THE SYMBOLIC POLITICS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
A view from Portugal

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Abstract This paper highlights the centrality of the social representation of cultural heritage for the symbolic legitimization of a regime and the foundation of its social and cultural policies. The relevance attributed to history, its codification into heritage and the formation of a collective memory are indeed arenas of social practice, power and hegemony. The Portuguese example is a good one, because one can compare contrasting visions of the authoritarian regime of Salazar and those of the new and current democratic order. We examine how the Portuguese democracy has reconstructed a national consensus regarding the interpretation of national history and identity; we consider the role of the new interpretation in the redefining of the Portuguese placement in the world system; and some conclusions will be tentatively drawn from this case study.

Keywords: cultural heritage, politics.

A política simbólica do património cultural: o caso português

Resumo O artigo sublinha a centralidade da representação social do património cultural para a legitimação simbólica de um regime e a fundação das suas políticas sociais e culturais. A relevância atribuída à história, a sua codificação enquanto património e a formação de uma memória coletiva são arenas de prática social, poder e hegemonia. O caso português é um bom exemplo, permitindo comparar as visões contrárias do regime autoritário de Salazar e do regime democrático. Analisamos como a democracia portuguesa reconstruiu um consenso nacional em torno da interpretação da história e identidade nacional; consideramos o papel da nova interpretação na redefinição do lugar de Portugal no sistema mundial; e esboçamos algumas conclusões mais gerais.

Palavras-chave: património cultural, política.

La politique symbolique du patrimoine: le cas portugais

Résumé Cet article essaye de souligner la centralité de la représentation sociale de l'héritage culturel pour la légitimation symbolique d'un régime. L'importance accordée à l'histoire, sa codification en tant que patrimoine et la construction d'une mémoire collective sont effectivement enjeux de pratique sociale, pouvoir et hégémonie. Le cas portugais est un bon exemple, car on peut comparer les visions contradictoires du régime autoritaire de Salazar et du régime démocratique. On analyse la façon dont la démocratie portugaise a réussi à reconstruire un consensus national sur l'interprétation de l'histoire et identité nationale; on considère le rôle de cette nouvelle interprétation sur la redéfinition du placement du Portugal dans le système mondial; et on essaye de tirer des conclusions de cet étude de cas.

Mots-clés: patrimoine culturel, politique.

La política simbólica del patrimonio cultural: el ejemplo portugués

Resumen Este artículo trata de subrayar la centralidad de la representación social del patrimonio cultural para la legitimación simbólica de un régimen y la fundamentación de sus políticas sociales y culturales. La relevancia atribuida a la historia, su codificación como patrimonio y la construcción de una memoria colectiva, son lugares de práctica social, poder y hegemonía. El ejemplo portugués es bueno, ya que contrasta visiones contradictorias del régimen autoritario de Salazar y las del régimen democrático. Examinamos cómo la democracia portuguesa ha logrado reconstruir un consenso nacional sobre la interpretación de la historia y de la identidad nacional;

consideramos el papel funcional de la nueva interpretación en la redefinición de la ubicación portuguesa en el sistema mundial; e intentamos sacar algunas conclusiones de este estudio de caso.

Palabras-clave: patrimonio cultural, política.

Introduction: interpreting history and heritage

Heritage is a critical political issue for more than one reason. The foundations of any political regime have also to do with the kind of interpretation that is provided about who constitutes the nation, what defines its national identity and which history it refers to. The assemblage of objects and symbols presented as past achievements that must be preserved, acknowledged and admired in the present requires a quite sensible and delicate work of selection and codification (see Guillaume, 1980; Davallon, 2018). And the collective memory that this work tends to endorse is a key element of the consensus that supports any minimally stabilised social order.

