

Entangled memories: how to study Europe's cultural heritage

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Entangled Memories and the European Cultural Heritage: Current Trends and Directions for Research

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Abstract

A fruitful direction for research on the European cultural heritage is to adopt a transnational approach. Rather than see cultural heritage as predominantly expressed in national contexts, it could be seen as primarily transnational and as plural. Such a view would also suggest a conception of national histories as themselves products of transnational encounters. In this perspective, the European dimension is not then necessarily something over and above nations, but part of their heritage. Moreover, as fundamentally transnational, the European heritage is not exclusively confined to Europe. Cultural heritage is not something that is fixed or based on an essence; it is produced and re-interpreted by social actors in different but overlapping contexts. This is also an interpretative approach that draws attention to the entangled nature of memories and especially the cultural logic by which new conceptions and narratives of heritage emerge from the encounter and entanglement of different memories. Such an interpretative approach offers new opportunities for comparative research on the European heritage as an entangled mosaic of histories and memories. It also a critical approach in rejecting not only particularistic accounts of heritage, but universalistic ones, such as Eurocentric alternative accounts.

Keywords:

Cultural heritage; cosmopolitanism; Europe; entangled history; memory; transnationalism

Introduction

The past permeates the present. Interpretations of the past are fundamentally altered when the present changes. This is particularly the case following moments of crisis. Today in Europe the sense of crisis and uncertainty of the present is inevitably projected back on to the past. It is now widely recognised both in academic studies and in public understanding that the European heritage needs to be re-evaluated in light of significant social and political change. The traditional approaches to the European past have been much questioned in recent times. The older assumptions of a grand narrative of civilisation based on universal values has lost its conviction and has been challenged by a new emphasis on diversity to a point that it is apparently no longer possible to say of what the European heritage consists other than a multiplicity of national histories and collective memories. In the absence of a grand narrative, is it possible for the present to relate to the past in a way that can offer a vision for the future? This is now a major challenge for the memories of

nations, but for larger entities such as Europe itself, it is yet more of a challenge. Whilst a paradigmatic shift to the transnational is taking place in the social and human sciences today, the implications have not been fully considered in relation to the European past and present. The thesis of this paper is that a transnational approach is essential for an understanding of the European heritage and that this needs to be unpacked in terms of processes of entanglement. In normative terms, such an approach can be situated in a broader cosmopolitan framework of analysis and points to a plural notion of European heritages rather than a dominant singular one.

Two main developments are evident today: on the one side, there has been considerable attention given to the idea of the European heritage in terms of identity, values, history as existing either within nations or transcending them, and, on the other side, some of the dominant intellectual trends since the 1970s question if not the very possibility of a European order of values at least the capacity of culture to provide enduring points of reference for the present. The notion of a shared European historical heritage is either uncritically appealed to as a source of historical legitimation or, in more critical accounts, it is rejected as irrelevant for the present. What is left is basically at most a choice of facing up to the dark side of the European past or celebrating the diversity of Europe. There has not been as yet any comprehensive attempt to reconcile the critique of the European heritage with the apparent need for contemporary Europe to articulate its identity and values in relation to the past in a way that is more inclusive of all European traditions. This is a major challenge for research on memory and heritage today not least in light of widespread cultural alienation felt by many minorities. Put differently, a key normative question is whether it is possible to create a conception of heritage for Europe that can maintain a critical and reflective stance towards the past and a positive orientation for the future.

This challenge, which can be described as a cosmopolitan task, is important since the question of how the present should relate to the past continues to be posed at national and European levels and very often the answers that are found are based on old-fashioned and discredited notions of history and heritage deriving from group specific memories. The European heritage has been widely appealed to, but almost always inconclusive as regards substantive content. While questions about the past in the present have long been central to definitions of national identity around memory, mourning, and commemoration, they are now integral to European self-understanding, as in, for example, controversies over disputed legacies of history, the status of the Christian tradition, whether Islam is part of the European heritage, colonialism, the persecution of minorities, contested definitions of persecutors and perpetrators, the traditions of thought that shaped the rise of fascism, notions of peoplehood and 'European values,' the repatriation of antiquities etc. Underlying all these controversies is the basic question of what narrative of the past should be privileged, who tells the story and what purpose should it serve. In light of the resurgence of nationalism and various

kinds of populism, as well as new divisions that capitalism has given rise to, this is more urgent than ever if the European past is to be a relevant reference for the present day.

