
COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND HERITAGE: EBB AND FLOW AT NATIONAL AND GLOBAL LEVELS

David Tutchener

The purpose of this paper will be to discuss the fluid nature of collective identity as it relates to heritage on a national and global scale. It will do so by mapping some of the differences and similarities in the criteria used by the Australian Government and the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to define sites that have been classified as being of heritage value. As identity and heritage are dynamic constructs that are directly related to our freedom of speech, religion and education, they are constructs that are fundamental in the modern globalizing world. As heritage and identity are mutually informing concepts, the ebb and flow of power at various levels will ultimately effect our construction of both.

Keywords: *identity, heritage, collective identity, nationalism, globalization, cultural significance, Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens.*

The past has many uses, and recent times have seen the emergence of identity politics within the study of history, highlighting sectors of the past often overlooked by the official historical discourse. The concept of collective identity is deeply rooted within the framework of authorized heritage, 'Heritage is often used as a form of collective memory, a social construct shaped by the political, economic and social concerns of the present' (Graham and Howard 2008: 2). Identity is a dynamic construct. It is directly tied to who has access to those 'freedoms' and the power to define our heritage, at the national and global levels. The purpose of this paper will be to discuss the fluid nature of collective identity as it relates to heritage on a national and global scale. It will do so by mapping some of the differences and similarities in the criteria used by the Australian Government and the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to define sites that have been classified as being of heritage value. This paper will use the example of the Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens, Melbourne due to its dual heritage listing, to do so.

The concepts of heritage and significance are intrinsically political, and loaded with contentious values that are closely related to each other. The nature of significance and how it is defined is a different debate, where it is used in this paper it should be understood as, 'refer[ring] to the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities' (Russell and Winkworth 2009: 1). This paper will argue that, as power structures change on a global scale our global and national identities and heritage have also developed and altered as a result. These links between heritage, collective identity, globalization and nationalism is not static and will vacillate in terms of influence depending upon the circumstances of the period.

There is a need to unpack several concepts that are important to the foundations of this discussion, including their working definitions. The word 'heritage' can have many

broader meanings but in relation to this argument it will be defined as, 'used to construct, reconstruct and negotiate a range of identities and social and cultural values and meanings in the present' (Smith 2006: 3). Essentially it is a baseline of how the past is used in the present to further political purposes through the interpretation of meanings and values. Identity is generally understood to be a social construction of our sense of self and others, and is formed from our understanding of the past. Identity is a recent term, which has quickly, since its psychological conception by Erickson (Bauman 2001) come a long way. 'There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of "identity"' (Hall 1996: 1). The term is now used to reframe a sense of self and the past through a number of different perspectives. Collective identity, separate from individual identity can be defined for the purpose of this paper as simply being; a statement of membership that involves being a part of a group that considers its members to share a number of things in common (Ashmore *et al.* 2004).

The formation of the United Nations in 1945 was an attempt to establish a multinational dialogue that would prevent further worldwide conflict and promote social progress and human rights (UN 1945). As an adjunct to this economic and security-based forum, UNESCO was also formed in 1945; it was in 1972 that UNESCO passed the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. What this achieved was to raise the awareness levels of global and cultural heritage, its ownership and the need for active preservation. In 1976, the World Heritage Committee was established and the first tangible heritage sites were inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1978. The categorization of World Heritage has since evolved to encapsulate the concept of 'intangible heritage' (UNESCO) that aims at protecting cultural practices that are considered to be in danger of decline. This global approach to heritage was unprecedented and has resulted in the identification and preservation of significant historical sites and cultural practices that are in danger. Currently, UNESCO has little actual power to protect sites of international significance.

The Australian Heritage Act of 1975 was prompted by a number of circumstances in the Australian domestic environment, including a progressive national Labor Government and the release of the Pigott Report. The Act legislated that certain sites of national cultural relevance to Australia should be held in a national estate to promote their preservation. This embodied itself in the National Estate Register, which later evolved in 2004 to the National Heritage List and as of July 2011 included over 20,000 sites of National Heritage value. The Australian Heritage Council, an administrative body, includes sites in the National Heritage List when they are assessed as being of national heritage value. These sites are divided into the categories of cultural and natural places of national significance and include both indigenous and colonial sites. These sites can subsequently be protected under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Since the inception of the Burra Charter in 1979 and subsequent revisions (1981, 1988 and 1999) a more cautious approach to understanding cultural significance, conservation and identification of heritage sites in Australia has altered our understanding and the treatment of cultural heritage (Australia ICOMOS 2006). Ultimately, this refined understanding of heritage values will be reflected in Australia's preserved future heritage and identity.

