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De-heritaged culture and heritage inventions

David Florido del Corral

«…..echoes of feet in the sad generations like light dust upon the shadows, my feet waking them like dust, lightly to settle again». W. Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, 1929

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the basic concepts of the heritage discourse, by opening up a theoretical and critical debate on the concepts of culture and heritage that may lead to a reflection on current heritage creation processes in the maritime and fishing domains, in the context of the ethnographical background of the Atlantic coast of Andalusia.

We will use a neologism, de-heritaging, to highlight the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in heritage creation processes and to show how the cultural practices thus invoked have declined and lost vitality as a result. De-heritaging is not so much a strategy designed to reduce tension in the cultural fabric, but rather a systemic strategy resulting from a social logic. It refers to the dominant (bureaucratic or mercantilist) rationality which, together with the objectification of cultural landscapes and practices, has been steadily pushing traditional seafaring and fishing communities out of the picture.

We understand the usual argument that heritage creation strategies are set up when the cultural reproduction of the maritime-fishing world starts to decline, thus activating claims for collective recognition and the recreation of shared memories. However, we wish to draw attention to the effect that these heritage creation strategies have on the cultural practices they are supposed to be recovering. We could speak of unintentionally

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pervasive effects, characterised by paradoxes, ambiguities and contradictions, which have the result of undermining the survival of the maritime-fishing production fabric and its framework of meaningful social relationships.

The first, more theoretical, section of the chapter explores some key concepts of heritage creation: culture, heritage and tradition. The second, more empirical, section focuses on two examples we have chosen to illustrate our theoretical approaches, i.e., the creation of a commercial/gastronomy fair on the theme of bluefin tuna in the town of Barbate in Cádiz province –a direct reference to traditional tunny fishing in the area–, and the protection of the sea fishing weirs in Rota and Sanlúcar de Barrameda on the northwest coast of the same province.

**Culture, tradition, heritage, and approaches to heritage**

We will start by making a distinction between the concept of culture and the concept of heritage. The terms are often used ambiguously, sometimes overlapping or supplanting one another. The confusion has increased with the growth of the heritage discourse, which has spread to juridical discourses and to mass and social communications, and has filtered into the civic, business, media, and political spheres. The spread of the heritage concept is the result of several interrelated processes (Ariño, 2002), among which we wish to underline the concomitance between heritage and the notion of anthropological culture (Carrera, 2009). It is thus accepted that culture belongs to communities (and not to the social elites), that it includes both tangible and intangible dimensions (the criteria of monumentality, singularity, aesthetics and historical importance no longer apply), and that it is becoming a major platform for producing social identities in the contemporary context –over and beyond heritage creation processes engineered by the social elites. However, the concomitance between the notions of culture and heritage must not lead us to overlap the two concepts. To put it in
a nutshell, culture is the substrate from which heritage draws its resources, with the deep qualitative differences existing between both categories. On the other hand, we can speak of heritage, or rather, heritage creation, only in terms of the appropriation processes constructed out of certain cultural elements or fragments by the various social stakeholders.

This differentiation can be outlined by using various comparison criteria. In the case of a heterogeneous culture, the heritage discourse tends towards homogenisation unless reactions from society, politics, the media, or the economy prevent this from happening. Furthermore, whereas heritage must be activated by a political process, culture includes power relationships. We cannot overlook the succession of appropriations, re-appropriations and rejections carried out by the various social stakeholders against the backdrop of historical continuities/discontinuities of cultural traditions. The stakeholders no longer fit neatly into the homogenous communities envisaged during the consolidation of national political models; nor do they fit into the contemporary category of tourists avid for landscapes, culture and tradition. Today’s stakeholders and agencies may multiply, promote contradictory interests, and apply different meanings to “heritaged” culture.

The concept of culture is an extraordinarily hyper-referential, multisided category, depending on the theoretical perspective that we adopt (Kuper, 2001). We understand culture in the broad sense, i.e., not in the culturalist tradition that understands it as something separate and separable from social experience. From our perspective, culture refers to the symbolic weave of changing rules and principles of cognitive organization, expressed as an interrelated set of material, social and theoretical processes, as ways of life (Díaz de Rada, 2010). Human communities, in all their heterogeneity, use these ways of life in order to construct, through bundles of social relationships, their social
universe (in practice, a diversity of universes) in its political, economic, ritual, and other dimensions. To understand this social fabric, we must examine the dynamics of historical continuity/discontinuity that are woven into a tapestry of tangible and intangible, global and local threads stemming from both exogenous and endogenous processes (Roseberry, 1988: 176).

