



Empowering Scotland's Ethnic and Cultural Minority Communities



BEMIS (2011)

The goal is to win social justice. We need to see cultural heritage within the wider human rights framework¹.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON HERITAGE: A ROUTE TO SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

I. Heritage: Definitions and Debates

Defining heritage is a difficult and ambitious task. It is often defined as “created in a process of categorising” whereby objects, places and practices have an “official position”². The concept of heritage is also understood as strictly bound up with the past, as a vehicle to access, remember and celebrate the past. A recognized model of heritage sees objects, places and practices as having intrinsic and fundamental values:

“Under such a model of heritage, heritage objects, places and practices are attributed particular values by the professionals who are involved in assessing and managing heritage (...). With time, these values become reasonably fixed and unquestioned. This ‘knowledge’, as well as the weight of authority given to heritage professionals, gives the impression that the process of assessing heritage value is simply one of ‘uncovering’ the heritage values that already exist in an object, place or practice.”³

Bound to the *past*, *fixed* and *intrinsic*, heritage is conceived as an enclosed world that cannot be entered and that it must be accepted. Synonym of preservation and protection, heritage *“has focused more on technical practices of conservation and processes of heritage management than on critical*

discussion of the nature of heritage and why we think particular objects, places and practices might be considered more worthy than others of conservation and protection.”⁴

Central to this view, what is recognised as heritage has inherent values, is stable, static and *‘authentic’*. This *“leads to a focus on physical fabric of heritage. If value is inherent, it follows that ‘heritage’ must be contained within the physical fabric of a building or object, or in the material things associated with heritage practices”⁵*.

This study seeks to propose and discuss alternative views of heritage and to challenge the received, dominant discourse surrounding it. There is a necessity to criticize the ‘sanctification’ of the past; *“heritage studies can sometimes come across as fetishising authentic and preserved physical relics and remains”⁶*. However, heritage is not simply a record of the past, as it is popularly accepted, but it is a cultural and dynamic process. There is an urgency to develop a critical culture in which heritage is approached and understood as a dialogue between past and present: heritage must belong to the present in the same measure as it belongs to the past. Heritage is about the present, it lives in the present and is received, practiced and consumed by people today. *“We must rid ourselves of the idea that the present has nothing to contribute to the achievements of the past”⁷*.

II. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

A cultural shift in understanding heritage occurred with the concept of *'intangible heritage'*: from material culture to the inclusion of performed culture. What was also called folklore, developed into a recognized repertoire of practices and the enactment, transmission and reproduction of these. The shift entailed a change in focus: from artefacts to people: "they are not only cultural carriers and transmitters (the terms are unfortunate, as is 'masterpiece'), but also agents in the heritage enterprise itself"⁸. Intangible cultural heritage is defined as "heritage that is embodied in people rather than in inanimate objects"⁹. As UNESCO defines it:

"Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts"¹⁰.

The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (article 2), defines ICH in more details as follows:

"The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity"¹¹.

Intangible Cultural Heritage, as per UNESCO definition, can include the following domains:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) traditional craftsmanship¹².

Far from focusing on people as 'performers', this notion of cultural heritage draws attention to people as 'makers' and 'active agents' of a culture. This is particularly important as it challenges the fixed, intrinsic and static vision of traditional heritage and favours a more dynamic, living and vibrant concept of heritage: "intangible heritage is constantly changing and evolving, and being enriched by each new generation"¹³. Thus, ephemerality takes its legitimate place alongside permanence.

III. The Politics of Heritage

"Anything that an authority (such as a state) designates as worthy of conservation subsequently enters the political arena"¹⁴.

"It is axiomatic that (...) all heritages are thus an actual or potential political instrument, whether that was intended or not"¹⁵.