The broad aim, then, is to assess re-interpretations and contentious positions on the European heritage today in light of recent developments in the human and social sciences and in view of a mood of crisis in Europe. One of the main insights informing this paper is that a transnational and global perspective of European history can re-orient the European heritage in a direction that offers a more viable way for contemporary Europe to articulate an inter-cultural identity in keeping with the emerging shape of Europe and with its own often acknowledged past. It can thus be hypothesised that the European heritage is based less on a grand narrative conception of culture than on a plurality of interconnecting narratives and the inclusion of new voices, such as those of post-migration communities, and is being forged in new spaces of critical dialogue. This suggests less a universalistic conception of heritage than a dialogic or cosmopolitan one wherein the various voices can speak to each other and thus admit of the possibility of a process of learning taking place.

The question of European heritage needs to resist political instrumentalisation and to be posed in a way that does not reduce heritage to a specific subject and its memories as much as to a hegemonic master narrative that seeks to transcend all memories. What is needed is to understand the ways by which European societies interpret themselves, their past and their collective goals and aspirations in order to arrive at a view as to what the present task should be and how the human and social sciences could guide the articulation of a narrative that is appropriate for the present day. This challenge is perhaps the central task for the European heritage today. It is philosophical, historical and sociological. From a research point of view the way forward is less clear. The aim of this paper is to indicate possible directions for research that might be guided by critical cosmopolitan considerations that highlight contention, competition and new interpretations.

Current Approaches on the European Heritage

Over the past three decades or so there has been widespread recognition of the contested nature of all aspects of the cultural and political heritage of Europe. After the end of the Second World War, there was a general desire to sever the idea of Europe from the past. Instead, the appeal to Europe signified the future and in many ways it was a memoryless discourse as critics such as Anthony Smith and others have pointed out.ⁱ Since the 1990s that has all changed and the idea of the Europe – as part of a general turn to history – has become embroiled in disputes about the past. However, there has not been much agreement on how it should be approached and the range of responses would appear to reflect the diversity of theoretical currents in the social and human sciences since the so-called ‘cultural turn’ and the related impact of post-modern thought.ⁱⁱ There are four main

theoretical responses to the fragmentation of unitary master or grand narratives, which can be very briefly critically reviewed to provide a point of departure.

One response, which is arguably the dominant one in recent scholarship, is the adoption of a presentist approach. Such approaches typically posit cultural discourses as the object of investigation. The growth of heritage and memory studies is one expression of this constructivist trend towards a view of social and historical reality as ‘invented traditions’.ⁱⁱⁱ The notion of heritage is itself a discourse in which the past is instrumentalised by the present.^{iv} Heritage studies, including the ‘new Museology,’ and memory research have now extended beyond the field of nations and nationalism to cover global and transnational topics.^v Such research on heritage derives generally from the culturally oriented social sciences, including anthropology, cultural studies, but also geography and has led to specialised sub-fields such as heritage studies. This paper while informed by this body of work – and especially the pioneering work of David Lowenthal and David Horne – argues for a stronger normative perspective to bear on the idea of heritage and also goes beyond the emphasis on culture and material life that is often a feature of such studies.^{vi} It builds on critical heritage and memories studies – such work by Andreas Huyssen, Aleida and Jan Assmann, and recent important studies by Sharon MacDonald and Pakier & Strath – while going beyond the general field of heritage and memory research to include more explicitly political heritage, as in for example the debate as to whether republicanism constitutes the shared political heritage of Europe, histories of women and the German Historians debate.^{vii} Without a critical perspective and the inclusion of a perspective on political heritage, which cannot be separated from cultural heritage, the question of how the past should be evaluated becomes too easily seen in terms of collective identities resulting in ‘chronocentrism’, with the present constructing the past, with history dissolving into memories and an all pervasive presentism: the monument is simply replaced by the memorial. Heritage has an unavoidable evaluative dimension in that it is about how the past should be recalled by the present.^{viii} This is to take up a normative stance on the past and to admit the possibility that the present can learn from the past. It is also to go beyond the notion of cultural heritage as normally understood to include other aspects of the legacy of history, which might not always come under the rubric of heritage in the sense of the patrimonial, which tends to suggest a notion of heritage as inheritance.