To clarify this differentiation between the concepts of culture and heritage, we can make use of various concomitant categories, such as tradition. For Koeckel (2007: 20-21), tradition is a set of cultural models, practices and artefacts transmitted over time and space; ways of doing, thinking and interrelating that continue to be appropriated by successive generations. Heritage, on the other hand, refers to the re-appropriation of (some of) those cultural models by different channels to those that transmit tradition. In a sense, heritage creation has alienated tradition, by placing it in the hands of experts who de-contextualise it beyond its original uses. Summarising the dichotomy contributed by García Calvo (1979: 319ff), tradition belongs to the world of here and now, the world of the deictic, and the world of personal relationships; tradition is within our reach, within reach of the hands that we use to inter-subjectively construct our universe, «the world in which people speak». On the other hand, heritage belongs to «the world about which people speak», a world plagued with impersonal, abstract discourse, constructed out of ideas and categories, supposedly (and irrevocably tending to be) objective. This world can also be manipulated by an external agency with explicit, strategic aims formulated outside the context addressed.

To avoid reproducing a static representation of the relationships between tradition/culture and heritage discourse, we must try to detect the fluxes and influences between one and the other. The activation of a heritage creation process can inject new meanings and new uses into the culture from which it draws its inspiration, and thereby
set up new political, economic, social, and ritual interrelationships. This is what Koeckel (2007) is referring to when he talks about the reflexive nature of heritage creation processes. These influxes can have negative consequences, as described by Beck in his discussion of heritage creation in (contemporary) risk society: the modern trend to reflect on our own culture can be seen as mere political or mercantile exploitation (tourism, setting up primary production activities in the name of sustainability, the whole process of political homogenization) that may actually hinder the reproduction of the social fabric in question.

**Figure 1. The reflexive nature of heritage creation processes.**

Source: Author.

J. L. García (1998) made an early contribution to this approach in his work “De la cultura como patrimonio al patrimonio cultural” («From Culture as Heritage to Cultural Heritage»). This standpoint enables us to understand how fragmentation of experiences, social inequalities and cultural differences tend to be concealed in the realm of cultural heritage. Culture is associated with transmitted symbolic processes, which make up individual experience and generate a sense of society (at the same time as it is affected by power relationships, heterogeneities and contradictions). On the other hand, heritage discourse leads to the transmission of an institutionalized memory aiming to conceal oblivions and absences (Connerton, 2009), and promotes a static, immanent, homogenous representation of the same memories, referring to an integrated
community, the depositary of an ancestral, unequivocal history. From this point of view, heritage, or rather heritage creation, is a discursive (Hall, 2005), politicised practice designed, for various reasons, to legitimise a certain social order. The heritage discourse invokes the traditionalism of the past, drawn up from the present and for social reproduction. We must, therefore, differentiate between tradition as defined here and traditionalism as an ideology and as a characteristic policy of contemporary society (Philips, 2004): a discourse that invokes (and replaces) a memory represented as outside time, a memory that tends to sidestep the direct, internal experiences of actual memories.

However, despite the interpretations of tradition as something diametrically opposed to modernity (Beck et al., 1997; and Ariño, 2002), we must accept that, in contemporary societies, various cultural fabrics continue to generate dynamic traditions that inspire the actions and thoughts of social stakeholders in local contexts. We must now turn our gaze to seafaring communities, but not in the sense of integrated, easily objectifiable communities. We refer to groups of stakeholders who continue to cling to a traditional social fabric, to a culture that organises their social and work relationships, their ways of doing things, their forms of expression, and so on, to a tradition that is manifest in various economic, festive and political institutions… at a local level. It is true that these are mostly unconnected communities occupying peripheral positions on their respective cultural maps, which are being decisively transformed by the economic, cultural, and political processes of postmodernity. But these social groups continue to exist, despite the increasingly deterritorialised experience enjoyed by many cultural practices in our modern globalized society (Hernández i Martí, 2006), and they continue to claim their place in the world. The principle of locality implies a position within the increasingly
globalised economic framework and a recognition of inherited cultural ways of life as described above (Leff, 2004).