Furthermore, the politics of memory and historical identity is crucial for regimes appealing to forms of legitimacy that are alternative to the democratic rule of popular sovereignty and electoral competition. That was the case of the dictatorship that Portugal continuously experienced from 1926 to 1974, under Oliveira Salazar and, in the last six years of that period, under his disciple Marcello Caetano (see Gomes, 2011; Rosas, 2012; Cadavez, 2018). For such a conservative authoritarian regime, the manufacturing of a unique and indisputable interpretation of history and national identity, and its compulsory dissemination throughout the educational apparatuses, the leisure and media system, the civic rituals and the public space, was the very basis of legitimization. The "national, cultural heritage" was then a canon elaborated by state agencies (in clear partnership with the Catholic Church). It included or excluded historical characters, events and structures, and it echoed, silenced or reinvented traditions according to the political principles and needs of the dictatorship. In particular, the ancient grandiosity of Portugal, during the 15th and 16th centuries, when it pioneered the European "maritime expansion", was presented as both the justification for the increasingly obsolete maintenance of a colonial empire in Africa, and a sort of compensation for the rather archaic economic and social structure that the regime had frozen. Salazar's Portugal was conceived as a necessary return to the traditional, pre-modern society that a century of liberalism (from 1820 to 1926) and the prospect of democracy had put in danger. This continuity — and not the popular support — was its *raison d'être*. Consequently, the codification of what was to be considered as "genuine" national traditions, as historical "milestones", as "distinctive" characters, events, monuments and memories to be glorified and preserved was a crucial political issue. The ideology of national heritage was at the heart of the regime's foundations. No pluralism, no controversy and no dissent could be admissible in that very symbolic field.

The deadlock of the Colonial War in Africa (1961-1974) was the main factor of the fall of the dictatorship in 1974. A military coup led by young officers was immediately transformed by the popular adhesion into a quite radical social and political revolution, from which the country evolved into a parliamentary democracy, in 1976, joining, ten years later, the European Economic Community (currently, European Union). One of the main features of that radical turn concerns the reading and evaluation of national history, and of the heritage it created and transmitted.

This analysis overviews the democratic turn, in just one particular aspect: the interplay of heritage and memory. The focus will be on the symbolic and ideological elements of cultural heritage, leaving aside other aspects, no less important, such as those relating it to the arts, the economy and the urban or regional development (see, for instance, Filipe, Vale and Castaño, 2018). First, we will examine how the Portuguese democracy has reconstructed, both in the field of social representations and in the field of public policies, a national consensus regarding the interpretation of national history and identity. Then we will consider the functional role of the new interpretation in the redefining of the Portuguese placement in the world system. Finally, some conclusions will be tentatively drawn from this case study.

Building a new consensus on history and heritage

Three ruptures vis-à-vis the authoritarian canon characterised, in the late 1970s and the early 80s (the years of revolution and institutionalisation of the democratic regime), the re-codification of cultural heritage.

Firstly, the radical questioning of the framework and main ingredients of the authoritarian vision on national history and heritage. This implied the deconstruction of allegedly permanent traits of the "Portuguese way of being", such as Tridentine Catholicism, traditionalism, rurality, peacefulness, passivity and melancholy. It also implied the strong criticism of the colonial era and the devaluation of the meaning and importance of the early modern "Discoveries". Finally, it implied the unveiling of the manufactured nature of the authoritarian canon, since, for instance, (a) several of the main "historical monuments" were in fact deeply rebuilt in the 20th century, (b) the central elements of the official history were false, and (c) the "folklore" that supposedly defined the rural traditional culture to follow and promote was itself the output of a quite clear selection and reformatting of particular elements, undertaken by state agencies and the Church.

The second break assumed by the first years of the Portuguese democracy was a huge redefinition of the nature and scope of heritage, identity and social memory. This redefinition operated in two directions. On the one hand, areas formerly taken as impertinent or irrelevant were retrieved and integrated: the everyday life of the working class; urban and industrial structures; modern arts; cultural diversity and political antagonism. In terms of knowledge and preservation, this meant the emergence of new disciplines and organisations, such as industrial archaeology, anthropology, social and economic history, and a systematic treatment of archives, archaeological and monumental sites, and museums. On the other

hand, in this as in many other fields, democracy involved pluralism; and this was really a radical breach in respect to the former authoritarian policy. Instead of a rigid, unique canon, strictly defined by the ideological apex of the regime and to be assumed and conveyed, in a top-down manner, by all public institutions — from schools to churches, from workplace to leisure, from university to mass media, from government to the local arena — the new democratic environment gave floor and dignity to the public florescence and expression of several readings and representations of national history, collective identity and cultural heritage. Suddenly, none of these nouns could be said in the singular form: as a whole, history was composed by heritages, identities and memories — plural and diverse, contradictory and convergent.