These statements clearly set out the crucial relationship between heritage and political discourse. Whilst being a lucrative economic activity (maintenance, funding and promotion of tourist destinations), ***heritage is fundamentally a means to produce state ideologies***¹⁶. Far from being representative of the history of a country, of a place or of a people, heritage is ***"an instrument of cultural power in whatever period of time one chooses to examine"***¹⁷. Heritage is ***"often directed towards establishing particular national narratives in reaction to the influence of globalisation on the one hand, and the local on the other. We can see the growth of heritage in the second part of the twentieth century as, at least in part, a reaction to the way in which globalisation, migration and transnationalism had begun to erode the power of the nation-state. In this guise, heritage is primarily about establishing a set of social, religious and political norms that the nation-state requires to control its citizens, through emphasis on the connection between its contemporary imposition of various state controls and the nation's past"***¹⁸. Indeed, heritage and the celebration of a specific 'past' have undoubtedly served for political interests.

The dominant western discourse about heritage, called 'Authorised Heritage Discourse' (AHD) has been defined as ***"the creation of lists that represent the canon of heritage. It is a set of ideas that works to normalise a range of assumptions about the nature and meaning of heritage and***

*to privilege particular practices, especially those of heritage professionals and the state. Conversely, the AHD can also be seen to exclude a whole range of popular ideas and practices relating to heritage*¹⁹. Thus, it can be inferred that AHD, as an instrument of power, is utilized and managed by a restricted group and it is used to both control the general public and to exclude it from having an active role in heritage. This has significant repercussions on civic society, identity and the ways these engage with dominant ideologies: *“the power to control heritage is the power to remake the past in a way that facilitates certain actions or viewpoints in the present”*²⁰. Since the concept of heritage is culturally (and ideologically) constructed, there are many possible heritages, what means that promoting one object, practice or site as heritage always implies neglecting another. This process of selection excludes civic society and the alternatives ways in which it would understand heritage, whilst it favours and promotes values of elite social classes. The monumental things which often constitute official heritage are easily delineated and therefore can be managed.²¹ It is important to note that Authorized Heritage Discourse (official heritage) does not simply involve national or global arenas, but it also and foremost impacts upon local settings.

IV. Heritage, Identity and Representation: toward Democratic Active Citizenship

Heritage Studies addresses two main processes: *“the first concerns the ways in which ideas and ideals about official heritage, or authorised heritage discourses, are involved in the production of a ‘heritage industry’ that controls the distance between people and the past. The second involves the production of identity and community at the local level, which relates both to official and unofficial practices of heritage and has the potential to transform society”*²². This latter point is particularly significant as it is often overlooked by the practices surrounding production and management of official heritage. Heritage has the potential to affect the ways a society relates to its past, or the ways in which shared experiences are understood; further, it has an impact on what is chosen to remember and what is ignored. All this has a huge effect on the ways a society perceives its present and its identity (-ies).

Identity (and identities) is a crucial value of a society and is strictly bound up with politics (and example might be the case of sectarianism in Scotland). Heritage enables us to engage

with debates about identity; it is part of the way identities are created and disputed, whether as individual, group or nation state. As a *“present-centred cultural practice and an instrument of cultural power” heritage implies “the identities, memories and temporal experiences of ordinary people”*²³. Our identity is constituted of more than just heritage but there is a large proportion of identity which we identify as part of us and our makeup and which we wish to preserve. *“Heritage strengthens the identities at the level of our home, our neighbourhood, our town, our region (which may have several layers), and our nation and at the continental and universal levels”*²⁴. Consequently, the fact that heritage is controlled by hegemonic interests, it can be inferred that heritage is produced, managed, controlled, commodified and commercialized to provide, mainly, a national identity.