Another and related response is to emphasise multiplicity over the older assumption of a continuous narrative of progressive unity. It is often claimed that Europe has no objectivity other than in the discourses that construct it. This constructivist position leads to the view that there are as many ‘Europes’ as there are discourses about it.^{ix} Europe is not then a single entity, but plural and characterised by difference. The emphasis on the plurality of Europe has now become one of the standard responses to the problem of whether a common heritage is possible. Most histories of Europe (such as Norman Davies’ long-run history) do not see Europe as a homogenous entity and

not much more than the totality of its constituent national and regional components.^x Indeed, it is often characterised by historians in terms of division.^{xi} This is also reflected in new approaches to the study of European identities where the emphasis is on *identities* rather than on a single identity.^{xii} The general perspective on diversity has an additional relevance in the divisions in economic systems that have been highlighted by the recent crisis of the Eurozone. The argument for multiplicity, as in the notion of ‘multiple Europes,’ is essentially an argument for the existence of variation and thus needs to be complemented with a perspective on what variation produces and how it is produced and what is desirable (since not all diversities are desirable). The very notion of multiplicity also logically presupposes a broader notion of a matrix that is pluralised. For these reasons a perspective is needed that goes beyond the question of diversity, whether in cultural or in political or socio-economic terms. Diversity, as in the slogan ‘unity in diversity,’ is an essential perspective, but it invites further questions including the relationship between disunity and diversity, since diversity is very often the result of disunity. The argument to be developed in this paper is that the emphasis on diversity alone is inadequate since it fails to account for the interaction of the various elements. One of the significant developments today is the transnationalising logic of the intertwinement of memories and the potential cosmopolitan learning that may result.

A third and more critical response is one associated with post-colonial theory. This can be characterised as the view that Europe has been formed out of a relationship with the non-European world and that colonialism was the main influence. In this view, the external context is emphasised over the endogenous. This is a perspective that typically places the ‘dark side’ of Europe’s past at the centre of its identity. Influenced by the orientalist argument of Edward Said, it suggests that the very notion of European identity is based on a relation with an Other, which is posited as the contrary to Europe and constructed such that it exists only in the terms dictated by Europe. Such insights concerning the centrality of colonialism and the necessity of a global approach to an understanding of the European heritage must be central to any account of the European heritage, especially in critiquing the Eurocentric notion of European exceptionalism, and also the notion of a special path that produces universal claims. The approach adopted here departs from post-colonial theorising in a number of ways. The global contextualisation with colonialism at its core needs to be correctly positioned rather than being over-generalised and to take account of the diversity of colonialisms; the emphasis on the external dimension does not dispense with the need for an endogenous account, since not everything can be accounted for by colonialism, for instance internal divisions and precolonial histories. A theory of cultural heritage should also be able to account for the hermeneutical and cosmopolitan dimensions of cultural encounters.

A fourth response, incompatible with the previous, is a more normative one that invokes underlying European values or a unique political or cultural tradition.^{xiii} Differing from the other above mentioned, which stress rupture and difference, it seeks to salvage a degree of continuity in

history without necessarily relying on grand narratives or assumptions about the exemplarity or exceptionality of Europe. However, in these accounts there is nonetheless a strong assumption of underlying values and the claim that a shared European political identity will need to rest on a common cultural identity, which in turn must be based on a shared understanding of history. Such notions are often to be found in Council of Europe conceptions of the European heritage.^{xiv}

Arguably there is an additional body of literature that considers some of these questions around notions of 'The West,' such as the controversial 'clash of civilisation' thesis which subsume Europe under a broader category of the western Atlantic world and defined in contrast to other civilisations. These politically charged ideas will not be addressed here other than to make the observation that if the notion of civilisation is retained as a pertinent term, it must be in a more circumscribed manner attentive to inner divisions (between Europe and America, for instance, and the divisions within Europe) as well as to the existence of inter-civilisational currents and the formative influences of transnationalism.^{xv} Rather than see cultures as primarily clashing, instead they should be seen as interacting in multiple ways, leading to complex outcomes that include entanglement and hybridity.

The thesis advanced in this paper accepts that the possibility of a common understanding of history on a European scale has been more or less definitively refuted. However this does not mean that the present must be severed from the past and that there are only irreconcilable differences if not divisions. Rather than draw this conclusion, which would appear to be the dominant position today, the argument is that there are other ways in which the present can locate itself in the past, but for which new theoretical approaches are required. Europe cannot abandon questioning its dark side, but it cannot also entirely see this as the only way it can relate to the past. The alternative to celebrate its plurality is more promising, but also does not offer an exclusive basis for the present to relate to the past. To identify alternative ways of responding to the past is a challenge that cannot be underestimated and may lead to unexpected results that cannot be entirely foreseen, for instance it may be concluded that there are only national and subnational ways of relating to the past and that that there is no European heritage as such. However, the presupposition of this paper is that there are ways to re-approach the past from a European perspective beyond those discussed in the foregoing. The contention is that the category of heritage defined in terms of Europe can offer radical and unexpected alternatives and is not, as is also often thought, the unreflective transmission of the past or simply the expression of memories, which are increasingly defined in terms of trauma.^{xvi} In other words, there is something more than the shift from the monument to the memorial at stake in the question of how the past can be appropriated by the present.