The third break was the *de-ideologizing* of heritage. This does not correspond to the denegation of the political and ideological dimension of the social representation and the public administration of heritage. As we shall see later, the Portuguese democracy would succeed in establishing a new and strong consensus on the meaning and value of the country's history and heritage. The point is that Salazar's regime had overinvested in the ideological definition of certain symbolic and material elements as a national, uniform, and long-lasting tradition. This was indeed one of the totalitarian features the regime assimilated. Monuments as the Batalha Monastery (built to commemorate the victory against Castile in the 14th century) or the Guimarães Castle (associated to the first king, Afonso Henriques); characters as Henry the Navigator; real or fictional events as the "Fátima apparitions (of the Virgin Mary)" or the supposedly existent "Sagres school" (preparing the maritime expansion); traditions as the urban popular music of Lisbon ("fado"), all were metamorphosed into true fundaments of the history and "temperament" of the Portuguese, in relation to which Salazar could represent the clearest continuity and the highest achievement. Any attempt to question this interpretation, in scientific, technical or political terms, and any reluctance to adopt it as the guideline for education, ceremonial parades or other forms of socialisation, were immediately treated as subversive and unacceptable challenges to the established order and ritual.

In comparison with this rather aggressive authoritarian arrest of history, the new democratic institutions and environment of the late 70s provided the floor for an effective de-ideologizing. On the one hand, heritage became more a matter of study, care, dissemination and usufruct than a moral, religious and political ground: it would typically be a subject for knowledge, technical inquiry and practice, professional expertise and labour. On the other hand, monuments, sites, art collections, crafts, traditions, and so on, could be more easily conceived as assets and opportunities for social investment — a cultural richness the community could apprehend and use in the context of its social and economic development, and symbolic affirmation.

These three ruptures allowed the Portuguese democracy to reconsider, in a substantially new form, the most critical issues of national history, and to gradually build an alternative consensus on their meaning, value and relevance for the present and future of the country. This means a quite important work on memory and identity. It redefines the way in which the past can be reinterpreted and extended in the collective representations — that is, how history can be transmuted into

memory. It also affords social representations to consolidate elements that contribute to draw, at the same time, the collective unity of nation and its singularity regarding the other nations — that is, history supporting identity (see also Medeiros, 2013).

But how could the contemporary presence of the past, through cultural heritage, help elaborate a democratic view (inherently plastic and plural) of national history and identity? How could it favour the consolidation of social memories freed from the authoritarian predefinition of what was and what was not politically acceptable in that history?

Among the critical historical issues that such an effort should deal with, the following three were particularly relevant. The first one was colonialism — a constant of the Portuguese history from the 15th until the very late 20th century. The second issue was the contrast between the *grandeur* of early modern times — the "Era of Discoveries" — and the subsequent "decadence". The third one was the way democracy should deal with the canon of values and traditions that the Salazar's regime had invented or reformatted. For each of these topics it is worthwhile to observe how the new consensus was gradually formed.

The logic of inversion in what regarded the colonial past dominated the first years of the democratic regime. Wherever the authoritarian state had seen glory, pride and responsibility, the new one saw shame, dishonour and oppression. Specifically, the terrible conditions of the decolonisation (with the massive return of half a million people to Portugal, in 1974-1976, and the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique) were explained as the inevitable consequences of the refusal of Oliveira Salazar and Marcello Caetano to timely negotiate and compromise. The social memory of this long colonial period of the national history (lasting five centuries) was then marked by a negative sentiment, one of whose consequences being a sort of resistance to take it as a topic of public discourse or artistic elaboration. These were imprisoned in the dichotomy between the radical deconstruction of the entire colonial era, reduced to illegitimate occupation and endless exploitation, and some variant of the "luso-tropicalist" approach — the idea, initially due to the Brazilian writer Gilberto Freyre, of the uniqueness of the Portuguese presence in Africa and America, based on a "soft" and "close" relationship with autochthonous peoples.