The concepts of heritage and collective identity are constructs: one of the past and the other defines who we are. Under scrutiny it becomes evident that each relies upon the dominant conception of the other. Without a sense of heritage, collective identity can-

not be constructed, as there would be no past to base this identity on. Without a sense of collective identity, heritage also cannot be constructed; because without knowing who we are, how are we to decide what is important enough to preserve of our past? The relationship between these concepts is 'manifested and performed through interpersonal relationships and behavior' (Russell 2010: 33), beyond the concept of individual identity and within the realm of collective identity. There are a number of conceptual complexities in how the terms heritage and identity relate, what is integral to their construction is how they 'interact and build upon each other' (Graham and Howard 2008: 1). This is true at both the national and global levels. The following will dissect these two concepts and discuss how they relate and change.

The implementation of a World Heritage List in 1978 implies that a sense of global identity was being formed. If sites are to be designated as being of global heritage value, it suggests that these sites are especially culturally significant and relate to the formation of a global identity. The nature of this global identity is difficult to establish, due to its relatively recent and multifaceted construction, yet it can be ascertained that this concept is, 'hardly existing in a vacuum, therefore, constructions of identity and the concomitant politics are taking place in a global context' (Meyer and Geschiere 1999: 32). This phase of identity construction can be understood within the greater context of globalization.¹ The more recent concept of glocalization, or the ability of the local to absorb the global (Wellman and Hampton 1999), is also intrinsic to our understanding of the formation of global identity. Throughout this process, what is selected as important for absorption, for example the spread of language and what is rejected, for example, religion can help us differentiate trends in global identity development.

It has been successfully argued that 'Nationalism and national heritage developed synchronously in Nineteenth Century Europe' (Graham *et al.* 2000: 183) and that national heritage, or a national narrative, was needed to absorb competing versions of the past from other nations as conflict, migration, and travel increased. It would follow that globalization and global heritage are Twentieth Century constructions designed to formulate a specific past and an identity of 'outstanding universal value' (UNESCO 2013). It could be argued that globalism and global heritage are constructed to assist in the synthesizing of a global narrative of the past. This global narrative of our collective past could, just as nationalism absorbed competing versions of the past, absorb different versions of the national narrative. 'National heritage can be reconstructed as world heritage because certain sites and practices are of universal significance' (Harrison and Hitchcock 2005: 7). This absorption or reconstruction of national narratives relies on the assumption that the authority and power to construct heritage will lie outside the current national construct. Due to changes in power balances this may not always be true.

The relationship between the national and global levels of identity and heritage is volatile and cannot remain static. As Howard and Graham argue, 'this continuing privileging of the national compromises and constrains the effectiveness of other forms of representing heritage and identity ... most certainly, the idea of universal values embodied in the concept of World Heritage' (Graham and Howard 2008: 8). The disproportionate weight given to national heritage over global heritage would appear to be an inequitable distribution of the value of the past. This is easily explained by the origins of the power exerted in the construction of heritage and identity. Although global

heritage and identity exist, the powerful need for nations to create a national narrative at times will outweigh the influence of globalization. It is this relationship between the global and national and the respective power to create narratives of the past that consequently inform our identity through the selection of heritage that will fluctuate over time.

If nations, as Benedict Anderson observed, are 'imagined communities', alive in the popular mind even before they become nationalist movements or nation-states (Anderson 1991) then the global community could be understood as an imagined community, beyond regionalism and nationalism altogether. This suggestion is supported by Turtinen, who argues that 'world heritage is a cosmopolitan political project, one which aims at creating a new political as well as an imagined community' (Turtinen 2000: 29). As with any sense of identity, whether global or national it is a construct that relies on being informed by tangible forms of heritage. What must also be considered is the relative strength of these constructs. In a global environment where the constant erosion of nationalism is occurring and the balance of power can move from national to global, and back again, consequently the authorized heritage discourse alters, informing either a stronger sense of global identity or national identity. This balance is not all one way and will shift depending on events affecting the global political discourse, for example, wars or economic crises. This balance between the relative strength of imagined communities at the global and the national levels would ultimately affect what criteria are used to preserve our past.

Both heritage and identity are constructs, they require an interpretation of the past and are, therefore, subjective, political, and self-serving. The concept of heritage can be interpreted as 'present centered' (Graham 2002: 1004) shaped, and managed in response to the demands of the present. Heritage is also what we would like the past to be, 'we exult in our own heritage not because it is demonstrably true but because it ought to be' (Lowenthal 1998: 128) and is used to justify current political acts. As a construction however, heritage is essentially political in its nature, its interpretation forms part of an authorized heritage discourse (Smith 2006). This discourse is the language of the powerful or the elite. In global terms the elite is represented by the political 'North' often comprised of first world nations. At the national level, it is the language of the wealthy, educated, and powerful. The purpose of an authorized heritage discourse at any level is to create a narrative that benefits those in power at the time. As power eventually shifts so can the heritage discourse, which can, in turn, shift the process of identity construction.