The cultural capital and monetary value invested in heritage are aimed at legitimizing a set of values, to make some people more rooted, more secure, more protected. However, the problem resides precisely in the realm of heritage and the ways this is selected, produced and managed; as Heritage Studies scholar, Peter Howard highlights: *“Heritage is for people; not just for a small minority of specialists and experts, but for everyone”*²⁵. There is a significant issue at the level of representation as current policies and practices surrounding heritage operate as gate keepers to the process of making and producing heritage. Thus, civic society is excluded from playing an active role which concerns heritage, and is confined as passive recipient of heritage products, sites and practices (ideologically engineered) which have to be uncritically accepted²⁶. Prominent French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu postulates the existence of a ‘cultural capital’ which is *“not concentrated in the hands of a few official agencies but dispersed among many producers and curators, especially in democratic societies. Therefore these producers are frequently conveying a multiplicity of quite different and even competing ‘ideologies’, even in the interpretation of the same heritage, rather than a particular coherent political programme intended to support any distinctive prevailing view of society”*²⁷. Bourdieu’s perception of cultural capital re-draws power relations in the ‘making’ of heritage and assigns heritage in the hands of the broader civic society. Over fifty years ago, eminent western theorist Claude Lévi-Strauss advocated for **greater and more equal representation of all cultures in the formulation and general approach to heritage**. The implications of such a view are significant

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at the level of democracy, active citizenship, identity, cultural difference, intercultural and inter-ethnic dialogues.

It is imperative at this stage to highlight the crucial connection between active citizenship and heritage.

Democratic Active Citizenship proposes an alternative vision of citizenship, global and cosmopolitan, where its content and practice are underpinned by human rights principles and social justice. Democratic Citizenship concerns itself with rights, responsibilities and action; it promotes an active citizen who is not solely aware of her rights, but able to act upon them. This has profound implications as mere empathy has to be replaced with responsibility and outrage to make people 'act' for a more equitable and sustainable society. Democratic Citizenship focuses on horizontal ties (responsibilities among individuals) and calls upon an ethical understanding of civic society. The greater representation invoked by Lévi-Strauss in the formulation and approach to heritage implies more 'active' citizens, it signifies greater ownership of actions, enhanced participation in civic society and a greater democratic approach to the past. Heritage is much more than a few stones and relics: it bears witness to the actions of people, to centuries and values. Heritage proposes interpretations of history and serves as a stepping stone to locate our place in the universe. To breed grounds for more active citizenship it is necessary to engage civic society in the dialogue with the past. From passively accepting the 'selected' history to celebrate and include in the heritage repertoire, civic society must be enabled to actively engage with the past. Cultural Heritage *"is a concept that can promote self-knowledge, facilitate communication and learning, and guide the stewardship of the present culture and its historic past"*²⁸ further the selecting "particular pasts to conserve is necessarily a matter of continuous negotiations among all interested parties"²⁹.

V. Heritage: Multiculturalism and Social Inclusion

Heritage must be understood *"not only as a potentially democratic phenomenon, but also to see in the social practices surrounding heritage the possibility for promoting social change. An advocate of the potentially transformative power of history, and of the role of heritage in producing diversity and scaffolding multiculturalism in society"*³⁰. Cultural heritage, buttressed by an active participation of the wider civic society, can bring about social inclusion and advance equality and diversity in a society. The social

potential residing within the concept of heritage must not be underestimated. The processes of 'selection' and 'interpretations' of the past must address the cultural diversity which is inherent in the history of any nation.

*"Cultural heritage can, of course, be used to manipulate people. Governments commonly use cultural heritage to try to weld disparate ethnic groups into more cohesive and harmonious national entity. They use cultural heritage to shape public opinions. All of these manipulative activities may be benign if they promote tolerant states and societies based on human rights. Interpretation of the past can be opened out so as to recognize the roles played by minority groups in the national story, to engage them more fully in celebration of the nation's achievements, and to recognize injustices done to them in the past"*³¹.

Cultural heritage instruments, at international, national and local levels, have significant implications and play key political roles with a major impact upon society. Whilst minority groups feel suppressed and excluded by the official heritage discourse promoted by governments; dominant ethnic groups feel threatened by the raising profile of minorities' cultures. This opposing dynamic is counterproductive, it breeds division, social exclusion and discrimination. In addition, we must not forget that *"cultural heritage operates in a synchronised relationship involving society (that is, systems of interactions connecting people), and norms and values (that is, ideas and belief systems that define relative importance)"*³². Thus, cultural heritage is erroneously associated to national narratives: there is a necessity to approach **heritage as a 'shared memory'** rather than a 'common memory'.

