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THE "CULTURE WARS" AND SOCIAL POLARIZATION: EFFECTS ON HISTORICAL MONUMENTS AND TOURISM[1]

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This hot issue article examines the convergence in experience between the "developing" world's postcolonial experience during the 20th century and the "developed" world's liberal/progressive social agenda in the 21st century. In it, Tan and Mura highlight the role of the "culture wars" in creating new "minority" groups based not on ethnicity or social class but on social ideology, whose disagreements with dominant majority groups threatens to unleash a new round of heritage destruction worldwide. Citing the public display of monuments to the Confederate States of America as an example of this new sensitivity, the reviewers conclude that although tourist consumption, the passage of time, and the absence of "living communities" can each act collectively to remove the stigma of ideology from monumental constructs, it remains to be seen which monuments will survive this period of social change to be appreciated as memorials to their time. Tan and Mura nevertheless identify the tourism industry as being uniquely empowered to preserve even monuments to "inconvenient" histories that are still important as place-makers for their cities or as works of public art for their host countries. (Abstract by the Critical Reviews Editor)

Key words: Monuments; Polarization; Ideology; Postcolonial; Culture wars

Social Polarization and Emerging Patterns of Behavior

Social polarization has long been connected to the measurable income gap between the "top" and "bottom" segments of society (O'Loughlin & Friedrichs, 1996) or by the many studies on ethnicity conducted throughout the 20th century. In recent times, however, this "label" has grown to also encompass political polarization as an increasingly salient,

yet comparatively understudied topic in academic and popular discourse (Strickler, 2016). In tourism studies this gap is even more pronounced, as the literature on "majority" and "minority" attitudes has focused in the main on visible/ethnic minorities or linguistic and religious groups connected to newer patterns of immigration and settlement.

As the contemporary "culture wars" between "left" and "right" wings of sociopolitical consciousness in the Western world stretch beyond "live" issues such as firearms, birth control, gender, and abortion however, arguments have grown to encompass even the past. This is exemplified by recent movements in the UK, the US, and elsewhere to remove historical monuments from cities that until recently were "united" in their veneration of narratives that were the products of their sociocultural time (Hirsch, 2017).

This connection between polarization and a changing built environment is relatively new in societies not affected by war, political upheaval, or other internal conflicts. It is therefore worthy of study as an emerging pattern of behavior that may well have a profound future effect on the tourism consumption of tangible heritage brought about mostly by a peaceful change in social attitudes.

Tangible heritage is visible. Buildings, artifacts, and art that represent a community stand out, especially since throughout the world, political leaders have used monumental constructions to legitimize their claim to authority (Kostof, 1991). At the same time, some have argued that heritage should be treated as a resource that can be transformed into a product or service, even if this prevents its unchanged transfer between one generation and the next (Garcia-Canclini, 1995). As alluded to by Fentress and Wickham (1992), the survival of culture in the long run therefore depends on communication and social practices, and both are now significantly affected by change brought about by "top-down" as well as "bottom-up" movements to reinterpret history around the world.

Historical Monuments and Tourism in Polarized Communities

Despite (or, in some cases, because of) history's potentially contentious legacy, Lowenthal (1985) premised that "If the past is a foreign country,

nostalgia has made it the foreign country with the healthiest tourist trade of all" (p. 4). By highlighting aspects of a site's identity, culture, and heritage that are worthy of public interest, tourism raises the profile of a location beyond that of its immediate stakeholders and community who, because of the social changes mentioned earlier, may no longer identify with their previous history. Given that one of the most important roles of cultural heritage is in fact to form the distinct identity of a place (Groote & Haartsen, 2008), the age of mass tourism is therefore helping to preserve "heritage" among even the most divided societies.