New Theoretical Approaches

The theoretical approach advocated here owes much to those discussed above that have emerged from the decline of the grand narratives, but goes beyond them in a number of respects. The most salient of these can be summed up under three headings that derive from developments especially in history and in sociology. The claim is that these interdisciplinary perspectives taken together will offer an innovative approach on the question of how the European heritage should be evaluated today. What is needed is a framework of analysis to place the past in a broader context of interpretation and to view the present as itself constantly re-defined in relation to the past (for which various other related terms are tradition, modernity, myth). It is the broader notion of heritage that is used here, namely the past that the present sees as relevant to the future, and which thus contains an evaluative dimension, which includes the contribution of the social and human sciences. In this sense the approach is reconstructive in its theoretical aims in that the category of heritage is deemed to be relevant to the present. It thus seeks to bring together the category of ‘memory’ and the notion of ‘history.’

(1) New approaches in historical analysis have brought a paradigmatic shift towards transnational history and global history. Transnational history stresses the connectivity of places.^{xvii} This has the potential to demonstrate important results about the making of what can be termed the European ‘matrix’ out of its integral units. Global history, which partly presupposes transnational history, offers a wider account of the making of Europe, including the role of colonialism, but also precolonial encounters. Both of these approaches, including ‘entangled history’ highlight the overlapping nature of European societies and a conception of Europe as, ‘an inter-civilisational constellation.’ On this view, the European past can be seen in terms of a rainbow of cultures shaped from cultural encounters and translations that have emanated from the logic of transnationalism.^{xviii} Theories of transnationalism vary depending on whether the emphasis lies on the networked space between different cultures or societies, where this space is seen as becoming increasingly large due to migration, or on the process by which movements between different parts of the world become the dominant form in which social relations are shaped. In this latter view, there is only global space.^{xix} The position taken in this paper is closer to the latter in so far as the assumption is made that in the longer historical perspective Europe must be seen as a networked space in that the matrix that emerged with the name Europe, itself historically variable, constitutes the societal structures that in turn become differentiated along national and regional lines. In other words, the transnational perspective posits the wider interconnected context as prior to the points in the matrix and gives rise to forms of consciousness that express such interconnectivity. This can lead to an entirely new way of looking at the formation of Europe and a contrast to national histories or chronocentric approaches that are derivative of the modern nation-state.

(2) Developments in the sociology/anthropology of culture draw attention to the changed

nature of culture today.^{xx} This can be characterised in terms of de-differentiation, whereby culture ceases to be a separate sphere, but has become part of the very nature of the social and as a consequence has also become integral to the political; in place of a view of cultural as consensus there is a pronounced tendency to view culture as contested; in place of a holistic view of culture as a whole way of life, there is a stronger emphasis on hybridity.^{xxi} The general trend is towards a conception of culture that is post-representational in the sense that culture does not depict something external, but is itself a process of creative self-constitution and integral to society rather than residing in an autonomous domain of its own. Moreover, culture does not merely transmit, but interprets and transforms that which it communicates. Where the traditional accounts of culture stressed symbolic closure, contemporary developments emphasise the open-ended, mobile and reflexive nature of culture, be it in identities, memories, artistic creations. Without such a perspective it would not be possible to understand cultural acts of claim-making, including in the domain of heritage.

(3) From social theory and historical sociology are two insights that are hugely important for a re-interpretation of the European cultural heritage. (a) The first is modernity as a framework for the analysis of the European heritage.^{xxii} Rather than look at Europe in terms of primordial identities associated with nations or with an equally problematical notion of an integral civilisation, attention instead should be given to the competing political imaginaries that shaped the making of modern Europe, in particular those that arose in what Reinhart Koselleck termed the *Sattelzeit*, such as liberalism, republicanism, socialism, nationalism.^{xxiii} Here two very broad tensions can be identified: the open horizon of cosmopolitan currents and the tendency towards a closed vision of political community associated with nationalism and the republic. In this view, the European heritage was shaped by a field of conflicting conceptions of political community rather than one founding tradition.^{xxiv} (b) The second insight, and which can be stated here only all too briefly, is the critical conception of historical consciousness associated with the work of Ricoeur on memory, Adorno on ‘working through the past,’ Habermas on learning processes, and Foucault on ‘counter-memory.’ These more philosophical approaches to the past are rarely related to debates on heritage, which has generally been confined to cultural categories (monuments, memories etc). This broader notion of heritage, invoked by Hans-Georg Gadamer and by Reinhart Koselleck and also reflected in the German ‘historians debate’ is highly relevant to the analysis and assessment of the European cultural and political heritage.^{xxv} It draws attention to the legacy of critique in European culture. There are also significant developments in the theory of history since Certeau that can be drawn on to advance a theory of cultural heritage beyond presentism and constructivism.^{xxvi}

