VÄGSKÄLENS KULTURARV – KULTURARV VID VÄGSKÄL

Om att skapa plats för romer och resande i kulturarvet

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8. HERITAGE, TERRITORY AND NOMADISM – THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

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"Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic."

Michel Foucault in "Preface" to Anti-Oedipus

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to explore the dynamic tension between heritage, nomads and territory. Here I will be concerned with heritage as a territorializing socio-political phenomenon that strives towards stability and solidity through a globalizing apparatus of institutions, people, practices, discourses, knowledge and technologies. In contrast, the nomad, nomadism and nomadic thinking will be taken to be a socio-political category of deterritorialization, mobility and transience, established in dynamic relationship with sedentariness and fixity. Connecting the two, fitting the nomadic subject-in-motion with stable and historically grounded physical and place-bound heritage attributes, is the political project of "heritagizing the nomad".[1]

The main argument is that the recent concern shown by official heritage institutions, in Sweden and elsewhere, about the status of recognized territorialized heritage of nomadic groups in society, is an extension of

1. The paper is based on readings of theory on nomadism and mobility and secondary ethnography. The background is a research project directed by Dr Ingrid Martins Holmberg on the status of official recognition of the historical presence of travelling Roma groups, particularly place-bound physical heritage, by heritage institutions in Sweden.

sedentary thought and sedentary practices of the modern nation state. It is further grounded in the politics of recognition and the cultural economy of contemporary society. Heritagizing the nomad thus runs the risk of simply extending sedentism and the territorializing form of heritage to encompass new social groups. Paradoxically, rather than critically engaging in alternative forms of conceptualizing the past and relating to places, and thus expanding the repertoire of possible and officially recognized forms of heritage, government agencies in response to the globally expanding politics of recognition tend to reinforce a hegemonic conception of heritage. The targeted communities are often implicated in these processes as consenting and motivated heritage subjects.

The following key questions frame this investigation. What are the costs of being a recognized heritage subject? Is heritage necessarily linked to sedentary ways of thinking about the relationship between past-present-future? Should everyone be equipped with heritage? And finally: Can the heritage regime encompass radically different modes of relating to heritage and territory?

In order to make sense of these questions I will briefly touch upon three topics: nomadism, heritage and some ethnographic perspectives on past-present relations.

NOMADS

First of all, I take *nomads* to be a conceptual category that is configured from the perspective and needs of sedentary society and should not be confused with specific social groups manifesting certain nomadic traits. Modernity already harboured an ambivalent notion of the nomad. Nomads were defined as inherently different in their way of relating to territory due to their mobile lifestyle and mode of subsistence. Constructing the nomad as "the other" helped delineate and reinforce the mainstream sedentary identity. Sedentary lifestyles became the norm and interlocked with the sedentary state apparatus of discipline and control. Sedentism developed through a territorialized paradigm in which place and locality

became central pillars in the conceptualization of human beings as well as in the organization of social life (Cresswell 1997).

Sedentism typically sees people as rooted in specific places, belonging to bounded homogeneous, small-scale collectives and thereby embodying culturally authentic and stable identities. The territorialized stability of the authentic sedentary subject stands in contrast to the suspicious and problematic mobility of the inauthentic and deviant nomadic subject (Malkki 1992).

Nomadic groups were often rejected and excluded from society, but from this marginalized position they were then quickly drawn into disciplining campaigns and programmes of assimilation by the centralized nation state (see for example Gomes 2007; Siddle 1996 and Stewart 1997). Here territorialization and sedentarization typically played crucial roles. Importantly, this was a manoeuvre of re-territorialization that began by divesting people of territorial claims, incompatible with the state ideology of sedentism, and then moved on to imposing and enforcing settlement in prescribed forms.