Heritage is by its nature a process of classification, therefore it both includes and excludes. The recognition of heritage potentially excludes those who do not subscribe to, or are not a part of that heritage: 'What heritage does not highlight it often hides' (Lowenthal 1993). Often the purpose of this classification is to preserve the past, but this process is used to cement a narrative of the past and to consolidate the identity of the group with the most prominent political interest at the time. As these interests alter and the balance of power shifts what is included as heritage is manipulated to reflect the desired identity. This will eventually demonstrate itself as an ebb and flow between various politically constructed poles, for example, between the left and the right of the political spectrum or between national and global influence.

Collective identity plays a major role at national and global levels of construction. Meade's research into the American national character described the intertwining

of the concepts of nationhood and identity (Gleason 1993). This amalgamation of ideas has since grown into a major task of beginning to understand, find, and attempt to manipulate this sense of national identity. Nationalism can be understood in a number of different ways, one of them is the process by which a nation chooses to categorize and recognize its national heritage and global heritage. Global Heritage, or the World Heritage List and its criteria is one tool that can be used to understand the view of those who determine what is considered heritage and consequently our 'collective identity'.

World Heritage and its supporters are an aspect of the formal expression of globalization, 'UNESCO, like its partner agencies of the UN, is indisputably part of the multifaceted phenomenon of globalization' (Askew 2010: 25). World Heritage can be understood as a concept that can 'help us become more aware of our own roots and of our cultural and social identity' (Russell 2010: 30). This approach to World Heritage simply seeks to promote a passive understanding of this global construction. Conversely, Turtinen argues that UNESCO 'is a powerful producer of culture, and a highly influential actor, capable of defining and framing conditions, problems, and solutions, and thus framing the interests and desired actions of others, especially of the world nation states' (Turtinen 2000: 5). As the ultimate arbiter of what the world chooses to define as its heritage, UNESCO influences, preserves, and creates aspects of our understanding of global values. Without the power to identify and protect heritage independent of its member nations nominations, UNESCO can remain the ultimate arbiter and framer of what World Heritage is, but will continue to lack the power to create it.

The Royal Exhibition Buildings and Carlton Gardens, Melbourne, Australia, gained World Heritage Listing in 2004. This was Australia's first built heritage site to be included on the World Heritage List. It was included under Criterion (ii):

'... important exchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design' (UNESCO n.d.).

This was the only criterion that the building was allocated despite its nomination including other criteria. Criterion (ii) of the World Heritage List is reasonably specific but only considers the Royal Exhibition Building in relation to the International Exhibitions of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and its effects on the exchange of knowledge in the areas of industrial and cultural growth. The UNESCO document states that the Royal Exhibition Buildings and Gardens are the:

'... main extant survivors of a Palace of Industry and its setting, together reflect the global influence of the international exhibition movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries' (UNESCO n.d.).

This clearly states that the site's heritage value at a global level is singularly focused on previous eras of direct international contribution during the period of the International Exhibitions.

The nomination of the Royal Exhibition Buildings and Carlton Gardens for World Heritage listing included a second criterion, which the site was assessed as not adequately fulfilling. This criterion highlights an important point of difference when compared to the national heritage criteria. Criterion (iv):

'... be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history' (UNESCO n.d.).

The Royal Exhibition Buildings and Carlton Gardens were not considered within this criterion, to be an important example of its type at a global level. This could be due to an issue of scope and scale at a global level 'significant stages in human history' is fairly expansive and simply may not include such a site, despite its national importance, as significant. Whereas at the national level this was clearly significant as outlined under a similar criterion (f):

'The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period' (DPCD 2011).

This highlights the differences in classification of heritage at a global level and at the national level. It is also an example of how the authorized heritage discourse at the national level is stronger at times than at the global one, it has more power, both to identify heritage and to create identity. By considering these criteria we can examine how sites of heritage value ultimately inform both our present collective international and national identities through inclusion and exclusion.

The national criteria that highlights the heritage value of the Royal Exhibition Building is bound to be 'national' centric, as is its nature. In fact, 'The vast majority of legislation and policy relating to heritage and identity is the result of discourse of national identity manifestation' (Russell 2010: 31). This is not only a reflection of heritage values, but also an expression of national identity. Another example of how the authorized heritage discourse is applied to the Royal Exhibition Buildings and Carlton Gardens and allows it to become a tool in the national identity construct is criterion (a):

'The place has outstanding heritage value because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history' (DPCD 2011).