Drawing on these diverse approaches that have in common the attempt to overcome the disciplinary divide between history/historiography and memory/heritage, a key analytical concept is the notion of ‘historical self-understanding,’ by which is meant the contemporary consciousness of

the present as historically shaped. Such forms of consciousness shape collective identities, but are more general in providing the main reference points for identities and memories. The notion of a historical self-understanding is not an identity as such, as for instance the collective identity of a given group or society, but a more general level of consciousness and historicity and includes an evaluative dimension. The application of ‘identity’ to large-scale entities beyond the level of social groups results in falsely attributing the typical features of identity to forms of consciousness that are not necessarily characterised primarily by group boundness and alterity. This is arguably true of what is often called ‘national identities,’ but is specifically the case when it comes to the more diffuse level of ‘European identity’ which cannot be theorised on the presuppositions of an underlying subject. For instance, it can be hypothesised on the basis of limited research that Muslim intellectuals appeal as much to motifs integral to European culture as to Islamic culture.^{xxvii} This illustrates how concepts, ideas etc can have a wider and more cosmopolitan significance. One of the objectives of research on cultural heritage is to assess the degree to which this iteration is the case and what the implications might be for European historical self-understanding. In the next section this will be considered in greater detail around a notion of entangled histories and memories as a concrete way in which transnationalising processes can be understood as categories of interpretation.

Cultural Heritage and Entangled Memories

Until very recently collective or cultural memory has been predominantly seen in terms of national contexts. Looking at memory, which is the main dimension of heritage, in transnational terms, that is, as pertaining to entities wider and greater than nations, is only merging as a topic of scholarship in heritage and memory research. It remains largely absent from public understandings of heritage. There are clearly exceptions to this, as is illustrated by new museums, for example the European House of History, to open in November 2016 in Brussels, the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations in Marseille, and several exhibitions of the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Undoubtedly such developments will shape European historical self-understanding in ways that go beyond some of the received views of history as largely national history. The expansion in UNESCO’s World Heritage programme also offers some evidence of this and the shows that many such developments entail a transnational dimension.^{xxviii} However, despite the existence of a transnational dimension, UNESCO has on the whole affirmed national understandings of heritage since most world heritage sites are circumscribed in the national space. The growing importance of migrant museums is another instance of an emerging trend towards a new consciousness of the transnational nature of heritage.

How should such transnationalising developments be understood? One way is to see them in terms of an emerging global memory. The notion of a global memory has recently been the subject

of much scholarly debate. In this literature the place and significance of the Holocaust looms large. According to Levy and Sznajder in an influential article and a later book, as a result of a generational shift the Holocaust is no longer primarily a social memory, but a historical memory that goes beyond the limits of a specific nation.^{xxix} They call this variously a ‘cosmopolitan memory’ or a ‘global memory’. The memory of the Holocaust provides the basic ingredients for a new and more cosmopolitan memory that is of global scope. In their view the Holocaust can be memorialised and thus become the basis of a new understanding of the common heritage of humanity by people who no longer have any direct experience of it. In short, it has become de-contextualised. 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. In their analysis, referring to Zygmunt Bauman’s key work on *Modernity and the Holocaust*, modernity itself can be reinterpreted through the universal significance of the Holocaust.^{xxx} This is a position that challenges the conventional approach to collective memory, as represented for example by Pierre Nora, which sees the national community as the main subject of memory and heritage. The notion of a global memory that provides the basis of a new and more cosmopolitan approach to heritage is very important. However, it is not without its problems.^{xxxi} Trends in the literature over the past decade or so both confirm as well as qualify the strong argument of Levy and Sznajder.

