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## Culture of memory & Heritage of Violence: new tasks for public policies

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*“Historical realities are always enigmatic and, while appearing to be self-evident, are difficult to decipher” (Bourdieu, 1998: 23)*

### INTRODUCTION

Memory on wars and conflicts, “troubled past”, brought twofold attention to heritage: to the deliberate destruction of heritage (as the symbol of the hatred other) and to heritage of violence that is often celebrated as a symbol of “our strength”, heroism or deliberate sacrifice. Thus, links between heritage and violence should be widely discussed in cultural policy perspective focusing on mediation and interpretation of dissonant heritage, perceived in different manner by different communities. Policies of memory and of oblivion often are inspired by “daily” political needs (populism). But a wider horizon is needed – how our common, shared heritage and memory, in spite of former conflicts and wars, should be understood and interpreted not only from a national interest perspective, but from a perspective of human and cultural rights...

Numerous warspace, from Haiti to Nanjing, Kosovo to Waterloo, from Coventry to Dresden, keep memories on conflicts, tell stories that might (or are used deliberately for) reinforce nationalism. Can they become instruments for new heritage policies and practices, showing different responsibilities, not forgetting destinies of subaltern and minorities in those conflicts?

### HERITAGE OF VIOLENCE

*“There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism”, Walter Benjamin*

Heritage of violence is not the topic that is widely present in cultural or in heritage studies, although impressive number of the “lieu de memoire” – are places of larger social or community trauma. Most



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of safeguarded narratives are those of victimization or of triumphalism. Both of them are narratives of exclusion, as they do not include understanding of the “other” — even if the other is also a victim, not a perpetrator<sup>1</sup>.

But, is every heritage site – site of violence? How many have died by making cathedrals by forced labor? What was the suffering of the poor when best endeavors of the humanity have been created? To what extent communities interpret differently same events – making them a “dissonant heritage” within one same culture and region? (Orange Order Parade in Belfast is the most known conflictual, dissonant living heritage in Europe, but there are many other examples).

Every revolutionary change, even if only “cultural”, was introduced through a certain form of violence. But when the victory of the new “model” is announced, it stays in history as it was brought “by acclamation”, and not through conflictual process (scientific knowledge, industrial revolution, digital culture and recently AI). Great achievements in all the epochs have been based on some form of violence. Literary languages, like French, German or Italian, in forms that are taught today in schools and used in public communication, were created repressing all other dialects and languages that were spoken on their territories. This violence was specifically important in France after the Revolution (de Certeau 1993). The channel Moscow – Volga, and other great endeavor of communism, have taken a multitude of human lives (up to 30 000 only for the Channel). Every

<sup>1</sup> Only recently Holocaust museums are integrating Porajmos memory (genocide toward Roma), although happening at the same time, in same concentration/extermination camps

project of the closed, totalitarian society meant numerous unrecorded victims, deleted later from the history and collective memory.

And even in the cases that had not been based on torture and physical violence, former “grand projects” of totalitarian and recent ones of authoritarian regimes (Skopje 2014), represent violence over culture (as lived by people). They are usually initiated by leader`s ambition to offer “response” to a conflict with neighbours (like Skopje 2014 case conflicting with Greece) or aiming to humiliate its own minority groups (like construction of Christian crosses on hills above Muslim villages in the Balkans). Often those projects are asphyxiating already achieved levels of multicultural patterns of social behaviour. Project Skopje 2014 has directly opposed the already achieved level of integration of Albanian population in public and political life of the country, creating a city that offers new identity symbols to Slavic Macedonians. They have to accept their new identity: as slavized antique Macedonian population. Here, heritage is in the heart of the political battle: who was the “native”, the first nation, on this territory? Albanians, claiming Ilyrian origins; Greeks unifying Athenian and Macedonian cultures in Hellenism; or North Macedonians, as real and only descendents of Antique Macedonians?

Christianity was violently opposing pagan cultures – and as pagans at the East European borders did not have literacy, their version of history had stayed unrecorded. Oral literature kept some traces about people “tragedies during castle-buildings”, that demanded sacrifices: castle of Smederevo and city of Skadar/Shkodra symbolised in fact the new



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urban civilization. In both cases the women are heroines: the ruler wife “Bloody Jerina” that constructed the castle of Smederevo (negative), and for Skadar: innocent wife – victim was buried alive in the walls of the city, so that city can live (positive heroine). The most appreciated symbolic heritage is often memorized as a heritage of violence, like Višegrad`s *The bridge on the Drina* (through the novel of Ivo Andrić, a Nobel prize winner), less as a part of the UNESCO World Heritage List (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1260>).