**From tunny fishing culture to fishing weirs in Atlantic Andalusia**

Having accepted the distinction between tradition (cultural fabric) and heritage (objectification of a culture for uses beyond the corresponding cultural practices), we will now examine some heritage creation initiatives, and reflect on the effects they have on the objectified cultural fabrics.

In a previous study (Florido, 2011a), we compared the “Juan and Juana” festival, held during the summer solstice and organised by workers from the tunny fishery in Zahara de los Atunes (Barbate, Cádiz), with the “Tuna Fair” (officially known as Tuna Gastronomy Week) organised in the same town in recent years. Our aim was to show the conceptual difference between a festive context (former event) and a heritage creation initiative (latter event).

**Figure 2. Festival versus Fair**

**Source: Author**
We justified using the term “festival” to describe the “Juan and Juana” bonfires held on St John’s Eve (Caro Baroja, 1979), as we have here a ritual reflecting work institutions (in this case, the ways in which the local tunny fishermen distribute their product) and a work ethic based on solidarity and mutual commitment. We interpreted the event in the context of the contemporary (ecological and economic) recession in tunny fishing as a form of representation of a *communitas* made up of a limited number of workers and their families. In our opinion, the festival also had a transcendental aspect, i.e. the reclaiming of an identity through a ritualised representation of a particular space – in this case, a territory located on the edges of the cultural and political geography of local society (the space containing the infrastructures of the now-extinct tuna industry, beside the former river harbour).

On the other hand, we used the expression “heritage initiative” to describe the Tuna Fair that has been held in Barbate since 2007. What we have here is a combination of a fair and a gastronomy route, a de-contextualised recreation of various aspects of the local tunny fishing tradition. We carried out an ethnographic study of the Tuna Fair in 2011. That year’s event included a display of local and non-local tuna products in the fairground enclosure; a video and photography exhibition on the history of local tunny fishing, and on fishing in general; boat trips taking in various local heritage features (Barbate tunny fishery, the Natural Park, the watch towers, the harbour, and the beaches); and shops and pavilions offering products totally unrelated to tunny fishing. However, the event cannot really be classified as a commercial fair. Alongside the Tuna Fair as such, a conventional fair enclosure is put up, complete with all the usual pavilions, stalls, and attractions. Growing local participation since 2007 makes us think

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2 Especially the workers known as *higuereños*, who traditionally came from towns in the west of Huelva province (in particular Isla Cristina). Cf. Florido, 2005 for a historical analysis of the tunny fisheries and related social aspects.
more in terms of a new festive event for the month of May (similar to other traditional Andalusian spring fairs) on the local festival calendar. Tuna continues to be present as a heritage food product, with tuna dishes and recipes (some more traditional than others) still featuring in the advertisements as the star feature of the event. The pattern of participation among local inhabitants (much higher than among non-residents) has become dissociated from the theme of bluefin tuna. Local families have simply appropriated the fair and turned it into a version of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel workers’ festival traditionally held in the area (Corbacho, 2000). This goes to show that heritage initiatives can easily develop into relationships, experiences, and expectations, i.e. social fabric.

**Picture 1.** St John’s Eve in the old harbour of Barbate. ‘Higuereños’ tunny fishermen organise a meal attended by the tunny fishing community in Zahara de los Atunes and visitors of the area.
Picture 2. Tuna Fair, Barbate. As well as the main Tuna Fair Marquee, Barbate Town Council also sponsors pavilions that are becoming increasingly popular among the local inhabitants as a ‘spring fair’.

Author. David Florido.

We should now look at the effects of the above-described events, and turn our attention to the organisers. The St John’s Eve festival is organised by the families of fishermen who fabricate the way of life and the symbolic codes of the tunny fishing tradition. The aim of the event is to enhance the value of their identity and their collective memory.

