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Whose heritage?

van Dijk, Mathilde; Weir, Todd; Irving, Andrew J.M.

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WHOSE HERITAGE?

MEDIATING IT IN A SUPER-DIVERSE EUROPE

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In April 2019, the fire in Notre Dame de Paris led to a worldwide response. In Paris, many people flocked to the scene, wept, and if they knew how to, prayed and sang religious songs. That same evening, president Macron launched a funding campaign for the reconstruction of the cathedral as an important French and world heritage. Many individuals donated, including some of the richest people in France and abroad. Less than a day after the fire, 880 million euros had been collected. Although the chorus of approval of this generosity was dominant, there were also opposing voices. Some were incensed at the ready availability of funds which could have easily solved the problem of poverty in France. Others accused Macron of favouritism: in 2017, he had made his conversion to Catholicism public by being baptised.

This case is a good starting point in order to introduce this handbook for teaching heritage to adults in a diverse Europe. First, the global outpouring of emotion is striking: all over the world people cared about Notre Dame, regardless of religious affiliations. The cathedral lives in the memories of billions of people all over the world. It has a long history of being one of the greatest tourist attractions in Paris, receiving over twelve million people a year. In comparison: the Louvre attracts ten million and the Eiffel Tower lags behind with six million visitors. Secondly, it is important to note how, from the nineteenth century on, Notre Dame became a shorthand for Paris and for France: a marker of identity. The Gothic style of the cathedral, as first developed in the Île de France in the twelfth century, was seen as a specimen of French genius. As a consequence of the French Revolution, all church buildings were nationalised. Therefore, the charge of favouritism was neither here nor there: as a president of France, Macron was bound to protect the nation's property, although the priority of restoring the cathedral over other worthy aims was a political choice. In *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831), Victor Hugo (1802-1885) put the cathedral forward as the heart of Paris, and deplored its state of disrepair. His novel provided a major incentive for the restoration effort in the nineteenth century. Thirdly, the history of Notre Dame shows the contested nature of heritage as well as its connection to power relations. The cathedral's importance was not always clear as shown by its bad condition in the beginning of the nineteenth century, and we referred to the discussion after the fire, regarding whether the money allotted to its restoration could not be better spent on more serious problems in a diverse French society. Given the fact that restoration is well under way now, those who felt that it should take preference in the allocation of funds were clearly dominant.



In the following pages we will introduce the concept of heritage and its development in the past decades, focusing on religious heritage in particular, in the context of secularisation and the increasing diversity of Europe, both ethnically and religiously, which has led to changing policies concerning heritage as well as changing practices on the ground. Both grassroots movements from communities claiming heritage and the impact of international organisations are important, specifically agreements made by UNESCO and the European Community. In Europe, the Faro Convention (2005) has exerted a great influence on visions and practices of heritage. Arguably, the most important development is how access and contributing to, and benefiting from one's heritage, came to be acknowledged as a fundamental human right. All of this led to a changed perspective on what heritage is, who has control over heritage and, finally, on the role of the heritage expert.

What is heritage?

Heritage is, first and foremost, a narrative: an ideological appropriation of an historical site, event, practice, concept, person, object, which recruits it as a summary of a community's identity as well as an explanation for its current status.¹ Heritage is lived: by retaining rituals such as going through the usual motions of a religious feast, wearing specific clothes at life-events (e.g. black at a funeral) or attending the commemoration of a seminal event in a community's history. Heritage's status as a narrative means that it is not fixed. Instead, it evolves through creative processes of meaning-making by communities' claiming it and creating their own narratives. Such appropriations have a dark side to them: if one group claims a certain heritage, others are often excluded from it.² Therefore, heritage is deeply political: its narrative defines who can be counted as belonging to our community and who cannot.

Traditionally, heritage has been linked to nation states, but it can also belong to different types of communities, such as adherents of a certain religion, those identifying as belonging to a certain ethnicity, or even much smaller groups such as the fans of a sports-team or a film series. Increasingly, minorities of every stripe claim their own heritage, occasionally connected to the dominant heritage. In the Netherlands, for example, the seventeenth century has long been claimed as the Golden Age, when the Dutch Republic was a world leading power, both politically and culturally. It was the day of stadtholder-king William III's leadership of the coalition against the French King Louis XIV, of victorious admirals such as Michiel de Ruyter, prominent scientists such as Christiaan Huygens, and great artists like Rembrandt and Vermeer. Recently, this narrative has come under fire: the Republic's efflorescence was enabled by colonialism, the slave trade and the oppression of the poor in the Republic and the colonies. Descendants of the enslaved and the colonised claim it as dark heritage, thus highlighting that heritage is not only about past glories. In this sense, commemorating the past can also serve as a way to cope with trauma. In response, the Amsterdam Museum abandoned its use of the term Golden Age.³ In Rotterdam, the Witte de With-Museum changed its name to the Melly Institute, after a work of art displayed on

