Changing Places, Changing People

Critical Heritages of Migration and Belonging

Susannah Eckersley

Across Europe and beyond, much is being made of the perceived breakdown of the nation state, which was historically configured as a 'container' of heritage formations, adopting and perusing local traditions where possible but oppressing them where they were deemed unsuitable. Migration is seen as eroding the rigid boundaries of this configuration, potentially liberating identities and heritages in the process. This special issue aims to address the relationship between critical heritage and redefinitions of self, other, community and place within the contemporary global reality of movement and flux. Diversity and hybridisation are usually regarded positively, displacement, alienation, conflict and normative repression negatively; yet is that necessarily so? Heritage can be seen as a tool for discursively drawing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, but who is doing the drawing, for what purpose and what difference does that make? By challenging conventional heritage discourses projecting heritage as sited in place(s), and/or attached to specific groups and communities, the articles collected here explore the various, sometimes conflicting 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991) of heritage by raising a range of critical issues.

Ideas of 'home' and 'belonging' are often highly subjective and conceptual. However, in order to understand what it might mean for people to 'feel at home' or to 'belong' we need to recognise that there must be *something*, *someone* or *somewhere* to belong *to*: a representation of 'home' with which the individual can form an attachment. While this 'thing' can be both material and immaterial (in the sense of intangible, or conceptual), the other receptors of belonging or attachment – people (someone) and places (somewhere) – are usually considered to be inherently material (or tangible) due to their physicality. Such notions of belonging may be particularly important within the context of migration (including forced migration), border change or displacement, which result in people taking their own perceptions and memories of 'home' into new territory. Indeed, various academic literatures have explored feelings of belonging and understandings of home in

these contexts, including: place identity and place attachment; identities and belonging; emotions, affect and loss or attachment; memory studies; museum and heritage studies.

Within this special issue, many of the authors question how ideas of place and place attachment shape or limit the positions individuals and groups adopt, including the roles played by autobiography, objects, buildings, travel, institutions, communities, memory and history in shaping such ideas. The exploration of new transitional identities and redefinitions of self, community, other and place which have developed in relation to the heritage practices, mediated memories and ‘past-presencing’ (Macdonald 2012) of migrants is crucial to the special issue as a whole.

The means by which displaced or migrant people negotiate community and place in tension between the ‘here and now’ and the ‘there and then’ that shapes their heritage discourse as much as the elite discourse they are confronted with in everyday life, underlies much of the analysis, in particular in the articles by Mellor, Eckersley and Clopot. With displacement not only a historical but also a common contemporary experience, it is important to examine the significance of memorates of ‘roots and routes’ for shaping the journeys of return, (re)discovery, pilgrimage or ‘closure’ that figure in heritage tourism, and in the emotional memories which contribute to nostalgia. At the same time, the negotiations of contested heritage practices, discourses and associations of ‘authenticity’ between communities, and potentially in light of official discourses and practices can either alleviate or aggravate such contestations. The question of parity of esteem in notions of cultural citizenship, when combined with the coexistence of potentially conflicting heritage discourses, is at the core of all the articles. No matter what the specificities of the context of each article presented here, a key question of the special issue is – what is needed to make critical heritage sustainable in a social, political and economic environment in radical flux (whether migration, climate change, financial crises, political upheaval and conflict)? Following on from that, how do we decide which heritages should be sustained, who legitimises these decisions, and to what extent are such questions about merely replacing one elite with the power of definition with another? Given the continued reality of multifaceted place attachment, within this special issue we explore how migration and displacement might be turned into opportunities for re-placing communities and heritages while avoiding the trap of a shallow essentialism, and the sanitisation of uncomfortable heritages.

Belonging is tied up with understandings, constructions and articulations of identities, as well as with place, people, things and experiences. Hazel Easthope's work on mobility, place and identity (2009) argues that both mobility (including migration) and place are 'fundamental attributes of *all* identities' (Easthope 2009: 78) within contemporary societies. She argues that this is the case, no matter whether we conceive of identities as rooted in place (for example Duyvendak's critique of political instrumentalisation of the 'nation-as-home' [2011]); rooted in the sense of being hybrid and flexible, following Giddens' (1991) and Bauman's (1997, 2001) 'liquid modernity'; dynamic and incomplete (Rutherford 1990); positional in relation to an 'other' (Said 1979); self-constructed within relations of power; or as a combination of various aspects of each (all cited in Easthope 2009: 62–70).