This distinction is crucial to our understanding of multiculturalism: *"the old multicultural model has not been a big success in countries such as the Netherlands and Britain. To continue the idea of cultural diversity as a common good needs more energetic efforts to integrate all sorts of people into a common liberal culture. To do this (...) multiculturalism based on group recognition and group rights, must be abandoned"*³³. Heritage should be about shared past, history, experiences and practices, about the stories that a community tells about itself. To the detriment of social inclusion, discourses of national heritage often focus on normative cultures that are presented and understood as contained, coherent and homogenous in essence³⁴ and Britain is no exception³⁵. In essence, in the specific case of

Britain, cultural difference is always associated to 'non-white' communities; whilst Britishness represents the 'norm' against which difference is measured. In result, "there is a danger that an artificial dichotomy is created between a 'majority-white-indigenous' national culture (perceived as settled and homogenous) on the one hand, and 'minority-"non-white" –immigrant cultures (perceived as displaced and marginal) on the other hand"³⁶. It is necessary to question this view and the notion of a 'core' normative and homogenous culture around which minority cultures can be acknowledged and celebrated. Cultural difference is NOT something marginal to celebrate whilst the mainstream national narrative embodies the 'common' heritage'. Many scholars have recognized cultural diversity and immigration as integral part of British history³⁷. Therefore, cultural diversity must be approached as integral to the history and the culture of Britain.

Heritage is and has always been used as a political tool to advance a number of causes. Thus, it is imperative to use its potential to combat social exclusion and to promote multiculturalism as inherent to the history of a country. Heritage can play a key role in developing social cohesion and producing an integrated cultural strategy. *"Once it is accepted that heritage resources can be used in an active political way it is a simple step to apply them to the problems of social exclusion"*³⁸. Whilst globalization seems to be threatening cultural diversity, it can also be seen as fostering more cultural awareness and interchange. Multiculturalism is necessary to achieve social, economic, cultural, political, moral and spiritual growth. Indeed, the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity maintains that cultural diversity is the *"common heritage of humanity, (...) and a source of exchange, innovation and creativity"*³⁹.

Further, the EU's cultural programme 2007-2013 seeks to foster intercultural dialogue, to promote cultural diversity by engaging with a shared cultural heritage. At present we are experiencing a cultural crisis in which positive information, principles of interethnic interaction, socialization and cultural exchange are absent in multiethnic societies. Promoting social inclusion and enhanced cohesion among multiethnic societies can be achieved with an innovative approach to cultural heritage:

*"Heritage can both stimulate and act as a symbol of political struggle (...) ownership of heritage objects, places and practices might be considered to give their possessors political power"*⁴⁰.

Promoting social change through the performing arts (ICH) can be a solution to democratic participation and social transformation. Research has shown that the arts are important arenas for human rights education. For example: *"music making in a group brings out the social dynamics of the group. Harmonic as well as strained relationships are brought to the front (...). Through musical dialogues the interrelationship within the group is explored"*⁴¹.

Heritage stimulates and acts as a means of political struggle: is *"a touchstone around which people can muster their arguments and thoughts"*⁴². Heritage formation, when initiated and realized democratically by the broader civic society, and when it addresses a 'shared memory' where multiculturalism is a core value, can successfully bring about social transformations.

VI. Scottish Heritage, Equality and Collective Belonging

As a sequel to this general and theoretical preamble about the multifarious meanings of 'heritage' and its relationship with multiculturalism, active citizenship and social inclusion, it is important to focus on the Scottish context. Indeed, the most effective way to engage with wider and global issues is with localism. Scotland is experiencing exciting times on numerous levels; to date, its performance in matters of equality has achieved high standards in relation to other European contexts. Indeed, whilst there is still a lot of work to do concerning diversity and equality, in the last few years Scotland has advanced significantly its equality agenda and has made substantial progress in policies, practices and approaches. Institutional support, political will, a vibrant and active third sector, and its diverse cultural and ethnic communities, make Scotland a country receptive for change, innovation and progress. This is a time of opportunities for the country to bring about real social, economic, cultural and ideological changes.

