes affect the discourse around cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible (Lammy, 2006) – the concept of a European cultural identity as a historically inherited system closely associated with established forms of cultural heritage is failing to capture contemporary political and cultural trends in Europe. This is particularly so because the concept of cultural heritage involves nation-building (Graham, Ashworth, Tunbridge, 2000: 183) and in practice cannot ignore the diversity of heritage production actors. Yet, the European Union's cultural policy is still based on the concept of a specifically European cultural heritage. This creates "a congruence between territory, culture and polity" (Staiger, 2009: 12), thus aligning citizenship with cultural background. While elevating the commonness of shared culture and its tangible and intangible evidence across the European space, this approach – in a way – also reproduces the nation-state strategies that argue that the past is important for the present, just on a wider scale. Although the promotion of European cultural heritage has been systematically associated with cultural diversity, such

instrumentalisation of European culture camouflages its potential exclusivism (Shore, 2000, 2006) and is a departure from the 'unity in diversity' discourse (Sassatelli, 2002; Delanty, 2005; Shore, 2006). In this issue, Sylla's article closely scrutinises the construction of European culture and identity in the context of a youth debating club in Germany, critically highlighting the collusion between the universalism underpinning these so-called 'European values' and the elitist social aspirations of the group's members.

It is not only the content of heritage discourse that is significant but its stylistic format as well. The recognition and formalisation of cultural forms and emplaced memories as cultural/historical heritage incorporates Western ideas of modernity and enlightenment. For the project's non-European case-studies (as exemplified by Kharat's article in this issue), the very presence of formalised heritage sites may be a way of internalising a particular vision of history and culture that is Western in origin. Given the observable camouflaging of the exclusivism, it is also an internal European as well as Extra-European process.

Multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism as conceptual frameworks for managing cultural diversity in the nation-state in the West (Europe and North America in particular) (Fossum, Kastoryano, Modood, Zapata-Barrera, 2020) offer alternative and seemingly more inclusive representations of histories and cultures as part of the culturally diverse heritage. Critics, however, point out that the unchallenged essentialisation of culture, 'cultural differences' as well as the unequal social positions and access to the power and legitimisation resources between majority and minority groups constitute limitations of these approaches or even further entrench cultural exclusion and social inequalities (Ashley, 2013; Gordon-Walker, 2013; Macdonald, 2013). Ashley (2013), for instance, in her analysis of 'Canadian multicultural nationalism as a mythology' demonstrates how the plurality of people, histories and processes embedded in ideal multiculturalism has become obscured and erased in its institutionalised forms. Under such conditions the idea of diversity has become 'universalised as an object and as cultural objects rather than generated as a fluid, creative, relational and activist practice' (ibid.: 2). Gordon-Walker (2013: 20) argues that this reification of culture within inclusionary nation-state discourses can be harmful, drawing clear distinctions between each included culture. Thus, the hegemonic understanding of culture in society emphasises cultural differences that 'define culture in terms of discrete and bounded cultural entities that can presumably each be recognised for what they are without need for a dialogue' (ibid.: 35). Such a representation of reified culture reflects and upholds the power relations and inequality that exists in societies where the culture of minorities is defined and recognised by the majority, with the minorities assuming the role of passive recipients of recognition. The cosmopolitan paradigm with the universalism of human rights and emphasis on the individual rather than the collective as an agent of cultural diversity does not, however, make it entirely immune from being co-opted into the nationalist agenda as Macdonald (2013) argues in her analysis of the role that the cosmopolitan memories of Holocaust play in the memorialisation and representation of WWII as a formative period of national identities in Europe. Popov and Karásek (in this issue) also demonstrate that even the empathetic enactment of cultural diversity that is very much along the line of multicultural and cosmopolitan ideologies is, nevertheless, not always sufficient for addressing the lack of agency on the part of minorities, effectively ontologising them as 'the other' and 'different' from the majority.

Building on the understanding that heritage is a discursive practice and field of power relations, this special issue raises the questions of what and whose cultural legacies are recognised as a heritage and by whom. Following Ashley (2013) the authors of this collection of articles see heritage as not simply material structures or objects from the past that need to be preserved or presented in the sanitised version of institutionalised multiculturalism as sameness. Rather, heritage appears in these case studies as stories, things, practices and ideas that the people who took part in the research want to pass on to future generations. Heritage materialises in physical spaces, narratives and performances. Publicly expressed heritage enables individual and community self-definition that is part of the process whereby meanings of the past, identity and culture are transmitted (ibid.: 6). Thus, all the contributions in this special issue emphasise the participants' agency in understanding culture and heritage. Furthermore, by placing the young people in the centre these case-studies portray them as active producers, consumers and transmitters of culture and heritage. Hence, the papers in this issue examine sites and cultural practices that are meaningful to young people and approach cultural heritage as a process of re-making.

This special issue of *Slovenský Národopis/Slovak Ethnology* brings together a collection of studies that explore various facets of heritage in making. The ethno-national model of cultural identity and heritage is changing; nonetheless, the future outcome of the current transformations is far from being determined. Young people both challenge and socialise within the existing forms of culture and heritage, which are neither fully reproduced nor completely replaced. To address the issues relating to the recent turn in the social sciences and humanities towards public history, cultural memory and heritage, the editors have selected papers that reflect the overall goal of the project, which is to problematise the notions of cultural heritage and identity formed and informed by young people's educational environments, and notably, by the young people themselves.

