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Dossier: Heritage explorations across Europe

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Heritage management and public engagement

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This work package contributes to a deeper understanding of the processes involved in the generation, appropriation and use of heritage. The three projects developed in the research line explore heritage as a social phenomenon entangled with concepts such as citizenship, participation and policy. How does the concept of citizenship relate to the tension and ambiguity existing between the principle of equality that is implicit in the idea of citizenship, and the inequalities inherent to today's capitalist society? And how can we, in this perspective, conceptualize the relationship between citizenship and heritage? Heritage can be connected to citizenship in different ways. Firstly, its representative potential means that heritage can act as a vehicle for liberation and emancipation, by means of minority groups seeking explicit inclusion in what Laurajane Smith has called the Authorized Heritage Discourse of their heritage(s) or by creating their own heritage narratives and institutions (Abreu 2013). As such, heritage can aid people in asserting their right to citizenship. Secondly however in the Authorized Heritage Discourse, heritage functions as a regime of knowledge (Bendix 2012, Coombe 2015) that restricts access to the few, representing on a local, national or international scale, specific members of society whilst excluding others. Heritage, thus, can both enable and restrict access to citizenship, depending on the context.

Although participation is often regarded as a promising concept in the context of the perception of democracies as failing, it has been incorporated in heritage policy with little emancipatory success. Participation is not 'innocent' and has the potential to reaffirm existing heritage regimes (Cortés-Vázquez, Jiménez-Esquinas & Sánchez-Carretero 2017). Its newly acquired place in policy discourse risks transforming it to a cog in the machine of heritage. The three research projects presented here, deal, each in their own way, with this conceptual point of departure.

Forensic archaeology and the appropriation of traumatic heritage

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The research explores the idea of omission as a state technology and the use of bureaucracy and its apparatuses as technologies of disappearance of bodies during the last dictatorship in Brazil and examines the maintenance of similar strategies in a neoliberal context. From a heritage perspective, the study intends to uncover the meaning of public policies concerning memory sites and to understand the conceptual notions surrounding the 'non-existence' of people, in relation to those Brazilians who were considered irrelevant in life as well as death, whose existence was perceived as non-grievable. To carry out this research, the treatment of no names (NN) bodies by different institutions has been analyzed, in particular, how the bureaucracy uses omission to make disappear bodies that do not matter. One example is the non-description of the clothes and accessories related to cadavers. For the democratic period, the research tries to observe how neoliberal politics, state violence and the bureaucracy become apparent in one institution which is the cemetery, and how certain strategies from the dictatorship are maintained by analyzing omission in the cemetery bureaucracy.

Sociotechnical imaginaries of a modern past

NerminElsherif

The research investigates the wide circulation of vintage images depicting the social life in Egypt between 1900 and 1970s over Facebook and explores how the Egyptian middle-class mobilize the past online to negotiate their identities in the present. More specifically the study focuses on the online communities involved in reproducing particular narratives of the past, "al-zamman al-gamīl" or "the good old days" in Egypt, an elusive social construct that deserves investigation given the current oppressive political situation and the constant state violence exercised since 2013. The research is situated in Science, Technology and Society studies, to explore how social imaginaries of the past are co-produced through the technologies, and how the self is produced in relation to the network in the age of social media. Jasanoff's concept of the "sociotechnical imaginary" helps to understand how particular imaginaries of the past are co-produced online, and how imagination as a social practice is governed and constructed by political and technological affordances. Jasanoff describes the sociotechnical imaginaries to be "collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of advances in science and technology" (Jasanoff 2015, 15). As this author shows how big leaders employed science and technology to spread and implement their visions of desired social order for the future, in this research is explored how the disposed who lack the means to change the future, uses technologies to reproduce a desired social order from the past. Thus, this research aims to theorize for sociotechnical imaginaries of the dispossessed and how the past and its 'images' become a resource for dispossessed to negotiate their identities.

Participatory heritage in a changing Dutch neighborhood

Anne Beeksmas

By using ethnographic data, this research project analyses a case study of participatory heritage in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of Katendrecht, the Netherlands: the Verhalenhuis Belvédère or the Center for Intangible Heritage. Taking as a point of departure Susana Narotzky's approach to anthropology - analysing locally embedded experiences as evidence of societal transformation on a national or even global scale (Narotzky 2016) - this research project connects the findings from fieldwork in Katendrecht to overarching socio-economic developments, by looking for example at the connections between heritage and entrepreneurship and heritage and gentrification. By discussing how recently the Center, which is permanently under construction, has been included as 'best practice' in the discourse of Dutch national heritage policy-making, this research hopes to contribute to contemporary scholarship discussing the recent incorporation of participation into the 'heritage regime'. By looking at the different scales on which this organization operates, local and national, it is possible to distinguish different approaches to participation within the same organization. Although the Center is largely supported by volunteering employees, the managing core team of 'heritage entrepreneurs' is in charge of decision-making on all levels. When looking at the business model supporting the organization, it becomes clear that participation not merely provides the center with its core heritage product - diverse stories of immigration to and from Rotterdam - as well as a legitimization of its perception as a 'success story' of participatory heritage, which in turn provides the center with one of its main sources of income: governmental clients who visit the center to organize 'participation' training opportunities for their staff.

Conclusion

The commonality between these vastly different projects presented here lies in the efforts they make to critically analyze processes and uses of heritage to bring forth knowledge that might otherwise remain out of sight. Uses of heritage that from the outside might just seem as 'just so', are turned inside out and by doing so, interconnections between heritage, citizenship, policy, participation, politics and economy are laid bare. These projects do not give clear cut recommendations about future heritage policy and management. Rather, they call for precaution and a critical awareness of heritage's power.

References

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Demonstration to transform an old clandestine detention center in a memorial site, São Paulo, April 2017.	A viral post on Facebook appeared on July 9, 2019, few hours after the defeat of the Egyptian football team in Africa Cup of nations. The image shows the Egyptian cinema star Faten Hamama in a black evening dress in front of a well-dressed audience of film stars, writers, army generals, and others. The text in red reads "the disappearance of a society".	A drawing of the Verhalenhuis Belvédère taken from fieldwork diary, May 2019.	Demonstration called "Where are the disappeared people?" that took place in at the Law Faculty at the University of São Paulo, 2017.
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