On the other hand, the Tuna Fair is an event taking place under the auspices of various institutions – Barbate Town Council, Cádiz Provincial Council, the Autonomous Government of Andalusia and other business institutions – as a fleeting tourist attraction that is part of a plan for economic diversification in seafaring towns. In the former case, the fishermen themselves use their traditional institutions in order to reclaim their heritage. By doing so, they are creating heritage out of their own cultural legacy, which has been ignored by official policies. In the Tuna Fair, tunny fishing is officially invoked, but from an external, commercial perspective that does not involve any of the
main stakeholders. The Tuna Fair is an alienated instrumentation of bluefin tuna culture; a heritage creation process generating two further, paradoxical developments. On the one hand, the commercial fair has involved the local inhabitants (more than the non-resident population) in an event that is now becoming firmly established on the local festival calendar. On the other hand, the hereditary object –tunny fishing culture– is part of a production fabric (a social warp threaded with a symbolic weft) in the process of dissolution. This enhancement of the heritage value is backed up by traditionalist heritage discourses on the importance of the local gastronomy, the sustainability of the production processes, and the artisan nature of the same. This ends up negatively affecting the sustainability of the tunny fisheries as a comprehensive cultural system: demand for bluefin tuna puts more pressure on the already precarious global bio-economic equilibrium; tourism development affects the local economy and local employment markets by creating or reinforcing unbalanced relationships within the social system; and current heritage invocations are not interested in the social relationships or the work conditions within the culture in question. This is why we claim that heritage creation initiatives end up de-heritaging the cultural fabrics they invoke, i.e., by threatening social reproduction, concealing inequalities, or actually creating new imbalances.

We find a similar process taking place with sea fishing weirs. This fish-trapping system based on tidal movements (Florido, 2011b) is found along the coast of Atlantic Andalusia (north-west of Cádiz province). A semicircular wall encloses a rocky area of the coastal seabed, on which fences and other structures are placed to lure and catch species seeking shelter at low tide. Historically, the weirs were a unique form of fishery management, based on private appropriation by noble houses and religious orders (not necessarily located on the coast) that ceded the rights of use to fishermen and shellfish
From the 19th century on, the rights were held by medium-sized agrarian landowners from coastal areas, although local fishermen and shellfish harvesters may have continued to work the weirs. The system required a few simple traditional tools and techniques, e.g. gigs, harpoons, conical casting nets, and so on, as well as precise knowledge of the local tides and the behaviour of the fish species, molluscs and crustaceans captured in the weirs.

The heritage value of the weirs also includes natural features. In some cases, spermatophyte meadows are found; the intricate structure of the weirs provides hatching and breeding grounds for certain species; several types of wildfowl are also attracted. These unique enclaves in the landscape contain values that have made them into heritage sites. The Merlín (or Marín) weir in Sanlúcar de Barrameda was listed as a heritage asset in the Historical Heritage Catalogue of Andalusia in 1995; the weirs in Rota were listed as a Natural Monument in 2001 (Durán Salado, 2003). In both cases, the heritage listings underline the relationship between man and the environment, the peculiar landscape resulting from human action, and the fanciful claim to an “ancestral” value supposedly dating back to Roman times, which is not, however, supported by any serious historical or archaeological research.

In the case of Rota in particular, the weir was listed as a heritage site with the aim of attracting tourists and thereby helping to diversify the local economy. However, the measure ignored the continuing use of the weirs, which are still maintained, albeit in a sketchy, marginal way by local associations. On the other hand, the largest number of working weirs is found in Chipiona, where a local association carries out heritage activities as well as regulating their use and maintenance. These weirs, which are mostly located on the urban shoreline, have not attracted any official initiatives for listing as heritage sites.
In 2005, a regional project to rebuild the Rota weirs set off a wave of protests from the Ecologists in Action group and from the local shellfish harvesters’ association. The protesters wanted the repair works to be carried out with traditional building methods, thus guaranteeing future production from the weir. They argued in favour of maintaining fishing and shell fishing activity on the weir as carried out by the traditional stakeholders. This would also require an official regulation and management plan in order to control the use of the weirs by tourists harvesting shellfish as a leisure activity, particularly during the summer months. The regional administrators, on the other hand, were more interested in durability and appearance, and argued in favour of a structural homogeneity for the weirs. Their idea was to create a landscape to be seen, not one to be lived in or worked in.

