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FROM A GIVEN TO A CONSTRUCT:

Heritage as a commons

The transition towards a cognitive and post-industrial economy has led to the emergence of new strategies of capture of the immanent productive capacities of the social forces. Heritage entities are subject to, and also participate in, processes by which common creativity and knowledge are being harnessed by novel forms of rent and control. The objective of this paper was to show that conceiving heritage as a common situated in specific contexts rather than as a universal essence can open up novel epistemological spheres of communication between different knowledge practices. Also, it can help bridge some ontological gaps among the various stakeholders in the arena of heritage, such as academics, managers, architects, local communities and market forces. This entails considering heritage as an emergent material and immaterial construction process involving many different agents. Currently, these processes tend towards the privatization of common values and the shattering of local communities. Normally, this situation entails a fundamental alienation between objects and subjects, and the reification of heritage. This paper suggests that considering heritage as a common could provide a different perspective to tackle this crucial problem. Accordingly, scholars should not only be bound to a critical discursive stance, but should also commit to 'ontological politics' that would situate them as mediators between the global hierarchies of value generated by heritage and the common productive potential of local communities.

Keywords cultural heritage; common; community; knowledge practices; social theory; post-industrial economy

Introduction

The ideas comprised in this paper stem from my experience in Val de San Lorenzo, in Maragateria, a region of north-west Spain where I have been carrying out ethnographic research since 2006. The insights provided here arise in the friction between empirical experiences in the field and theoretical reflection. In Val de San Lorenzo, the ongoing heritagization process is undermining the very foundations in which it is based: a shared tradition,

cultural livelihood and aesthetic homogeneity. Why is this happening? To answer this question I take a detour in which I set out three basic ideas. First, that heritage should be conceived as a commons, disregarding modern epistemic divisions between nature and culture, objects and humans, culture and economy. Second, that this common heritage is been privatized and captured as immaterial value through different types of enclosure strategies and rents. In doing so, a fundamental alienation between subjects and objects occurs which reifies heritage and hinders its lively preservation in community life, and leads to social segmentations that cannot be solved through the post-political strategies of identity politics. Finally, that most scholars overlook this problematic and reproduce it, thus being unable to undertake the twofold task of developing the knowledge practices of the discipline while at the same time engaging in the transformation of reality as political agents.

The heritage conundrum

Hall considered heritage to be a

complex of organisations, institutions and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts — art galleries, specialist collections, public and private, museums of all kinds (general, survey or themed, historical or scientific, national or local) and sites of special historical interest

(1999, p. 3)

For him, the heritage endeavour goes beyond the preservation for posterity of valuable things based on aesthetic and historic criteria to fulfil governmentality tasks and to legitimize ‘national stories’. Heritage is a present-centred phenomenon and a discourse with material consequences (Smith 2006). It is a social construction and a metacultural process of selection, as there is no ‘heritage’ before somebody starts to preserve, remember, reclaim, enhance or celebrate something (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004). Clearly, people have always used ‘retrospective memories as resources of the past to convey a fabricated sense of destiny for the future. Heritage, in this sense, can be found, interpreted, given meanings, classified, presented, conserved and lost... within any age’ (Harvey 2008, p. 22). However, the concept of heritage has expanded to comprise the ‘entirety of what anthropologists call material culture – structures, sites, artefacts and to immaterial cultural manifestations now elaborated as intangible heritage’ (Anheier *et al.* 2011, p. 3). Consequently, the practice of heritage preservation and enhancement has become prominent in contemporary cultural life, both as a site of investment and of political debate around what is to be preserved, represented, remembered, documented or erased.

Heritage has become a multifaceted and complex concept. Thus, instead of positing an all-encompassing and necessarily reductionist definition of what it is, we should put forward a processual definition that keeps a dynamic tension between two levels of analysis. The first, more concerned with institutional and academic social constructions and practices, considers heritage as a set of ‘metacultural operations that extend museological values and methods’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2012, p. 199). The second refers to heritage broadly as ‘something that somebody or some people consider to be worthy of being valued, preserved, catalogued, exhibited, restored, admired (etc.); and others share that election – freely or by various mechanisms of imposition – so that an identification takes place and that ‘something’ is considered ours’ (Novelo 2005, p. 86). This second level is characterized by a more ‘emic’ and immanent approach and acknowledges that ‘heritage is grounded in culturally specific ideologies of kinship, residence, and property’ and that ‘the universalization of the nation-state as a collectivity of similar subunits has given those concepts globally hegemonic power’ (Herzfeld 2010, p. 259). However, today the nation is no longer the central site of heritage production. Critics of the British heritage industry signalled its reactionary character and promoted its democratization by underscoring the relevance of ‘other heritages’ and of the ‘history from below’ (see Wright 1985, Samuel 1994). People today tend to ‘construct multiple identities out of a great variety of materials, times and places’ (Anheier *et al.* 2011, p. 9). Nonetheless, some social actors and institutions still hold a great power in the symbolic representation of the cultures and heritages of others. Cultural representations invest meaning in heritage places and sites with which people connect physically or emotionally, which bound them up with notions of belonging, memory, ownership and consequently identity (Rose 1995, p. 91). In fact, identities are about ‘questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being . . . they relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself’ (Hall 1996, p. 4). The narrative of tradition aims at establishing a meaningful connection among community, past and identity. Therefore, Scott argues, it is ‘never neutral with respect to the values it embodies . . . if tradition presupposes “a common possession” it does not presuppose uniformity or plain consensus . . . It is a space of dispute as much as of consensus, of discord as much as accord’ (1999, p. 124).