Rather than postulate a global memory centred on the Holocaust, it might be suggested that instead there has been a transnationalisation – as opposed to a globalisation – of memories extending the scope and nature of heritage beyond the national community, which is itself already transnationalised. In other words, a transnational perspective offers a more nuanced approach than one that asserts a global memoryscape. Although, Levy and Sznajder use the terms cosmopolitanism, globalisation and transnationalism interchangeably, they clearly hold to a strong thesis of a global memoryscape based on the Holocaust, albeit not one that asserts that there is now a single unified interpretation of the Holocaust. Yet, the evidence for their thesis is largely due to the so-called Americanisation of the Holocaust, an argument also made by Peter Nozick in *The Holocaust in American Life*.^{xxxii} To be sure, they offer compelling evidence of changes in Germany of how the Holocaust is remembered. The thesis of this paper is that a transnational approach captures most of what is included in the notion of a global memory. However, there is also the need to locate the Holocaust alongside other competing narratives that have major significance for how heritage should be conceived today. The Holocaust was decisive in opening up new narratives of memory; it was not the only expression transnational heritage, however much it may have been a reference point for other transnational heritages.

One very concrete way this can be developed is to explore what happens when one memory – or a tradition of heritage – confronts another. To follow Rothberg in a seminal work, memories

are not self-contained, but interact with other memories.^{xxxiii} This has been demonstrated with respect to the memory of the holocaust, which in developing a collective memory has become a wider and global memory that has contributed to the articulation of other memories, especially slavery, but also the Algerian War of Independence (and has itself changed as a result of the interaction with other memories). This occurs through borrowing, cross-referencing, and negotiation. Through such processes and mechanisms, something like a cultural transfer occurs whereby the culture of one group or society is appropriated in whole or in part by another and as a consequence undergoes change. There is considerable scope for research as well as theoretical development in applying the notion of ‘cultural transfer’ to memory research along these lines. This is also the most promising alternative to notions of global memory and a way to see cosmopolitan heritage. In this case, transnationalism is embodied in the inter-section of different histories leading to diverse outcomes. It follows from this that there is not a single heritage but several and thus it would be more in tune with current trends to see the European heritage in terms of heritages. This is not to advocate a pluralist account, but to stress that such multiple forms of heritage result from the intersection of different cultural memories and histories.

It is possible to take this further with the thesis that shifts in memory are more likely to be come from the experience of mobility – travel, displacement, migration – than from settled modes of existence. Looking at memory from the perspective of cultures of mobility, would fundamentally challenge the dominant view of memory as the record of settled histories.

In more concrete methodological terms, a promising direction for research on cultural heritage is to see how memories and the identities that lie behind them frequently take an entangled nature. Consequentially cultural heritage can be seen in such entangled terms. This is potentially more fruitful than seeing it as global. It is now widely recognised that collective identities are multi-layered, porous, and contested. Memories likewise can be seen in such terms, based on forgetting and selective remembering. While there are some examples of memories that cut across European societies – for example the memory of the holocaust and in central and Eastern Europe the memory of Stalinist purges – it is unlikely that there will be a common European memory as such. Instead a more likely scenario will be an increase scale of the intersection of different memories. While it cannot be precluded that in time this will lead to entirely new memories, it does point in the direction of a conception of the European cultural heritage formed out of the entanglement of different memories. There are certainly events and places that have a wider, if not a common European focus, for example 1648, 1789, 1914, 1945, 1989 and highly symbolic locations – Waterloo, Vienna, Verdun, Versailles, Auschwitz, Brussels, Berlin – which are best seen as reference points for memories and traditions of heritage that will have different interpretations in different places and times.

The most fruitful direction for research would therefore be to focus on such intersections and re-interpretations. Such research could offer innovative opportunities for comparative analysis within a broadly defined interpretative framework of analysis. In other words, to take the example of the memory of the holocaust, it will be remembered in different ways in different places and, crucially for the argument given, it will also intersect differently in different times and places (for example with the memory of Stalinist purges, with the memory of the Algerian War of Independence, with the memory of slavery). In that sense it is possible to address the notion of a European cultural heritage as such in more meaningful terms. It will also be fruitful way to explore the entanglement of European histories in wider global ones, with the entanglements extending beyond the cultural and geographical area that is generally taken to be Europe.

Such a transnational perspective opens up new opportunities for comparative research, which is too often rejected as incompatible with conceptions of cultures as entangled (Rothberg unnecessarily dismisses comparative research. One of the most promising lines of inquiry for comparative cultural research and which would bring comparative analysis onto a new level more generally would be to address the transnational in terms of entanglements rather than in terms of endogenous factors i.e. memories as the products of an internal history. This needs to be done in a way that overcomes one of the major problems with the established comparative approaches, namely the tension between looking at the units in question as separate – as already formed endogenously and thus as separate – or as connected and thus to be explained by exogenous factors. What transnational and global analysis draws attention to is the logic by which spatial and temporal entities are formed. In this view, then, the comparative task is to look at different modes of entanglement. The concept of entanglement itself needs to be developed to show what both precedes it and what is produced as a result of entanglements.