The hegemony of sedentism as an organizing principle of modern society and as a foundational aspect of social sciences as the dominating knowledge regime of modern societies has been criticized within anthropology and by mobility studies, amongst others (Cresswell 2006; Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007). The questioning of the fixity, homogeneity and authenticity of relationships between people, culture and place has paved the way for a broad movement focusing on processual, heterogenizing and negotiating forces of social life, and seeing social life as emergent, rather than a static given (Wright 1998; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992). Globalization has further reinforced this shift towards deterritorialization, hybridity and fragmentation.

This new focus on mobility within social sciences has highlighted the limitations of sedentary approaches, but has also evoked romanticized ideas of the free nomadic subject that early modernity produced as a counter-discourse to the sedentary norm of the Western modern male, trapped in the treadmill of labour and family. Vagabonds, travellers and nomads

were seen as subjects free from state discipline and unfettered by the demands of modernity, free to roam the country and make new discoveries, experience new places (Bauman 1996). James Scott's recent study of nomadic tribes in highland South East Asia, in addition to its many merits, contributes to this wishful thinking of the nomad as a subject that knows "the art of not being governed" (Scott 2009).

Beyond the "real" nomad that constitutes the foundation for the nomad as a concept, we find the cosmopolitan nomad. The lifestyle of this nomadic subjectivity, positioned at the other end of the social spectrum, has not developed as a counter-mode of living to the normative sedentary society. On the contrary, the cosmopolitan nomad is highly dependent on the institutional and organizational foundations of sedentary society (D'Andrea 2007; Fechter 2008). Whereas "real" nomads are exposed and vulnerable to the workings of the sedentary system, and rarely benefit from the positive valuations that contemporary society under specific conditions attaches to a mobile lifestyle, cosmopolitan nomads both profit from sedentary society that provides anchor points of stability, and gain social status and cultural capital from a mobile lifestyle (Szerszynski and Urry 2006). A variant of this is the intellectual nomadic thinker, who, in addition to a cosmopolitan lifestyle, strives to be unrestrained in conceptual and analytical practice by the stagnant and canonical thinking of the state ideology (Deleuze and Guattari 1986; Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Indeed, it has been argued that a turn towards conceptual and analytical nomadism is desirable for anthropology as a discipline (Hazam and Hertzog 2012).

Nomadism is entangled in the processes of deterritorialization that characterizes globalization. Deterritorialization has turned out to be a fractured process. Not only does it disembed people, practices and objects from specific places, and juxtapose territories in ad hoc ways, it also contributes to conflicting valorizations of territory. On the one hand, territory has become a malleable backdrop for social action (Augé 1995; Harvey 1990), which might not even "take place" in the famous wording of Jean Baudrillard (1995). On the other hand, territory and place remain a crucial source and, often scarce, resource in the politics of belonging, identity

formation, and the cultural economy of urban and regional development. In these contexts place and territory are often the object of reification processes, being claimed, owned, displayed. What is important here is that these arrangements are not only people-place relations, but also organize social relations, defining "the other" as those who don't have access to "our" land or property. What is more, this provides a crucial framework for claiming, owning and displaying physical and place-bound heritage, hence the strategy to territorialize one's existence and one's history.

HERITAGE

In his influential critical investigation of contemporary heritage practices David Lowenthal exclaims that suddenly heritage is everywhere (Lowenthal 1998: xiii). Heritage has become a favoured tool in political projects, in stimulating economic growth and in fostering senses of belonging (Benton 2010; Harrison 2010; Labadi and Long 2010). Heritage has increasingly been reconfigured into an asset to be explored and harnessed in specific contexts and for specific purposes, not least when defining places and localities. This tendency has been fiercely debated (Nora 1989; Lowenthal 1985; Samuels 1994: 259–273), but the point here is that heritage is being operationalized within specific contemporary political, economic and social projects and processes on multiple scales, which creates particular heritage objects and particular heritage subjects.