Today, despite being listed as a heritage site, the Merlín/Marín weir is in a bad state of repair due to lack of use or proper maintenance. On the other hand, some of the weirs in Chipiona and Rota are still working and are in a good state of repair. This is not so much the result of protection as heritage sites but of the untiring efforts by local associations of workers interested in maintaining the weirs, despite adverse economic circumstances (pressure from tourism and the gradual disappearance of the cultural uses historically sustaining the fisheries). Once again, we find the opposition between culture reclaimed as heritage versus heritage initiatives that fail to guarantee the sustainability of the cultural fabric underlying that same tradition. Institutional heritage initiatives divorced from the local social fabric tend to pursue other aims (landscape values, new social and economic relations, recuperation of a “frozen” collective memory) and can actually weaken the objectified activity, which in this case is a set of traditional fishing practices contextualized in an ancient but constantly changing seafaring culture.

Image 3. ‘Longuera’ fishing weir, Chipiona (Cádiz).

Image 4. Merlín/Marín fishing weir, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz).

(Joint Caption). The Longuera weir is still used and maintained by local shellfish harvesters (and occasionally tourists), whereas the Merlín/Marín weir (listed in the Historiccal Heritage Catalogue of Andalusia) is in a bad state of repair.

Author: David Florido.
Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to discuss the relationship between cultural practices and the social construction of cultural heritage in the maritime-fisheries domain. We now wish to return to the initial quotation from *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner. It may indeed come about that the echoes of our feet awaken the memory of a tradition forged over countless generations. But it may also come about that this *invention of the past* hardly manages to awaken an illusion that may, like the dust, lightly settle again. In this case, our efforts will have been in vain, at least as far as concerns preserving the cultural system we have invoked. This begs the question of whether we have to persist in a heritage exercise that is unable to reinvent traditions in a way that guarantees their continuing validity.

In the first place, we are not obliged to reproduce social traditions inherited from the past. Culture is protean; its inherent dynamism cannot be conjured away by seeing the past as an object to be manipulated by contemporary traditionalism and heritage policies. On the other hand, if we wish to protect, or activate, or recuperate certain cultural ways of life, then we must reflect on the paradoxical, conflictive relationships that are unleashed by heritage initiatives in a present-day context, which is systemically organised in different political, economic and symbolical ways to those being processed as heritage. Otherwise, we will tend to conceal the fragmentation of experiences, the social inequalities, and the cultural differences that characterise any given social context.

However, awareness of the difficulties involved should not hinder claims for the sustainability of the objectified cultural fabric. Once we have freed ourselves of some of the tenets of current heritage practices (representativeness, homogeneity and ancestrality), we should consider the possible effects of heritage strategies, e.g. conflicts
that may be generated, and/or incompatibilities between pre-existing and contemporary and/or reactivated uses. The recuperation of collective memory, when considered as a living memory, should guarantee the reproduction of traditional ways of life. However, heritage policies do not suffice to achieve this; other political fields must also be brought into play. As seen from the above examples, the agencies initiating and becoming involved in the dynamics (state, civic, entrepreneurial, academic, and so on) and the purposes for which they do so (identity, mercantile, ideological, and so on) would appear to be the key to determining the result of heritage creation.

Bibliographical references

CARO BAROJA, J. (1979) La estación del amor. Fiestas populares de Mayo a San Juan, Barcelona: Taurus.
List of figures/ images (with captions)
Figure 1. The reflexive nature of heritage creation processes.
Source: Author.
Figure 2. Festival versus Fair.
Source: Author.

IMAGE 1. St John’s Eve in the old harbour of Barbate.
*Higuereño* tunny fishermen organise a meal attended by the tunny fishing community in Zahara de los Atunes and visitors from the area. Background: dummies to be burnt on the bonfire.

IMAGE 2. Tuna Fair, Barbate.
As well as the main Tuna Fair marquee, Barbate Town Council also sponsors pavilions that are becoming increasingly popular among the local inhabitants as a “spring fair”.

IMAGE 3. Longuera fishing weir, Chipiona (Cádiz)

IMAGE 4. Merlín/Marín fishing weir, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz).
(Joint caption) The Longuera weir is still used and maintained by local shellfish harvesters (and occasionally tourists), whereas the Merlín/Marín weir (listed in the Historical Heritage Catalogue of Andalusia) is in a bad state of repair.