There are three dimensions to this: First, a feature of many collective identities today is that they intersect with other identities. This is not only a recent development. Identities always have taken this form. However, there can be little doubt that there has been an increase in cultural pluralisation in recent times. Identities and memories are not separate but interact with each other and as they do so the encounter brings about a change in at least one. Second, the intersection can lead to the mutual cross-fertilisation of identities and memories, such that it is possible to say that the cultures have become entangled. Entangled memories are becoming increasingly prevalent today in the context of transnationalised societies. Third, it is possible that entangled identities and memories will become embroiled in each other to a point that they led to the creation of new hybrid forms.

Two cultural mechanisms that are at work in the re-working, transfer and entanglement of memory and which make possible new codifications of cultural heritage; these are cultural translation and narration. A) Cultural translation refers to the process whereby one set of ideas,

concepts, symbols etc are translated into another and as a consequence their meaning is modified. Cultural traditions are rarely handed down unchanged, but undergo transformation in their transmission and often major re-interpretation occurs; they can also be preserved and reintroduced by other cultures, as is attested by the history of Arabic translations of Greek antiquity; and they can be greatly modified as a result of extensive borrowing from other cultures, as has been much documented. It can be hypothesised that the European heritage is itself comprised of such translations and it does not itself consist of an origin that provides the basic legitimation of the present.^{xxxiv} B) Narratives are stories that make sense of the present in its relation to the past and a possible future. They situate the subject in history and thus seek to provide continuity and a sense of order. Narratives are not necessarily ‘true’ and may be based on selective memory and reflect the perspective of the narrator. Collective identities and memories all require narratives. Such narratives can be hegemonic, but may also be counter-narratives and admitting of the possibility of critical reflection. A narrative approach is very useful when it comes to the question of the European cultural and political heritage, since this is very much a question of positing a particular narrative over others.^{xxxv} While narratives can be seen as discourses, a key feature of them is that they have an interpretative role in making sense of the past for the present. They are, in short, ways of dealing with the past.

Approaching memory and heritage in this way can lead to new insights and offer a different perspective to a view of memory as singular. It also offers an alternative to what may be implausible notions of global memory or the now anachronistic hope that that ‘new sites of memory’ can be recovered within the nation. It remains to be seen – and this is also a possible research outcome – if there are European sites of memory, as opposed to national sites. From the perspective of a transnational theory of history and memories as entangled, the implication for a European conception of heritage – whereby ‘European’ signifies less a layer of history above the national – is more of the order of a process of Europeanisation, by which is meant that the ‘European’ level of signification rather consists of the process through which different memories intersect producing new constructions. In this case, the way memory is articulated in one country will be influenced by the way it is articulated in another one. Such a view would suggest a conception of heritage less as fixed – neither in national historical terms nor in an alternative European counter-narrative – than produced by the present with a view to the future.

The entanglement of memories is in part a product of the democratisation of culture as well as of the diffusion of democracy into many spheres of life, including and especially so the sphere of cultural heritage. In other words, culture is no longer, as intimated earlier, encased in a specific sphere or constrained to serve a specific function, such as historical legitimation. It has become anarchic and open to numerous interpretations. This has implications for the very notion of cultural

heritage itself. The notion of cultural heritage must also be challenged in terms of its relationship to political heritage. The dominant trend is to see them as separate. This is in part a reflection of the concerns of archaeology, anthropology and cultural studies. The question of heritage in terms of political legacies is generally confined to the history of political ideas. There is also the related question of natural heritage, which as Harrison argues, has reflected the division of human and natural history.^{xxxvi} In the context of the current age of the Anthropocene such divisions must be re-examined. Rather than being organised into compartmentalised domains, they should be seen as interlinked. This would also require a rethinking of the received notions of heritage as either universalistic or as particular.