This criterion is deemed to be important at the national level due to the role the building played in hosting Australia's first Parliament in 1901. Again, although this is considered to be important to the Australian narrative of heritage and identity, on a global scale it is really only one of hundreds of buildings that held a 'first' parliament. This category could have many applications, not the least of which is to deliberately inform an opinion of what is in need of preservation and how important that aspect of the past is to the current national authorized heritage discourse.

The Royal Exhibition Buildings and Carlton Gardens currently fulfil five criteria of heritage significance at the national level (DPCD 2011) while at the international level it fulfils only one. Even though the scope and scale of each list is very different, the breadth of the national criteria would seem to reflect a greater political need to create heritage and in turn influence the national narrative and consequently our collective identity. This is an example of preference being given to the authorized national heritage dialogue. If the political need was greater at a global level than at the national level to create an identity narrative, then the world heritage would form the dominant authorized heritage dialogue, in Australia at this point in time this is not the case. The number of criteria used to define the Royal Exhibition Buildings and Carlton Gardens at a national level are a clear demonstration of the current power preference towards a national level within the heritage and identity discourse. Ultimately national heritage also has the power to enforce the legislation that protects sites of heritage value at that level. Although UNESCO can help to raise awareness of the cultural value of a heritage site, it has no formal power to identify and protect it. Until it does the authorized national

heritage dialogue, despite fluctuations in identity and power at a global level, will continue to dominate our interpretation of heritage and its social value.

The purpose of this paper has not been to deconstruct identity and heritage but to show that they have a link that is intrinsic to the value of each other. Heritage and identity are mutually informing, and changes in power dynamics on a national and global scale, effect our construction of heritage and identity. Currently nationalism is still the preferred tool used in this construction, which may continue for some time, but over time this power balance may shift. An indicator of this shift in power will be reflected in how heritage is identified at national and global levels. Ultimately the selection of these sites and the creation of both heritage and identity are integral to our future as individuals, nations and as global citizens, as is the preservation of these and other forms of heritage.

NOTE

¹ UNESCO *glossary* available at URL: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/glossary/>.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, B.
1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Askew, M.
2010. The Magic List of Global Status: UNESCO, World Heritage and the Agenda of States. In Labadi, S., and Long, C. (eds.), *Heritage and Globalization* (pp. 19–44). London: Routledge.
- Ashmore, R. D., Deaux, K., and McLaughlin-Volpe, T.
2004. An Organizing Framework for Collective Identity: Articulation and Significance of Multidimensionality. *Psychological Bulletin* 130: 80–114.
- Australia ICOMOS
2006. The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance. *APT Bulletin* 37(4): 22–33.
- Bauman, Z.
2001. Identity in the Globalizing World. *Social Anthropology* 9(2): 121–129.
- DPCD – Department of Planning and Community Development
2011. *Royal Exhibition & Carlton Gardens*. World Heritage Management Plan. Melbourne: Department of Planning and Community Development.
- Gleason, P.
1993. Identifying Identity: A Semantic Story. *Journal of American History* 69(4): 910–931.
- Graham, B.
2002. Heritage as Knowledge: Capital or Culture? *Urban Studies* 39(5–6): 1003–1017.
- Graham, B., Ashworth, G. J., and Tunbridge J. E.
2000. *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy*. London: Arnold.
- Graham, B., and Howard, P. (eds.)
2008. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

- Hall, S.
1996. Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'? In Hall, S., and du Gay, P. (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 1–17). London: Sage.
- Harrison, D., and Hitchcock, M.
2005. *The Politics of World Heritage: Negotiating Tourism and Conservation*. Clevedon: Channel View.
- Lowenthal, D.
1993. Memory and Oblivion. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 12: 171–182.
1998. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Meyer, B., and Geschiere, P. (eds.)
1999. *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Russell, I.
2010. Heritage, Identities and Roots: A Critique of Arborescent Models of Heritage and Identity. In Smith, G., Messenger, P., and Soderland, H. (eds.), *Heritage Values in Contemporary Society*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Russell, R., and Winkworth, K.
2009. *Significance 2.0: A Guide to Assessing the Significance of Collections*. Adelaide: Collections Council of Australia.
- Smith, L.
2006. *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Turtinen, J.
2000. *Globalising Heritage: On UNESCO and the Transnational Construction of a World Heritage*. SCORE (Stockholm Centre for Organization Research) Rapport serie, No. 12. Stockholm: Stockholm Center for Organizational Research.
- UNESCO
n.d. *The Criteria for Selection*. URL: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria>.
- Wellman, B., and Hampton, K.
1999. Living Networked On and Offline. *Contemporary Sociology* 28(6): 648–654.