This is important given that "traditional" and "patriotic" commemorative holidays such as Columbus Day in the US or Australia Day are today subject to increasing reexamination by contemporary nongovernment organizations, city councils, and even central governments (Cecco, 2018). As stated by former US president Barack Obama (2016) in his Columbus Day proclamation:

> As we mark this rich history, we must also acknowledge the pain and suffering reflected in the stories of Native Americans who had long resided on this land prior to the arrival of European newcomers. The past we share is marked by too many broken promises, as well as violence, deprivation and disease.

Physical monuments should ideally serve as markers of this "shared past." Although these structures serve as major "place-makers" for their host cities, some are now being rehoused, removed, or otherwise "reinterpreted" as sections of Western society increasingly view monoethnic and monocultural recorded history as a negative legacy to be reimagined, subtly ignored or otherwise atoned for, as clearly reflected in Obama's 2016 proclamation.

Whereas such movements affecting the built environment in Western societies are relatively recent, the equivalent experience in the developing world emerged in the mid-20th century as an anticolonial movement, now slowly giving way to an emerging and opposite trend of "postcolonial" heritage appreciation in some parts of the global south (Ward & Miraflor, 2009). This is in stark contrast with the developed world's belated and self-flagellating examination of histories that appear less than attractive to increasingly liberal (i.e., increasingly socialist

and atheist, as described by Hayward, 2012) 21st century eyes. These rapid changes in identity and values around the world will have a profound impact on tourism behavior and the projection of "authenticity" in the near future, forming an emerging gap that cannot be ignored in tourism studies, especially since, as mentioned by Bauman (2011), the power to make things happen has in fact ceased to be "local," but has become increasingly "territorial."

The Past Is a Foreign Country

One of the most significant sources of contentious "heritage" in modern times is the Confederate States of America (CSA). The CSA was a short-lived experiment in protonational identity, existing for barely 5 years from 1861 to 1865. By contrast, many European colonies throughout Asia, notably "British Malaya," including its precursor Crown Colonies of Penang, Singapore, and Malacca, survived as Western-influenced polities for several generations.

This disparity in political longevity is however marked by a stark contrast in the huge number of monuments to the CSA that exist within the borders of the present-day US (e.g., several hundred, as identified by the Southern Poverty Law Centre), compared to the paltry number of colonial monuments still on public display in some parts of Asia today (e.g., a few dozen in Penang, the oldest British colony in Southeast Asia).

Recent moves to consign CSA monuments to a place of "remembered" as opposed to "living" history are indeed reminiscent of Malaysia's experience of removing "Western" monuments and place-names beginning in the 1960s. However, slowly changing opinions relating to increasingly rare colonial-era monuments in the 21st century suggests a cyclical pattern to memory, identity, and heritage, all of which influence tourist perceptions of places with this type of "cleft" history, the latter as described by Huntington (1997).

Whereas Huntington identified "cleft societies" or even "cleft countries" as more common in multicultural and (especially) multireligious communities, Hoffman (2003) identified diversity and multiculturalism as essentially positive for tourism. Hoffman's premise becomes even more interesting when coupled with Smith's (2003) definition of "ethnic tourism" as involving an appreciation

for the cultural activities of minority groups within a tourist's own society. Although Smith clearly equated "minority groups" with "ethnic minorities," it is worth reexamining the same premise today by reclassifying "minorities" as people holding "minority opinions" in opposition to the "dominant" or "majority" opinion, in light of the on-going "culture wars" already mentioned.

Memory, Heritage, and the Impact of the "Culture Wars"

Memory has long been treated as a contentious historical source (Perks & Thomson, 2006), with peoples' recollections seen as both partial and selective, relating both to the "storyteller" and the expectations of different audiences. If we accept that the worldview of people reflects the entirety of their historical heritage (as argued by Inglehart & Carballo, 2000), we can surmise a direct link between "collective" episodic memory and the heritage of a community. This is especially important because the majority of social interaction within communities often occurs between members of the same generation, thus requiring an "intergenerational transfer of ideas" for assimilated information to be passed from one age group to the next.