We had to reach the 1990s to see the emergence of a new intellectual and emotional framework to deal with colonialism and postcolonialism. First, there was a gradual move in the conception of the Portuguese "legacy" in Africa, Latin America and some regions of Asia. If the dictatorial regime of Salazar focused on religious proselytism and "civilisation" (that is, the so-called "white man's burden"), democracy would underline language and culture. "Lusophony" became seen as not only the real, durable outcome of the Portuguese historical presence in several continents, but also and foremost as the remaining hyphen between former colonisers and former colonised nations. In 1996, the foundation of the CPLP (Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries) provided an institutional ground for cooperation, based on equality of rights and dignity. But it was the process of East Timor's independence, in the years of 1999-2001, that in a certain way closed the debate: the massive adhesion of the Portuguese people to this cause acted as a kind of

re-encounter with their own history and the redemption from their past responsibilities. Portugal had been a colonial state; but the joint effects of democratisation, decolonisation and the subsequent turn to an international cooperation based on common language, shared history and convergent interests, allowed for the redefinition of the course of events, value and meaning of the past. Colonial heritage and the social memories associated to the colonial experience could be reconsidered in a cultural and future-oriented manner.

This turn was one of the forces that led to the reassessment of the tension between *grandeur* and decadence that had hegemonized, at least in the 19th and 20th centuries, the narratives and arguments on Portuguese history. Along with Spain, Portugal had pioneered the great historical European move towards the "New World", in the early modern times. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the first line of the European "maritime expansion" was there, the Iberians being the discoverers (from a European point of view) of new routes and new lands and the rulers of vast empires. From the perspective of 20th century societies, this put two fundamental questions.

The first was: how far could one distinguish the "Discoveries" from colonialism — that is, how to separate the social and technical achievements that completely transformed the world's geography, from the subsequent colonial enterprise, marked by territorial conquest, economic exploitation, slavery and genocide? Salazar's regime could not accept the split between these two sides of the Portuguese "historical destiny"; several of its democratic opponents also tended to refuse it, merging the two processes in the same shameful past. In terms of social representation and public discourse (since scientific research had already established the distinction), the dissociation was operated by the Portuguese democracy mainly during the 1980s and 90s. And the Universal Exhibition that took place in Lisbon in 1998 would be its most important expression (see Ferreira, 2005). Commemorating the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Vasco da Gama in India, launching a new maritime route through the South of Africa, the exhibition focused on the sea as its general theme. It thus crystallized (as a public discourse) and disseminated (as a narrative and iconography for mass consumption) a positive reinterpretation of the Portuguese history. Its main axes were threefold: the emphasis on the excellence of the scientific and technical dimensions of the Discoveries, and the novelty of its cultural outcomes; the demonstration of the mediating role thus performed by the Portuguese between the "Ancient World" of Eurasia and the "New World" of Sub-Saharan Africa and Americas; and the key relevance of the oceans to the present and immediate future of the world as a whole.

The second question put by Portuguese modern history was the contrast between a glorious past and a rather mediocre present. Indeed, some of the most influential thinkers of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries — in the Enlightenment, liberal or democratic traditions — had pictured the evolution between the early modern age and their contemporary circumstances as decadence, mainly due to the excessive power of conservative forces (some of them generated by the Expansion itself). For Salazar's regime, there had also been a moral decline, but due to the excessive influence of such malefic things as liberalism, laicism and market economy; it was

then necessary to return to the "genuine" temperament and "natural" role of the nation. This rather mechanicist opposition was overcome by the European integration of Portugal, in 1986. On the one hand, the issue was reframed — the most relevant topic being, not the comparison of the current situation to the far past, but its comparison to European standards. The benchmark was not in the past, but in Europe; the pertinent discipline was not the ideological debate on history, but economics and economy; the question was not the reasons for "decadence", but the causes for the "development lag". And on the other hand, European integration — the access to the (by then) restricted and rich club of the European Community, marking a definitive choice of the Portuguese society for democracy, market economy and welfare — was itself a promise of solution, or a key element in addressing the national problems.