The pervasiveness of a globally hegemonic framework of heritage has been investigated in terms of an "authorized heritage discourse" (Smith 2006) and a "patrimonial régime" (Hafstein 2012). These contributions have been valuable in exhorting scholars to think about the discursive practices and knowledge regimes contributing to the creation of heritage objects, and how these hegemonic practices are sustained by institutions and agents situated within global fields of power. Laurajane Smith has critically examined the process by which metropolitan conceptions of heritage have come to constitute a globally expanding discourse that performatively acts on what are considered legitimate forms of heritage (Smith 2006).

At the formal level this discourse is part of a regulatory framework for global governance of heritage developed under the UNESCO umbrella. This framework constitutes an apparatus of expertise, procedures and techniques for systematically safeguarding and preserving cultural and natural heritage.

The global heritage regime, spearheaded by UNESCO, "privileges monumentality and grand scale, innate artifact/site significance tied to time depth" (Smith 2006: 11). The centrality of material substance and territorialized heritage is related to a number of significant issues. Firstly, it is closely tied to the knowledge regime of science, ensuring that heritage values rest on scientific methods in establishing truth and authenticity. Secondly, it renders heritage visible and visitable so that heritage can be recognized and made to gather communities, local, national or the whole of humanity. Lastly, it reflects the predominant sedentary heritage conceptions of influential member states in Europe, with their richness in historical buildings marking territories and maintaining boundaries over time.

Heritage as a normative discourse and a regime of knowledge tends to operate in two directions. On the one hand, it expands outwards, encompassing new territories and phenomena that are encouraged to join up. On the other hand, it homogenizes inwards, transfiguring people, things and places as they align these to its standards. We are thus faced with a globally expanding set of ideas and practices that challenge or even threaten alternative forms of experiencing, knowing and preserving the past (Smith 2006: 11). This can occur through the formal procedures of nominations, screening and designation, in which heritage objects are formed to qualify according to the specified criteria, but the hegemonic heritage discourse also has reverberations throughout the various scales of nation state, region, city and municipality as well as beyond the legislative channels through actors who are not directly connected to the formal structure, such as NGOs, social movements, local communities and individuals. Hegemonic forms of territorialized material heritage become desirable at many levels.

The global heritage regime, underpinned by the liberal democratic

project of recognition of cultural diversity and cultural identities as well as the cultural economy of place-making, urges nation states, ethnic groups and other heritage subjects to revere and celebrate their past in specific ways, and it exhorts local and central governments to actively seek out and recognize that heritage. Visible and visitable territorialized material heritage is engaged to stabilize the past, to stabilize places, and to stabilize communities. It is a diversifying apparatus that orchestrates conceptions and practices, and an empowering tool that can be put to a multitude of uses, but that also reconfigures places, things and people. In this way heritage is binding: it forms distinct objects and subjects, enrolling them into solid constellations, through stable linkages. These heritage constellations of objects linked to memories, people and places are then claimed, owned and displayed for others, including official heritage institutions and the state apparatus, to recognize.

ETHNOGRAPHY

There are numerous ethnic and social groups throughout the world displaying nomadic traits and lifestyles, real or imagined. Needless to say, there are not only manifest differences between these groups but also a great heterogeneity within them. In line with the focus of the research project of which this paper forms a part, I have limited the ethnographic section to readings on various Roma communities in Europe. The aim is not to present a coherent Roma perspective on heritage, but to juxtapose insights drawn for ethnographic research in these communities with wider debates about heritage, nomadism, sedentism and territory. Ethnographic evidence forms a number of sources researching various Roma communities throughout Europe. It suggests that the relationship to the past and to place differs in significant ways from the expectations of the global heritage regime as outlined above, and can thus partly shed some light on the challenges official heritage institutions face when setting out to recognize the heritage of these groups.

The insights of the British anthropologist Michael Stewart on the mne-

monic practices of the Roma communities he has studied is worth quoting at some length.