Conclusion

Why do we need to re-evaluate the European heritage and what can it offer for the future? The very conception of Europe has changed enormously in recent times as a result of societal change within Europe, the impact and now crisis of European integration, and the consequences of a more globally connected world in which Europe has been much diminished.^{xxxvii} In this context of not only change but rapid societal transformation and crisis, it is inevitable that the relation with the past also changes as the present poses new questions as to its identity and orientation in the world. In the present day there is widespread uncertainty and ambivalence about how political communities can define their identity. One reason is that the past, which is essential to the self-understanding of the present, has become the site of conflicting interpretations. It is no longer possible to appeal to a master narrative, despite some attempts to do so, e.g. in Hungary. Europe is now 'post-western' in the sense that it is not reducible to the category of the West and, since the enlargement of the EU, the central and eastern civilisational traditions have come to the fore, so that the Europe can no longer be defined exclusively in terms of the historical experience of the founding western European nations. It is now more multi-centred. Moreover, the wider context is no longer dominated by the West, which like Europe itself has become decentred. The major sites of economic and political power are no longer exclusively in the western world, which is only one centre of global power. It is in this sense possible to speak of a 'post-western age.' The former imperial powers are now diminished post-imperial states with a very uncertain relation to their past. National memories are still of course major sources of national identity, but rarely embrace all groups in the society. Moreover they are often highly contested. British national identity, for example, is no longer based on uncontested interpretations of the past. It is fundamentally divided on the question of Europe. Uncertainty about Europe is a symptom of uncertainty about Britain. At

root is a more basic question as to what is a common memory in the context of highly pluralised and complex societies.

It is helpful to distinguish between singular memories and shared ones. The first are the memories of a specific group who had direct experience of an event and possibly also the memories of a given nation. These may include generational memories. For example, the memory of the Second World War was a common memory for the generation that lived in that time. Until recently British national identity was coded in the memory of the war, but this is now fading and British national identity no longer has specific cultural reference points. This too is the case with Germany today. Shared memories, on the other hand, are memories that are of a more general nature and no longer rooted in the memory of a particular generation or nation. The memory of the First World War would be an example of a memory that is now an indirect one. Such memories are less likely to be hegemonic and can, as in this example, take a more European wide dimension. Additionally such memories can also intersect with other memories. In these instances the idea of Europe functions as a frame in which contemporary societies re-interpret themselves and their histories.

The thesis of this paper is that the question of the European heritage should be addressed from the perspective of the changed historical understanding of the present and that the diversity of different responses should be placed within a larger context of interpretation in which both past and present are mutually connected but with ever-changing narratives. The argument is thus that the idea of Europe does have this function of a larger framework of interpretation. The idea of Europe operates as a reference culture against which collective identities as well as national communities define themselves. On this level, the European dimension is akin to a repertoire of ideas, principles, modes of cognition and thought that crystallise in more specific cultural models. In this sense the specificity of the European heritage is less one of content than of form. The forms in question establish certain kinds of structures – similar social, cultural, political patterns – but with significant variation due to different interpretations made of them at different times and places by different social groups. In this view, Europe did not emerge out of a single culture, but out of numerous exchanges and interactions. Thus what are often seen as separated histories are in fact interconnected. To take such a theoretical perspective involves an entirely different way of looking at the notion of the European heritage than one of presentism since it problematises both the present and the past.

The dominant tendency, it has been argued, is to see the European cultural heritage in terms of some notion of unity in diversity or, in more critical conceptions, of conflict and division and more generally the dark side of the past. The vast field of heritage and memory studies does not address adequately the wider question of the assessment of the past, as the concerns are predominately, though by no means exclusively, about national and local/regional memories.

It is possible to speak of the European heritage in ways that do not simply refer to the diversity of national and local memories and heritage or to the alternative of seeing heritage only in terms of trauma. The most promising direction for future research is to see the European cultural heritage as an entangled mosaic of histories and to compare the ways in which different memories intersect with each other and to map such intersections spatially and temporally. This is important because unless Europe's transnational past is given more prominence, Europe will not be able to deal adequately with the many problems it is currently faced with at a time of low growth economies, political crisis and security, unprecedented migration etc. However, it is insufficient to see its transnational past in only European terms, as opposed to national terms. Such a corrective of nation-centric accounts would be simply Eurocentric. This is a potential danger in thinking of the European dimension. Instead, what is required is that the European cultural heritage(s) should be seen as an expression of a more global world. Such a conception of the European heritage offers a more relevant and cosmopolitan lens to view the past in the present than what is currently available. It avoids simply substituting the category of Europe for the nation, for this would neglect the transnational nature of both the nation and Europe. The European heritage, furthermore, is not uniquely the legacy of Europe but was formed through myriad encounters with the rest of the world. Both from a critical cosmopolitan normative point of view and from a comparative transnational research perspective, the most promising direction for research on the European cultural heritage is thus to exploit the logic by which identities and memories become entangled. In jettisoning the possibility of a common and singular European heritage, the cosmopolitan prospect of a shared world is preserved in so far as this consists of shared reference points that will have very different meanings depending on where and when they are taken up.

EndNotes

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