The postcolonial emphasis on language as the main global legacy of Portuguese modern history, and the rescue of the cultural, scientific, technical and innovative dimensions of the Discoveries from its imperialistic envelope, established a solid ground on which the Portuguese institutions and public opinion gradually converged towards a consensus on the representation and evaluation of past history. No question that such a consensus must be submitted to critical scrutiny: for instance, the neocolonial element (or risk) of "lusophony" is quite evident. However, there is no place in this paper to proceed in that sense (see, for instance, Almeida, 2000). Suffices to say that this re-interpretation of history, that was effectively consolidated in the transition from the 20th to the 21st centuries, did impact on public opinion, education, the mass media — and, of course, in the ritual ceremonies and speeches of political institutions and authorities. A new form and a new content for social memories about the recent and ancient national history were thus provided, functioning as a powerful framework for the group and personal expression of manifold experiences (see Sobral, 2012; Loff, 2015; Calafate, 2016).

This has direct and indirect consequences on the conception, administration and usufruct of material and immaterial cultural heritage (see Filipe, Vale and Castaño, 2018). Deprived from the former role of an ideological apparatus, the religious practices and artefacts acquired a new relevance in cultural, anthropological, economic and touristic terms: Fátima ceased to be the very national myth, remaining nevertheless a mass and meaningful event. Several traditional elements of the Portuguese folk culture, that the Salazar's regime had converted into essentialist devices of an alleged "national character", were rediscovered and revalued for their specific artistic and social value: this was much notably the case of the Lisbon "fado" song, re-appropriated and reinvented by young generations of interpreters and listeners, whose classification by UNESCO as "intangible world heritage", in 2011, was massively celebrated. Disinvested of the role of sacred altars of the "Nation", the historical monuments and sites would be re-invested as cultural assets, a rich asset the country owns and can use for civic, social and economic purposes (see Peixoto, 1997). That is to say that the "ways of being" and "traditions" (as immaterial heritage), and monuments, collections, crafts, urban and rural settlements, historical vestiges, archaeological sites, ethnographic objects and arts (as material heritage)

could and have been gradually redefined, in the democratic context, in a totally different way, by comparison with the authoritarian regime's canon.

Relocating a nation

One should not minimize the impact of the process of building an interpretive and normative consensus on history, national identity and cultural heritage, as the one undertaken in the Portuguese democracy, since the 1980s, and summarized in the previous section. Memories, as the reconstitution and reconfiguration of past events and the reinterpretation and incorporation of their traces, are social facts and social factors. It was critical for the democratic redefinition of cultural heritage and its value for contemporaneity, both in terms of collective representations and in terms of public policies and practices, to re-elaborate the content and the inscription of some basic memories: what to think and say about the past national achievements, such as the "Discoveries", what to think and say about the colonial dimension marking several centuries of history, what to think and say, in a given generation, about the codification of facts, characters, vestiges as "national traditions" inherited from previous generations. The very possibility of implementing a new framework for policy, administration and professional expertise regarding cultural heritage, depended on the success of a new general and widespread representation of history. One that would be radically different from the former authoritarian ideologizing and politicization, and sufficiently comprehensive and plastic to include plural and diverse narratives, attitudes and practices. My hypothesis is that the Portuguese democracy did succeed, at least until the huge crisis of 2010 onwards, in producing and disseminating such a representation (see also Fishman, 2019).

This representation operates along the axis of time, providing a framework to reconfigure the relationship between past and present — between what Portugal has been and what it is in the current circumstances (more precisely: between what we now think that Portugal has been and what we think it is nowadays). But this is not the only axis. As this section will try to assert, the socially hegemonic representation of history and heritage that the democracy has elaborated, established in new terms the placement of Portugal in the world system. Geo-history is, therefore, also relevant, the two axes of time and space coming together.