### DISSONANT HERITAGE

This bridge itself is the dissonant regional heritage. In Bosnian Muslim collective memory – this heritage represents greatness of the Ottoman Empire, its care and investment in its people in Bosnia and Hercegovina. In Serbian collective memory this bridge is a glorious “present”, a “tribute” of the great vesir Mehmed paša Sokolović to his own roots and to his fatherland (he had to deny its origins becoming a janissar). Thus, it is not the symbol of Ottoman Empire Greatness, but of the crime of that Empire (“blood tax”), taking children from Christian families to educate them to become merciless soldiers of the empire. Today, this dissonance is reinforced with another “present” to the city of Višegrad (from where Bosnian Muslim population were forced to leave during war of nineties)<sup>2</sup>. Emir Kusturica (later baptized in orthodox church) built Andrićgrad, fictitious new town created close to “the bridge” (from 2011 to 2014)<sup>3</sup>, with “old” buildings from

different centuries (according to Kusturica, it is bridging Byzantine, Renaissance and Otoman periods), that never existed in any of the cities of the region. Is the project of Andrićgrad (city named by the Nobel prize winner that memorialized Višegrad and the bridge in the book) in itself violence over Višegrad that lost its real multicultural character, offering a new city with a church in the middle, and with monuments important only for Serbian national identity?

On the other side, transcultural and transnational European identity is built on common, shared heritage, even when it comes to dissonant heritage, due to a common troubled past. Holocaust museums exist today in all countries of European Union – an example of common culture of memory that new Europe is building. New democracies, from Latvia to Hungary, have built their Holocaust museums only recently, re-constructing in a different manner memory spaces linked to WWII. During socialist time`s politics of oblivion was lead regarding their own role and responsibility in those processes – German occupied forces were the only to be blamed! After 1989, Soviet occupation and Soviet crimes like Katyn massacre dominated a culture of memory. But in both periods cultural and social importance of Jewish communities was neglected. Today, new memory politics are renewelating memory of others, heritage of communities that have disappeared. Festivals of Jewish culture are flourishing in Poland, but not yet in Lithuania or Latvia. However, it does not concern all minorities and their cultures, Roma, Rusyns (Ruthenians) and many other non-recognized minorities.

<sup>2</sup> In 1991 municipality of Višegrad had 21.199 inhabitants, out of whom 70 % Muslims Bosniacs, while today has approximately 13.500 inhabitants (10% Bosniacs)

<sup>3</sup> It is offensive for Bosnian Muslim population as numerous crimes had been committed near the Višegrad Bridge during the war in the 90s



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Multicultural communities usually have different memory communities (as many ethnic groups they had), constructing conflicting or differing narratives about same historical events. Dialogue among those “memories” started to be established as a social practice only at the end of XX century, specifically due to the proclamation of 2008 as the European year of intercultural dialogue. Even then, a few dissonant issues succeeded to be selected for a dialogue, but school curricula became much more open and “dialogical” then before.

### **PUBLIC POLICIES AND MEMORY**

How relationships between our own time and the history of the world are constructed? How systems of heritage protection are created? Are those systems sufficient to point out the complexity and differences of experiences? What is researched, publicly presented and made visible by efforts of mediation and interpretation? These are three crucial questions of heritage policies as part of larger public policies that operates in public interest – but interest that should relate to all citizens, not only to majorities in each of the countries.

Heritage today is the primary political question – when we deal with it and when we “forgot” about it. But we use only a few “historical episodes”, those that are relevant to present political aims. The world culture of memory is more “episodical memory” (Tulving, 1984) that characterised most of policies that ignore or erase everything that is shameful, like colonisation, slavery (negative past) or confusing (Dragičević Šešić and Stefanović 2017).