1 Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London/New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis 2006), 29-34.

the outside of this contemporary art museum, that depicts a non-white working class girl: the Golden Age admiral Witte de With had fallen into disrepute for his connection to the slave-trade and his cruelty.⁴ Against this trend, a Dutch populist party used its allotment on national television to broadcast the old-fashioned version of the seventeenth century as an age of glory.⁵

This already shows a fundamental point: narratives around heritage can change the self-image of communities. This has certainly happened on a European scale. The Faro Convention defines Europe as a pluralist society, in which many voices can be heard and the heritage of many communities be expressed, be they ethnic, cultural, religious, or otherwise. This is a radical change of the traditional vision shared by the founders of the European Community. They defined Europe as essentially Christian and as roughly consisting of the territory of Charlemagne's Early Mediaeval Empire. Their vision no longer fits in view of Europe's expansion into the East and the increased diversity of the continent.

Superdiverse Europe

The diversity of Europe moves in different directions. From the 1960s, a growing percentage of the population considers itself nonreligious, while at the same time, new religious communities comprising immigrants and converts are proliferating. Secular and religious individuals alike show a keen interest in spirituality as they do in religious heritage. These three dimensions of religious diversification play into debates over heritage and European identity.

In Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Sweden and the Netherlands, a greater portion of the population identified with non-religion than with the major religious cults in a 2015 Eurobarometer survey.⁶ However, leaving organised religion does not necessarily mean leaving faith.⁷ Neither does it mean ceasing involvement in religious heritage, in fact quite the opposite. Believers and non-believers cherish the memory of the religious past and perceive a religious building as a marker of identity for a town or village. Churches and synagogues become tourist attractions. Many buildings are being repurposed for uses going from bookshops to party venues. Strikingly, those who no longer attend church feel

2 Frijhoff, Willem. 'Toeëigening; Van bezitsdrang to betekenisgeving', *Trajecta* 6 (1997), 99-118'; id. 'Toe-eigening als vorm van culturele dynamiek', *Volkskunde* 104 (2003), 1-17; id., *Dynamisch Erfgoed* (Amsterdam: SUN 2007).

3 https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/nieuws/gouden_eeuw, consulted 29-1-2021.

4 https://www.fkawdw.nl/nl/about_us/news/on_27_january_2021_you_can_call_us_kunstinstituut_melly consulted 21-1-2022. The photo was created by the Chinese-Canadian artist Kenneth Lum in 1990.

5 In the Netherlands, all political parties share broadcasting time for three minutes-advertising-slots on national television, equally divided among the parties, and increased during election campaigns. See [Indeling zendtijd politieke partijen | Commissariaat voor de media \(cvdm.nl\)](https://www.cvdgm.nl/), consulted 21-1-2022.

strongest about which uses are acceptable and which are not: a demure classical concert would usually be OK, a dance party may be frowned upon.⁸ This sensitivity highlights the special position of religious heritage. It retains a certain sacredness, which sets it apart from other forms of heritage.⁹

At the same time, growing numbers identify as ‘spiritual, but not religious’.¹⁰ Although these people may not want to have anything to do with an authoritative church, they still feel a need for a transcendent sphere, a place beyond the daily experience, to cope with life’s events, such as birth, illness and death. Often, spiritual people take their point of departure from outside traditional religions: for instance from neo-paganism or cults inspired by popular culture. Thus, they create new heritage narratives. Star Wars fans go on a pilgrimage to Skellig Michael, the Irish island that was used as Luke Skywalker’s hermitage in the third series of the franchise. This island has a long history, starting in the Early Middle Ages, as a site of Christian and possibly pagan pilgrimage. Nowadays, tourists, Christian, neo-pagan and Jedi pilgrims each create their own meaning around this site.

Globalisation is the second cause of the transformation of the European religious landscape. In Europe, it has led to widespread immigration. Migrants from all over the world have brought their religious traditions, which has occasionally attracted European converts. Henceforth, European societies were characterised by “superdiversity.”¹¹

The presence of migrants has altered the political discourse around religious heritage. Opponents of immigration used to focus on the supposed cultural differences between “native” and “foreign” populations. Since the 1990s, religion has become a chief marker of difference, particularly concerning Turkish or North African migrants’ Muslim identities. Such framing of “our” religious heritage over “theirs” is most pronounced in populist rhetoric, however, it has also been widely employed by mainstream politicians. A growing number of heritage professionals and activists, including those belonging to minorities, is challenging this vision, which no longer fits the reality of a pluralist Europe, particularly when re-examining historical accounts from critical perspectives. It also clashes with the status of heritage as a human right for all.