Mariona Ferrer-Fons and Marta Rovira-Martínez discuss the process whereby young people acquire historical literacy through sites of memory in Barcelona. Contrasting the static heritage exhibitions with those that offer a tangible approximation to the experiences of the earlier tragic events and that share the potential to elicit empathy, the authors introduce two Spanish Civil War (1936–39) sites, an air-raid shelter and anti-aircraft batteries, that are currently under the curatorship of the History Museum of Barcelona. However, it is not just the experiential visit that, through turning emotions into learning, enables the young people to reconsider their formally acquired understanding of the past. As both authors convincingly show, in the learning process much depends on the culturally sensitive dialogic approach of all the actors involved in the educative dialogue and the mutual positioning of the past within the present-day concerns and the liquid social milieu of Barcelona today.

Basing their claims on the results of quantitative research among young people at different types of secondary school and conducted in three Slovak regions, Roman Džambazovič and Daniel Gerbery raise questions about global identity, or global self-identification. The latter is explored through two dimensions that measure the global proclivities of the young people, namely 'Non-nationalism' and 'Cultural Openness'. Highlighting the theoretical concepts of 'de-territorialisation' and the liquidity of identity in the socialisation process they discuss how the global identity relates to the

cultural participation they found, which was often of a highbrow character and required sufficient economic means. Although experience of the global – either through travelling, communicating with people from different cultures, or cultural participation – plays an important role in the process of global self-identification, the authors point out that there is untapped potential in the Slovak educational system for further research.

In the next study Anton Popov and Matej Karásek analyse theatre performance as a heritage event. In their discussion they draw on recent academic insights into memory and its ongoing politicisation which affects the ways in which cultural identity is constructed. Seeing theatrical performance as a ritualised activity of young people allows the latter not only to contest the notions of place, community and belonging, but also to address the public's concerns. Indeed, both theatrical groups represent the young people's engagement with local concerns, even if they do it quite differently. In their plays, the group from Slovakia (Komárno) deconstructs the ethnic boundaries between ethnic Slovaks and Magyars (Hungarians) whereas the British group's (Coventry) performance of physical theatre sees the city's cosmopolitan heritage as a tool for more inclusive interhuman relationships. However, as the authors claim, the transformative capacity of such heritage events, despite their goals, remains limited by social inequalities and cultural differences that are observable even in the plays performed.

Another article in the collection, by Dušan Deák and Ilze Kačāne, discusses how the memory, heritage and identity complex actualises in an intergenerational setting and informs young people's cultural socialisation as broadly conceived. To highlight the questions raised by the mutual connections between the socially constructed notions of memory, heritage and identity, the authors apply Ulf Hannerz's rendering of the concept of consociality in their investigation of the diversity and unpredictability of human interactions in the cultural socialisation process. The discussion is located in the family environment, which is seen as a site of learning. By drawing on materials from the Latvian region of Latgale and the Slovak town of Martin, the authors are able to explore how the consocially framed learning, based on the remembered and shared experiences of the family members, alters the meanings of the culture and heritage that is formally acquired in school and provides opportunities to mitigate the ethnic-cum-cultural essentialism.

Shailendra Kharat's study analyses how the public and discursive dominance of majoritarian representations of the past informs contests between various societal groups. He introduces the reader to the 'the memory-heritage-identity complex' in the Western Indian state of Maharashtra and highlights the two main factors that inform the notions of heritage and culture in India – the socio-cultural diversity and the normative dimension of the model of the nation-state adopted in modern times. In turn, the two heritage sites serve as an illustration of such a complex – the two sites are a prominent museum documenting the regional culture and political success of the region's military elites and a former Buddhist cave designated as a UNESCO world heritage monument. Whether we are talking about the museum or the Buddhist cave, it seems that the public appropriation of these sites helps young people to both reproduce and internalise social dominations and exclusion as heritage. The young people's engagement with the sites hence reproduces the past seen from the interpretative angle of the Maratha military and political elites, which then becomes a socially divisive celebration of the Maratha success. By contrast, the local religious

concerns capitalise on the UNESCO badge while questioning the very origin of the Buddhist site. In these two cases, it seems that the idea of heritage serves as a tool for actualising all the constraints of the carefully chosen and medially appropriated past. And, as Kharat points out towards the end, to perpetuate the common consensus on gender roles.

The collection of studies closes with a fresh perspective from Cornelia Sylla, who combines environmental and societal issues, while embedding them in debates on the past and a responsibly framed future. Overall, the paper attempts to answer the question of how young people link narratives of the past with their own cultural identities and perspectives on the future. In her take on the problem, Sylla makes use of the ethnographic observations of conferences organised by two German organisations working in the field of political education, anonymised as Activists for Nature and Activists for Europe. They aim to prepare young people for the future and foster ideas that will enrich their lives. As Sylla shows, the Activists for Nature, even when preoccupied with their environmental agenda, opted to connect the barriers against it with the social hierarchies and global capitalism that enable reproduction of the arbitrary and often historically reductive goals. By projecting an inclusive future for Europeans, the Activists for Europe avoided these questions. Sylla's comparison then reveals that linking the past and responsibility is almost impossible without seeing both as embedded within the living environment with its apparently problematic hierarchies that affect and structure this environment and the selective memories that arbitrarily explain its exploitation.

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