The articles collected in this special issue came out of a session organised (together with Ullrich Kockel and Máiréad Nic Craith) at the 2016 conference of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies in Montreal. The conference session was intentionally broad in that there were no disciplinary or geographical boundaries imposed on the research presented, in order to allow multiple perspectives on diverse yet common human experiences of migration and belonging to develop in conversation with one another. The present collection of articles is by no means representative of the full range of excellent research which was discussed over the two days of the conference session. Indeed, the European scope of this journal means that some participants' research will no doubt appear in other journals in due course. The articles collected here all focus, in different ways, on the relationship between people, place and memory, as shaped by experiences of migration within or from Europe and illuminated through expressions of the connection between 'heritage' and belonging.

My own article (Eckersley) takes forward the idea of attachment and belonging as a relationship between people and place, through their encounter with objects, memories and emotions. By analysing two groups with varying experiences of and attachments to the same place – Silesia – it is possible to draw out differences resulting from migration experiences and relate them to processes of belonging in a broader sense. The museum as a 'habitus of heritage' (Dicks 2016) becomes the site within which the encounters take place, and it is through the objects and voices in it that memories are stirred, and past places come to life. I argue that the *process* of attachment is as significant in understanding belonging and a sense of 'home' as either *place* or *people* individually.

Russian Old Believers in Romania are the focus of Cristina Clopot's article, which examines the ambiguity of attachment to place and language, and the necessity of adapting to contemporary circumstances and pressure, in particular those arising as a result of tourism. Nostalgia and symbolic belonging feature strongly in her analysis of this minority group, alongside the question of 'authenticity' in relation to traditions and the complicated relationship between notions of heritage as 'fixed' and heritage as 'in flux'.

Hybridity is also integral to Clare Canning's examination of Sikh gurdwaras in Britain, in relation not only to people's sense of belonging in a particular gurdwara but also in the processes and practices of creating a gurdwara in a pre-existing building. Her article draws out how changes in the structure and use of a building, and its adoption by a new community may lead to novel concepts of place and value, which do not necessarily undermine or replace pre-existing ones but rather add to them. Again, as with Clopot's article, the idea of 'authenticity' in relation to a fixed notion of heritage and value is interrogated, here by the dynamic and community-led development of the significance of the space and role of the gurdwara.

Larissa Mellor approaches her exploration of belonging, migration and memory from an auto-ethnographic perspective, partly as an artist working on these themes, but also from personal family migration experiences. She draws out the emotional and emotive connections between the strangeness of a distant place, language and customs, which are simultaneously foreign to her and yet embedded into her everyday relationships, family words and nostalgic associations. Mellor's artistic work grapples with these contradictions, and in her article she places this against an examination of being part of German Clubs in the United States of America, while delving into the detail of personal family moments as German-Americans.

Taking a theoretical rather than empirical approach, Nicole Deufel addresses the question of how heritage interpretation can remain relevant while addressing contested ideas of identity, in particular in an 'age of migrations' (MeLA Project 2011–2015) for Europe. As such, her article relates to issues from within each of the previous articles, drawing them out in relation to the literature and theories on memory and heritage, in particular. She proposes taking forward the notion of 'agonistic remembering' (Bull and Hansen 2015) into the professional practice of heritage interpretation as a counter to increasing political populism and nationalism in many European countries.

◆
Susannah Eckersley, Media, Culture, Heritage;
Newcastle University. E-mail: susannah.eckersley@ncl.ac.uk
◆

References

- Anderson, B. (1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso).
- Bauman, Z. (1997), *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity).
- Bauman, Z. (2001), 'Identity in the Globalising World', *Social Anthropology* 9, no. 2: 121–129.
- Bull, A. and H. Hansen (2015), 'On Agonistic Memory', *Memory Studies* 9, no. 4: 390–404.
- Dicks, B. (2016), 'The Habitus of Heritage: A Discussion of Bourdieu's Ideas for Visitor Studies in Heritage and Museums', *Museum and Society* 14, no. 1: 52–64.
- Duyvendak, J. (2011), *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Easthope, H. (2009), 'Fixed Identities in a Mobile World? The Relationship between Mobility, Place and Identity', *Identities* 16, no. 1: 61–82.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society on the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
- Macdonald, S. (2012), 'Presencing Europe's Pasts', in U. Kockel, M. Nic Craith and J. Frykman (eds), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), 233–252.
- MeLA Project (2011–2015), 'European Museums in an Age of Migrations' www.mela-project.polimi.it (accessed 11.09.2017).
- Rutherford, J. (ed.) (1990), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart).
- Said, E. (1979), *Orientalism* (London: Vintage).