> Romany peoples lack many of the mnemonic devices which ground shared memories in European societies. The built environment in which they live, either of their own or others' making, is so temporary that it hardly bears a trace of the past. At death almost all personal possessions are normally given away, sold, or destroyed, and even in everyday life objects of daily use are passed on to others, almost as if with the deliberate intention of preventing them from acquiring the smell and feel of the past. This is a world without nostalgia, inhabited by a people who seem to "celebrate impermanence". (Stewart 2004: 566)

This apparent lack of interest in commemorating and preserving the past is confirmed by another British anthropologist, Paloma Gay y Blasco, who states in her account of a Roma group in Spain that her informants "downplay the past in their accounts of themselves". She adds to this that the same attitude also prevails in relationship to place, with a "[d]isregard [of] any notion of shared territory" (Gay y Blasco 2001: 633). Rather than harking back in time to capture and commemorate shared experiences associated with certain places, a shared sense of belonging seems to emerge out of the establishment of a moral community in the present. Mourning, for example, is said to be not expressed socially in rituals, but constitutes a personal and introvert undertaking. It is argued that memories predominantly stay within the individual, and do not resurface to reinforce a shared memory at a later stage (Gay y Blasco 2001: 638). Gay y Blasco also stresses that in the community remembrance is understood to be an emotionally painful activity, since it evokes that which is no longer present.

Stewart similarly warns against taking this seeming "casual relationship with the past" too lightly, reading it as a way of "turning the experience of living in a state of constant jeopardy into a positive celebration of the present moment" (Stewart 2004: 567). Pain and loss are real even if they are not allowed to take an explicit outward social form. The normative

forms of remembering and commemorating the past should not lead us to read a lack of engagement in the past into the seemingly scant evidence of intersubjective forms of turning to the past. In this case it seems to be the silence that speaks.

In a study of a Roma community in France, the French anthropologist Patrick Williams discusses how death creates a specific category of objects, called *mulle* (Williams 2003). These are material objects, but can also include places and animals, associated with departed persons. When death occurs, people in the community Williams has been working with say that "nothing should be kept" (Williams 2003: 4). The most definitive step is to burn down the trailer along with other belongings. Another option is to get rid of possessions by having them scrapped or sold off cheaply to somebody outside the community, never to be seen again. Lastly, the trailer can be left, seemingly abandoned, to disintegrate (Williams 2003: 4–5). If belongings are actually kept, they are treated with care and respect. Interestingly, however, kept *mulle* objects are not distinguished from ordinary objects in any way that is recognizable to others in everyday life, and are not talked about as belongings of a deceased person. The classification as *mulle* is of silent significance and still carries great importance to those keeping the objects. Again, the significance of objects of the past are tied to specific individuals rather than shared socially (Williams 2003: 5).

Things, phenomena, places and names associated with dead people must thus be approached with the greatest care. Williams argues that memories and past events are rarely given discursive form, since they can evoke strong emotions, and there is a fear of being disrespectful towards people of the past. To recount something from the past is to re-enact it, and one needs to be cautious not to misrepresent events and people or to violate the integrity of the deceased by stepping in their footsteps (Williams 2003: 7–13). Even if it superficially can seem as if things are discarded without much attention given to them and people, events and places are forgotten about, in reality, Williams contends, the past is a landscape loaded with significance and should be approached with attentiveness. What can look like neglect, indifference or avoidance is in fact a sensitive and

respectful acceptance of the past as having a sovereign value and existence that shouldn't be evoked or explored (Williams 2003: 12). This immutable sovereignty of the past can be seen in how stable and enduring associations between people, objects and places only come into being after death: "it's only from the moment an object becomes *mullo* that it truly belongs to an individual" (Williams 2003: 14).