In many countries public memory policies are developed within different ministries and other layers of local governments that deal with culture, education, research, tourism, defense (related to the Army and army history), etc. Each is finding its ways to interpret and to instrumentalize the past, conditioning ways of history episode “selection” and representation according to their aims. On the other side EU (through different calls and programs), UNESCO and Council of Europe are trying to stimulate different approaches to memory, involving citizens, civil society groups and cultural organizations to enter in dialogue both locally and across borders, to rediscuss issues of troubled pasts that were dividing communities (Fairclough et al 2014). In the last few decades’ public memory policies became more “shared” and debated especially regarding so-called “negative past” that usually have not had the place within public policies (colonialism, official racism, policies of repression toward women, ethnic minorities, trade unions etc.). The aim was to create participative interpretation of the past, involving personal stories, community experiences, and to “create” a “heritage” that can be shared in community. Diversity of contemporary societies and raising xenophobia (provoked by recent massive migrations and economic crisis, stimulated by tabloid press and populist political communication) demand for new active heritage policies that would fight stereotypes and prejudices opening better understanding for the future among communities with different experiences.



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It is especially important regarding dissonant heritage, places of memory linked to colonial past, wars and conflicts, but also regarding a (non)existence of the other (victims) in the official memory representations in museums, archives, cultural monuments, etc. In this respect, although Museum of immigration in Paris is showing mostly positive individual “integration stories” (as stories that families wanted to share), it complemented them with media contents that have shown “negative past” – i.e. how Italian emigrants had been treated at the end of XIX century in France; what pogroms and street “actions” were organized against them. This unwanted history that is showing xenophobic society full of prejudices, was not part of official narratives or of heritage interpretation practices. Avoidance of those topics, politics of oblivion for everything that is not link to heroic or martyr behaviour, contributed that for a long time was impossible to create common approach to heritage of violence – where perpetrators and victims were often changing roles.

There are numerous examples of different memories influenced by present politics, especially in new democracies. What used to be socialist heritage – became non-wanted heritage (i.e. revolutionary movements of working class, trade union history, etc.); what was represented as evil once (medieval kingdoms and royal “strategic” marriages), was reinterpreted to show its importance for the national as “European” identity (Christianity, for example); what was deleted from public memory – now asked to be represented, as the most important part of national culture (religious dissident artists etc.). Monument and memory

policies had three forms in different phases of postsocialist transition (Dragičević Šešić 2011): the model of anti-culture (destruction strategy, appropriation strategy, ignoring “the other” and provocation strategy); the model of “culturalization” (monument building within new identity policies, decontextualization strategy, musealization of the heritage of others, “gratitude” strategy); and the model of dissent – creative dialogue (counter-culture strategy, strategy of opposing within one’s own culture).

### CONCLUSIONS

World needs to develop synthetic overall gaze toward memory and heritage from transnational and transcultural perspectives. It demands new relation toward memory & heritage of the “others”, victims and perpetrators, hegemonic and subaltern groups and it demands different approach and manners of value communication. Heritage should not be (mis)appropriated, destroyed, or neglected. These three dominant strategies that relates to dissonant heritage and heritage of violence, should be replaced by new forms of heritage management that puts focus on civil society involvement and cultural mediation, integrating intangible heritage in meaningful use and understanding of the tangible in different social, educational, cultural and tourist activities...

Multitude of approaches and new instruments of revitalisation and re-articulation of heritage are needed – creation of “living heritage” – from already known forms such as cultural routes till interactive maps and “serious



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games” that have to cross local and national borders.

New strategies and tactics should be derived (according to de Certeau meaning of those words) – and especially newly constructed participative cultural policies (Dupin-Meynard et al. 2020) with adequate concept of memory politics and heritage interpretation. Thus museums, archives, and other public cultural centers and places of memory, would offer a contribution to participative culture of memory creating conditions for transitional justice – focusing on controversial heritage of violence, giving chance to different voices to offer their (dissonant now) readings and interpretations, bringing different perspectives in a dialogue in order to fight stereotypes, prejudices, hatred that are often embedded in a traditional interpretation of heritage of violence.

Finally, it has to be taken in account that history and heritage is not interpreted only by facts and reasoning, that social emotions and affects dominates zeitgeist and are often “managing”, channeling selection of history episodes, symbols and narratives that often are deliberately conflictual – dissonant. Thus, the task of both the heritology research and of cultural management practice is to create conditions for the open intercultural dialogue in the domain of preservation and interpretation of common world heritage related to troubled past, wars and conflicts, opening new horizons and perspectives for its understanding and interpretation.

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