The role of tourism in empowering communities to engage in "worldmaking" to reify certain selected events, spaces, and elements of culture as worthy of celebration (thus enriching transferred knowledge) is well documented in the works of Hollinshead (2007) and Hollinshead, Ateljevic, and Ali (2009), who explained how worldmaking in tourism can reinforce local communities' sense of self-identity about their past and present and even the direction of their future.

The triumph of "narrowcasting" over "broadcasting" and recent arguments about what constitutes "real" or "fake" news in the digital age risks replacing the publicly celebrated "collective memory" of many communities with diverse and individual points of view coming from both "internal" and "external" voices. This may eventually lead to historical reinterpretations arising from not just "top-down" or "bottom-up" movements, but also from hitherto unexpected sources or events. For monuments to play any meaningful role in a future of this type will require meaningful interaction between

"private" and "public" memories to identify the most important means of memory transmission and how this in turn affects culture and communication.

The on-going "culture wars" have in fact already altered the connection between memory and the built environment in many parts of the global "Anglosphere," which, as the undisputed victor of the Second World War, was previously more comfortable with its hegemonic history than many other parts of the "Western" world (Kissinger, 2014). It has moved the focus of discussion beyond the widely accepted mode of historical reinterpretation towards the physical removal of monuments to conflicted histories last seen in the developing world before the era of mass tourism "saved" the final handful of colonial-era monuments still on public display in Asia and Africa. It is therefore ironic that similar monuments are seemingly more at risk in parts of the "developed" North than the "developing" South today (George Town World heritage Incorporated, 2013).

The Impact of Competing Narratives on the Built Environment

The "culture wars" can be partially explained by the premise that "the dominant national narrative is always contested, the focus of internal conflicts" (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000, p. 16). Other writers have described opposing, or counternarratives, as "irruptions of memory" (Wilde, 1999, p. 475). When multiple narratives occur regarding the same topic concurrently, they therefore represent mutually exclusive yet equally collective representations of the past from different points of view.

Yet, for any narrative to truly gain credence, it requires celebration, often taking the form of "staged" events (Hollinshead, Kuon, & Alajami, 2014). The urge to "achieve" or "attain" goals via this form of capitalist promotion is, according to Bauman (2011), leading to a movement away from previous "homogenous" visions of society as well as an "emptying" of the public realm. Merging this idea with the need to remember and the redefinition of "minority groups" mentioned earlier, it becomes clear that whereas understanding past narratives is increasingly a purely intellectual exercise, commemorating historical events serves to enter them into registers of "sacred history" with broad social appeal, as mentioned by Schwartz (1982). Nowhere is this better exemplified than via architecture and historic monuments.

Physical remains are important to both memory and history because tangible objects provide the ultimate assurance to future generations that the past really did exist, especially important given contemporary worries about "fake news." As an essential bridge between past and present, the survival of old buildings and monuments allows for on-going interpretations and reinterpretations of heritage. Their occasional demolition therefore skews the historical record significantly.

This is because, to gain "knowledge" from history essentially requires society to care and feel for it, regardless of whether such thoughts are positive or negative. As the largest physical examples of tangible heritage, monuments and buildings are difficult to ignore, and are indeed often subject to "preservation" or "heritage" status. These efforts, while generally successful in preventing an old structure's demolition, profoundly limit the ability to rework related legacies, often resulting in "exclusive" narratives. In the Southern US, this has resulted in Confederate Memorials losing their place of importance in society due to changing social values (Dosen, 2012).

The social, political, and cultural nature of these changes, leading to "control" of the national narrative, implies a hierarchy of power leading to the creation of dominant groups in society. Fairclough (1992) premised that the use of language as a tool by dominant groups allows them to present their ideas as "common sense" or the inevitable "way things are" (i.e., "naturalization"). Hollinshead et al. (2009) went further by describing how "naturalization" is so commonplace in tourism that it occurs subconsciously via "passive-projection" or even "non-human agency."