The Equality Act 2010 marks a new beginning for the respect and protection of diversity, and this, in itself, is a chance to seize and take forward, it is a prospect for better times to come in terms of equality. The recent elections in the country represent an unparalleled opportunity for Scotland to foster

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change, innovation, growth and sustainability. Further, this has been the year of the Census, a decennial exercise to sketch a portrait of the country: its people, its needs, its resources, its diversity, its languages, its challenges and its problems. This 'picture' of Scotland is a chance, a starting point to drive things, a key to bring about change, an opportunity to learn who we are. This climate of novelty, fresh start and potentials represents a real chance for the diverse communities of Scotland to draw new horizons - we hold the right cards to make a difference, to shape a bright future for our country. What is needed is a strong civic sense, individual and collective responsibility, a strong identity and a sense of shared belonging. These are crucial components to make a difference - to allow for a sustainable and durable change.

It is at this point that 'heritage' becomes important; this is the time to re-consider old mis-conceptions of heritage and to acknowledge the numerous, innovative ways heritage can be understood. More importantly, the connection between heritage, multiculturalism and active citizenship, must be taken into consideration as a stepping stone to drive forward social change. 'The goal is to win social justice. We need to see cultural heritage within the wider human rights framework'⁴³. Indeed, the human rights dimension draws attention to people's rights and responsibilities toward their heritage. Citizens' active participation in selecting and interpreting a shared cultural heritage is a first step toward social inclusion and change. Thus, a more participatory, democratic approach to heritage can pave the way for a workable multicultural model and, ultimately, for social justice.

BEMIS seeks to propose prospects for a shift in thinking, approaching and understanding heritage and to create grounds for alternative and innovative solutions to multiculturalism and active citizenship. We invoke for a cultural shift toward this direction. This entails a process which requires a number of long-term stages in order to take place, but it represents a sustainable solution for the future. BEMIS' track record of commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and its experience in community development in support of the diverse ethnic and cultural minorities of Scotland, are buttressed by its engagement with the larger European context. Indeed, BEMIS plays an active role in a number of organizations and international networks to foster human rights education active citizenship across Europe.

Hence, in pursuit of a successful multicultural model with responsible and active citizens, BEMIS wishes to shake the grounds in matters of heritage. Specifically, it aims to initiate a dialogue about heritage(s) in Scotland, to prompt debates and spark the community's participation in this matter. To provoke a re-thinking about heritage it is imperative to invite the broader civic society to engage with this process. Thus the role of the third sector – for its strong community ties – is instrumental in this. BEMIS is committed to driving this concept(s) forward and to sharing such views both horizontally and vertically. An initial consultative process to engage with stakeholders and the wider third sector is a first step to map out interest and participation. Therefore, with this publication, we aim to launch a dialogue and to elicit interested responses, views, comments.

More importantly, this initial step functions as a means to recruit interested parties to form a steering group, a committee of individuals, representatives of the public and third sector and the wider civic society, to drive the change and break grounds in matters of social inclusion. The committee would not purport to fabricate solutions for social change, it would rather pave the way for a participatory and inclusive engagement with heritage discourse in Scotland. If heritage can be one of the ways forward, it must be deployed with a bottom up approach whereby it is the community to re-think about its past and to shape its future. Multiculturalism starts from identity and it is here that heritage can bring cohesion, collective belonging, and real social change.

Thus - in this climate of opportunities - BEMIS invites responses to this call for social and cultural change in Scotland. Visit our website or check out 'HERITAGE and MULTICULTURALISM in SCOTLAND' on our FaceBook page! We look forward to hearing from you!

THIS is the TIME to re-consider OUR past and to shape our FUTURE, THIS is the TIME to make a CHANGE.

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