Specifically, the reconsideration of the national past also means the reassessment of the national contribution to the global history. The "transnational" dimension of Portuguese heritage and historical memory is another key to understand how the Portuguese democracy gradually built its own vision and strategy in the symbolic and cultural field.

Three main ideas shape this vision. One is the association of the 15th century's Discoveries to a first "globalisation" — as they opened the European space and widened human communication through navigation and trade, permitting the structuring of a first world order irreducible to the ancient Eurasian civilisations. This new order included Africa and the Americas and thus rebalanced the long-established frontiers and exchanges between Christian Europe, the Muslim civilisation and

India, China or Japan. It also fostered the emergence of the first world economy. Aiming to escape the Salazarist link between Discoveries and Empire, the democratic reinterpretation relocates the Portuguese experience in a somewhat global "encounter" of civilisations (see Thomaz, 2021).

The second key idea is the nature and scope of emigration. The strong and continuous presence of emigration in the Portuguese history, from the late medieval times onwards, and going beyond the border of the Portuguese empire (see Hespanha, 2019), served as an indicator that the role played by the Portuguese people was not only the one of conquerors and rulers, but also the role of voyagers, tradesmen, settlers, pioneers. In this reinterpretation, the apparent ease in contact and interaction with different places, populations and cultures (from Japan to Brazil, from China to Africa, from India to Europe) would partially explain the long-lasting Portuguese influence, either in the former colonies or in other states.

Therefore — third aspect to take into account — the legacy to praise in should be the cultural one: first of all the language, the Portuguese language that became a global one, uniting independent countries of four continents; then the milestones and traces of the Portuguese presence throughout the world — as materialised in folk traditions and patterns of behaviour, or in religious beliefs, or in urbanism and architecture; finally and most importantly, the new cultural forms resulting from the interchange between Portuguese culture and other populations' cultures, be them "natives", that is, indigenous, or displaced populations (as the African slaves in Brazil), or other European, Muslim or Asian communities. The suggestion was that, long before the postmodernist narrative, Portugal had already cultivated or favoured some kind of hybridisation, intermixing different ethnic, national, linguistic and symbolic origins and giving floor to the emergence of fresh, hybrid forms.

So, a new "portrait" of Portugal was gradually drawn: a small but "global" nation, historically open to alterity. A nation located in Europe but linking Europe to other continents and fostering the "encounter" and "crossing" between several civilisations; the motherland of a population used to cross borders, to migrating throughout the world; and one relatively open to a multilateral interplay of influences, of which Brazil would be the iconic illustration.

Again, this positive turn in the hegemonic representation of history and identity was drawn against the Salazarist closeness and traditionalism (so well expressed in the formula "proudly alone" that the dictator coined when the Colonial War began, and the country became more and more isolated in international terms). "Openness", "universalism" and "plasticity" emerged as the key values for the new representation, on which the Portuguese democracy based public policies regarding heritage. From this point of view, the Portuguese architectural and archaeological heritage was especially noticeable. Among other elements, the importance of the Roman vestiges (in Braga or Conímbriga), the relevance of the Muslim long-lasting presence in the south (with the small town of Mértola redefining its identity as a crossroads of Christian and Muslim influences), the rich Romanesque and Gothic monuments, illustrating the European references of mediaeval Portugal, the splendour of the baroque either in Portugal or Brazil, and its influence in

Goa, the traces of Portuguese military and religious architectures in four conti-
nents, the marks of Portuguese urbanism, all constituted "evidence" of that
"global", "universalist" and "cultural" orientation of the Portuguese "singular-
ity". All suggested a sort of "easiness" in the relationship of this peripheral extreme
of the Old Europe with the Others, and its "belonging" to a wider, virtually univer-
sal symbolic order. The successive classification of several urban sites and monu-
ments as "world heritage" since 1983, and the emblematic political decision, taken
in 1995, to abandon the ongoing construction of a big dam to save the Palaeolithic
engravings of the Côa Valley, were critical to this re-reading and re-presenting
(Gonçalves, 2001; Silva, 2014). They metamorphosed the value of the national heri-
tage into a "transnational" logic and scale.