Recent years, and the period following the election of Donald Trump as president of the US in particular, have seen concerted attempts by conservative groups to push back against what they perceive as "liberal elites" dominating sociopolitical discourse in the US. The violent events surrounding the removal of a memorial to general Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 (Fausset & Feuer, 2017) exemplifies not just the contesting of the "dominant national narrative" as mentioned earlier, but also the very real potential for conflict

existing beneath the surface of even the richest of societies, which can be sparked by arguments over heritage reconstruction.

Reconstructing Heritage

In 1997, Huntington identified culture as both a divisive and unifying force. He premised that "civilization is a culture, writ large . . . it is the broadest cultural entity" (pp. 41–43). Writing for the *Harvard Magazine* just 2 years earlier, Havel (1995) emphasized the particular importance of culture derived from the past by stating that:

Only a "thin veneer" covers or conceals the immense varieties of cultures, of peoples, of religious worlds, of historical traditions and historically formed attitudes, all of which in a sense lie "beneath it." (p. 32)

Communities and countries therefore confront dilemmas. Whereas both sometimes derive their legitimacy from cherishing the past, in order to "come of age" both must effectively also put the past behind them. Innovation and creativity both suggest breaks with tradition, without which society is doomed to stagnate. The notion of societal "progress" thus differentiates one generation from the next, ensuring that our notion of "identity" is in the long run always fluid, even if our general concept of "heritage" remains comparatively more static.

"Progress" is therefore challenging the role of historic monuments, making them objects that can be discussed and even strategically manipulated, especially since the conceptualization of past events always involves some form of "organized forgetting" of issues deemed "less important" (Tanabe & Keyes, 2002). At the same time, however, digital technology has improved society's ability to view and review any contemporary cultural argument recorded as "news," thus making the process of forgetting (and therefore forgiving) more difficult, as graphically shown in the case of Charlottesville in 2017.

Conclusion: The Political Role of Tourism

The inherently political nature of tourism was emphasized by Hollinshead who described tourism as a "juggernaut through which old and corrective visions of tribal or private self-identity are not only declared but produced and consumed" (Hollinshead & Suleman, 2017, p. 961). Identifying tourism as one of the most influential commercial activities of the 21st century, he nevertheless argued that to fully understand the political impacts of tourism requires an understanding of not only the power of the ruling elites, but also those of mediating or well-mobilized interest groups.

It is in the area of policy development and implementation that the roles and interests of the elites and interest groups occasionally clash. Indeed, Jones (1984) suggested that whereas most people are uninterested in the problems of others, with a further majority resistant to major change, all policy systems come with built in biases reflecting the preferences of their creators. By acknowledging that no ideal policy system exists to govern the growth and focus of tourism, heritage tourism nevertheless allows for not just the celebration of differences between times past and present, but can also serve to lessen the conflicts of the "culture wars" by widening the sphere of interest and concern of a site beyond its polarized host community.

Indeed, this article suggests that the depth of polarization caused by the "culture wars" has the potential to change the connection between communities and their heritage to such an extent that preservation efforts may in the future no longer be led by in situ societies themselves, but rather by domestic or even foreign tourists, whose interests lie in curiosity and academic appeal rather than emotional connections. It presents the tourist as the unlikely yet potential savior of those heritage sites whose culture and community has not died, but who have nevertheless "orphaned" those heritage constructs they can no longer identify with.

Sociopolitical enmity brought about by the 21st century's "culture wars" may eventually replace income and ethnicity as the leading source of polarization in parts of the developed world in the coming decades. If powerful enough, this polarization may then proceed to damage the "social solidarity" so valued in the developed north. If it then spreads to the developing world, it may well do considerable damage to the "nation-building" efforts at the center of many government agendas in the developing south. The effect of this on the built environment

and tourism will depend on how different communities, cities, and countries choose to portray their "authentic selves" after the "culture wars" eventually end. What is certain, however, is that the political role of the tourism industry confers upon it the power to preserve even those monuments to "inconvenient" histories that, through the tourist gaze, may yet be resurrected as important monuments to remind society of elements of history that, while possibly less just, are no less important.

Acknowledgment

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