6 Marc Hooghe, Ellen Quintelier, and Tim Reeskens, ‘Kerkpraktijk in Vlaanderen’, *Ethische Perspectieven* 16, no. 2 (2006): 113–23. For the University of Lucerne interactive map on religious affiliations in Europe, see: ‘Religious Affiliation’, Universität Luzern, SMRE data, n.d., https://www.smre-data.ch/en/data-exploring/religious_affiliation#/mode/majority_religion/period/2010/dataset/1562/presentation/map; European Commission, ‘Discrimination in the European Union’, *Eurobarometer, October 2015*, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2077>.

7 Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1994).

8 Jacobine Gelderloos, ‘Liever een boekwinkel dan een disco : ratio en emotie rondom her- en nevenbestemming van kerkgebouwen’, *Jaarboek voor Liturgiewetenschap* 28 (2012), 183-206.

9 Cyril Isnart and Nathalie Cerezales ed., ‘Introduction’ in *The Religious Heritage Complex: Legacy, Conservation, and Christianity* (London/New York/Oxford/New Delhi/Sidney 2020), 1-13.

10 Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden: Blackwell 2005).

A human right

Originally, the concept of heritage had an elitist and Western flavour. Royal and aristocratic families as well as clerical institutes would draw up lists of their valuable objects and buildings. After the French Revolution, in France and elsewhere, many such collections were nationalised, for instance the royal collection in the Louvre, which led to a more central role for experts in the treasure belonging to the State. Art historians, historians and the like determined what was worthy of preservation and what was not. In this vein, the 1972 UNESCO *Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural Heritage and Natural Heritage* defined world cultural heritage as “monuments”, “groups of buildings”, and “sites” having “outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science”.¹² Judging from what UNESCO has acknowledged as heritage, “universal value” turns out to be mostly located in Europe. This one-sided identification shows that a Western bias is still far from being over.

In a meeting in Faro in 2005, the Council of Europe proposed a new framework for thinking about and working in heritage that placed people and their values at the centre rather than the valuable sites and objects. Here, cultural heritage is defined as:

*a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge, and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time.*¹³

Fundamental to this approach is the Faro Convention’s grounding in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which states, without qualification, that “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community”.¹⁴ ‘Participation’ is understood by the Faro Convention, not only in terms of who participates (everyone!), but *what* participation means. Participation is not a matter of simply engaging

11 Steven Vertovec, ‘Super-Diversity and Its Implications’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007): 1024–25; José Casanova, ‘Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A European Union/United States Comparison’, in *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, ed. Thomas Banchoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

12 *Unesco Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972), art 1.

with pre-existing authorised heritage: rather, participation includes the active “identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural heritage” and “public reflection and debate on the opportunities and challenges which the cultural heritage represents.”¹⁵

The implications of the Faro Convention for shared ownership of and responsibility for heritage, dialogue and democracy are still being worked through: the Rebelah Project is one example. How exactly can difficult, contested, or obscure heritage provide a “shared source of remembrance” as the Convention envisages?¹⁶ Who is in control of the “inclusion” process: are these the members of a heritage community or is it still the élite?¹⁷ This and other intractable problems will confront anyone attempting to use shared responsibility for and participation in religious heritage for social inclusion.

Mediating diverse heritages

Heritage is about meaning, about narratives tied to objects, places and practices originating in the past and providing the grounding for personal and community identities. These narratives are continually being made and remade. Heritage is no longer thought of as something produced by experts and given to the public through authorised sites and objects of heritage transmission. Rather it is the product and process of meaning-making between teachers and students, scholars and community activists. Its place is not just cathedrals and museums; it can be practised in various locations, wherever individuals and communities want to combine and compare historical perspectives in a process of reflection and create a pluralist vision of it, which matches a diverse Europe, for now and for the future. Having heritage, living it, shows the presence of a community as a part of the richness of Europe.

A new type of heritage professional is therefore needed. Whereas in the past heritage was in the hands of ‘experts’, the new heritage professional is much more of a mediator, who specialises in helping communities engage in the co-creation of heritage. The new heritage professional, whether a teacher, an artist, a community activist or a museum curator, plays a mediating role in a multi-sided process involving many voices contributing to the ongoing development of heritage in which all can participate. With this handbook we hope to inspire those who work with adult learners to take on this role, to step up to the challenge of helping learners take an active part in the formation of new forms of heritage.

13 *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (2015) a.k.a. *Faro Convention*, art. 2.a.

14 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), art. 27.1.

15 *Faro Convention*, art. 12.a.

16 *Faro Convention*, art. 3.a.

17 *Faro Convention*, art. 13.a.