Conclusion: the social representation of heritage as a political issue

The scientific, technical and professional elements involved in the study, the
preservation and the public access to cultural heritage should not be over-
looked. It is constituted by a large and disperse number of immaterial elements,
architectural buildings, archaeological remnants, artistic objects and other in-
gredients of museum collections and, surely, the global structure of territories,
towns and cities — that is, it comprehends many artefacts and identity markers
of groups, communities, and mankind. The consequences for scientific and pro-
fessional work are immense. Neither should be ignored or belittled with re-
gards to the functional usefulness of these cultural products and materials for
the process of social integration and economic development in which societies
are engaged. And, of course, one of the very foundations of the public focus on
heritage is its role as a source of inspiration for contemporary artists and arts, in
any cultural field, heritage being the effective presence of a social and cultural
history to which the contemporary creation (indeed tomorrow's heritage) di-
rectly or indirectly refers.

    None of these dimensions can be put aside. Research on heritage, its adminis-
tration, the relationship with the respective communities, its affordability and
meaning for different audiences, the value it adds to economic and social develop-
ment, the dialogue it favours with contemporary arts, its role in popular and insti-
tutional symbols and narratives, all these dimensions deserve a careful analysis
and an informed debate, as the challenges they address to science, arts and policies
are very acute.

    However, previous to all these dimensions, there is a more general and a
more fundamental question: how is that "thing" that we tend to call "cultural her-
itage" constituted and how is it codified? Who defines heritage as heritage, when
and by what means; and what kind of links it draws with social memory and col-
lective identity? How is heritage used as a material — a very important material
indeed — for symbolic, ideological and political practices and processes?

    Considering the Portuguese case, this paper tried to highlight the centrality
of the issue of the social representation of cultural heritage (and the consensus that

can be formed regarding it) for the symbolic legitimization of a regime and the foundation of its social and cultural policies. The relevance attributed to history, its "codification" into heritage, the elaboration and dissemination of a framework of meaning in relation to it, the formation of a collective memory, are indeed "arenas" of social practice, power and hegemony.

The Portuguese example is a good one, because it makes it easier to apprehend the political and ideological importance of heritage when comparing contrasting visions of the former authoritarian regime of Salazar and those of the new and current democratic order. In both cases, cultural heritage is a matter of politics and ideology. Heavy ideological constraints characterised the Salazar's regime, to which democracy opposed an emphasis on the cultural nature and value of heritage. Still, culture is the ideology of the current representation of heritage. Everything else — from research to preservation and exhibition — depends on the consistency, strength and impact of the social reinterpretation of historical heritage.

That reinterpretation — plastic and dynamic as it may be (and, in a democratic context, as it must), allowing for multiple and diverse discourses in its interior — is a powerful factor of the normative consensus on which any society tends to rely. That is the consensus built around the hegemonic representation of values, beliefs, historical narratives and icons, collective symbols, emblematic characters, shared memories. The representation of heritage contributes in a crucial manner for this hegemonic representation since it re/defines, re/creates, re/constructs, re/"invents", re/appropriates things and symbols that (a) can be treated as meaningful and (b) can be described as of collective ownership. Any step in this production is a choice: something to be valued and something to be disparaged, something to be voiced and something to be silenced.

Heritage is never only the presence of the past in the present. It is the changing result of the dialectics between that presence of the past in the present and the current reconstitution of the past. There lies its absolute centrality for the symbolic politics of our era, that is, for the political discourse and confrontation over values, symbols, events and narratives that, in each moment and group, define a certain identity and frame a certain memory (see Traverso, 2015, and Passerini, 2015). If one wishes to undertake historical archaeology, putting into context the material evidence of the past, one should not skip the archaeology (also in the sense of Foucault, 1969) of the symbolic contemporary reconstruction of the past.

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