A particular category of phenomena associated with death is *mūlengri placa*, "the place of the dead". These sites can be places where death actually occurred, but also places associated with the deceased person, a place he or she liked particularly much. *Mūlengri placa* needs to be approached with much the same care and respect as all *mulle* objects and might be avoided all together, especially by relatives and friends. If a site is avoided out of respect and a trailer left to decay on it, it can easily be taken to be a neglected and abandoned site by outsiders, but these are in reality still highly significant places imbued with history and memory. Paradoxically, even if "[i]t is very rare that a *mūlengri placa* partakes again of the movement of life" (Williams 2003: 18–19), they are locations permeated with history, meaning and life. Typically, the places, notes Williams, "inscribing Mānuš [the Roma community] presence in the universe are places with no one in them" (Williams 2003: 23).

The significance of this in relation to dominating conceptions and practices of territorialized heritage making is that, rather than claiming one's own space in dialogic opposition to mainstream society, presence, mediated by the dead, is inscribed within the world as it is established by the main society (Williams 2003: 47). The Roma community thus circumvents the expectations of the main society. It avoids addressing and refuses to respond to the main society, since that would undermine the power to nullify the other. *Mūlengri placa* is part of a strategy of avoidance, withdrawal and silence that together open up spaces for negotiating subordination (Williams 2003: 45–49). Asking main society for recognition of heritage would be disrespectful to the sovereignty and integrity of the past, and it would be to subordinate oneself to the dominating heritage conventions by accepting how that terrain has been created by the main

society. It would mean giving up the power to appropriate and nullify on one's own terms. Silence and withdrawal become ways to establish heritage, space and self and to maintain a measure of autonomy.

DISCUSSION

If we follow Smith, the dominating form of heritage has material substance, is preferably monumental and is situated in physical space (Smith 2006: 11). I have further argued that these conditions are particularly important today since they interlock with the politics of recognition of modern liberal democratic society (Taylor 1994) and the cultural economy of contemporary capitalist society (Dicks 2003). In this hegemonic form heritage is made recognizable, visible and visitable. The impulse of mainstream society is to produce materialization and territorialization of heritage that becomes intrinsic to the establishment of the hegemonic landscape. Sedentary populations constitute their territoriality over time by territorializing heritage practices, erecting grand buildings and spectacular monuments. Conceptions, practices and institutions are established by sedentary society to celebrate and preserve their own territorial achievements as statements over time, which can be seen as a temporal strategy to link the past, the present and the future in space. Heritage becomes a territorializing – place claiming – practice.

In contradistinction to this, the world-view of sedentism associates subaltern mobility, voluntary or forced, with a lack of and disinterest in stable physical forms and territorial moorings. By being predominantly associated with intangible cultural heritage and heritage artefacts, the deterritorialization of nomadic groups is reinforced. In response to this, a metropolitan governance strategy to "heritagize the nomad" – to encourage nomadic groups to draw on memories of the past, gives material shape to historical narratives and to mark territories over time – would contribute to the constitution of proper heritage subjects for participation in the heritage regime, but would run the risk of simply extending sedentism and the territorializing form of heritage. Metropolitan heritagization is not an

innocent invitation to be part of something, but implicitly a request to depart from something.

But, as Stewart notes, it's quite possible to remember and cherish the past without turning recollections into memories that can be possessed, presented and displayed, and that necessarily links into framing identities and claiming rights (Stewart 2004: 573). We have seen how the circumscribed public sphere restricts the historical inscription of nomadic groups, and sensitive handling of the past and respect for the dead results in moderation in drawing on and using the past for present purposes. What is surprising, perhaps, is not the reluctance to deal with the past in prescribed forms within the Roma communities referred to above, but the readiness amongst others to "use the past for present purposes", which is in itself a common definition of heritage. If some of these Roma communities are portrayed, sometimes romantically, as "present-oriented", or as masters of the "art of forgetting", one might well ask what can be more oriented towards the present and exemplary of the art of forgetting than instrumentally subordinating, objectifying and essentializing the past in order to exploit it "for present purposes". For the people in the community Williams studied it was clear: "the dead must not be used" (Williams 2003: 77). People showed great care for the past and approached the affective territory of the past with great respect. A crucial difference might be between developing a heritage subjectivity that possess memory, and one that is possessed by memory.

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