This ‘common possession’ shared by communities is becoming a valuable asset within the global hierarchy of value where the primitive, the local, the traditional and the exotic are cherished (Hardt and Negri 2009). This normally entails the commodification of heritage, whose negative consequences have been signalled by different authors (Goulding 2000, Baillie *et al.* 2010). The transcendent metacultural selection of heritage as an economic resource carried out by institutions and academics tends to curtail the immanent relation between communities and their heritages. Moreover, today it is clear that

tourism is a fundamental actor in the production of heritage, memory and identity (Timothy and Nyaupane 2009). However, heritage scholars have primarily focused in the role of nation-states, institutions and experts in the production of heritage (e.g. Breglia 2006, Smith 2006, De Cesari 2010, Herzfeld 2010). As Winter argues, this stance disregards the increasing role capital plays in shaping heritage and privileging specific forms of academic, expert and cultural knowledge (2011). This not only stems from the relation between tourism and heritage, but also from the growing association between real estate properties and the values of conservation (Hamilakis and Duke 2009). This process of accumulation of heritage values by public and private social actors at multiple scales means that something is being enclosed and accumulated. I focus on that something – commons. I argue that the enclosure of common heritage values does not only curtail the immanent relation between communities and their heritages, but is also likely to preclude the reproduction of heritage as a resource due to its reification and rationalization.

The commons

The commons, or that which is being enclosed by capitalist entrepreneurs, were historically assumed to be doomed to disappearance and did not attract much academic attention. However, a renewed interest on the commons emerged after the work of a group of scholars, mainly British Marxist historians, who provided novel insights in relation to issues of social formation (Thompson 1968, Neeson 1996), and custom and tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Also, different studies explored the economic dimension of the commons (Polanyi 1957), especially in connection with Thompson's (1991) account of the 'moral economy' of peasant communities (see also Wolf 1966, Scott 1976). Moreover, Hardin's work on the 'tragedy of the commons' (1968) brought the commons to the academic and institutional forefront of the social sciences. Today, a 'commons is understood as any natural or manmade resource that is or could be held and used in common' (Berge and van Laerhoven 2011, p. 161). The main body of literature on the commons, stemming from Ostrom's work (1990), is concerned with answering two questions. First, why are natural resources over-exploited? And second, under what conditions are resource users and communities able to generate effective rules to manage them? (Acheson 2011). Consequently, most works are devoted to the study and improvement of the management of natural eco-social systems and common-pool resources such as fisheries or forests (see Berkes *et al.* 1989). This position is represented by the *International Association for the Study of the Commons*, devoted to 'bringing together interdisciplinary researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers for the purpose of fostering

better understandings, improvements, and sustainable solutions for environmental, electronic, and any other type of shared resource that is a commons or a commons-pool resource' (IASC). However, when we move away from the field of natural resource management the lack of scholarship on the commons is daunting, and different authors complain about the almost absence of research from this standpoint in their respective fields (e.g. Agrawal 2007, Stronza 2009). A similar situation occurs in the field of heritage studies, where the few accounts exploring the relation between heritage and community do not tackle the issue (e.g. Crooke 2010, Waterton and Smith 2010).

For Berge and van Laerhoven, the core problem of the commons is related to 'the governance of individual rational action in a context where outcomes are dependent on the actions of all other resource users. This is in essence "the" problem of collective action. It is the core problem for all kinds of government and has been a topic for discussion at least since Hobbes (1994 [1651]) introduced "Leviathan" as its solution' (2011, p. 161). Indeed, according to Locke and Hobbes the privatization of open fields through the enclosure process established the rightful proprietary relations over the previously chaotic and barbaric realm of the commons (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 301). For Ostrom, common-pool resources shared by groups of people are defined by 'subtractability' (i.e. that one person's use of the resource subtracts from the amount available to others) and by the difficulty of excluding others from using the resource (Ostrom *et al.* 1994).

But, what happens in post-scarcity environments where subtractability does not apply and resources are not been harvested but preserved and enhanced? What about immaterial knowledge and aesthetic values which, as Lazzarato (1997) argues, increase and expand the more they are shared and utilized? Answering these questions requires a consideration of heritage as a non-scarce and renewable resource (Holtorf 2005). Also, it is necessary to account for the artificial enclosures created around heritage resources and the dispositives that capture the common values associated with them, such as institutional documentation and sanctioning through official declarations, privatization of heritage sites, promotion of real estate accumulation through gentrification processes, or the capture of the heritage values of a community by tourism enterprises. To account for heritage as a commons it is thus necessary to explore how immaterial value is produced and captured within post-industrial economies.

To do so, post-workerist thinkers have set out a novel conceptualization of the commons as the collective potential embodied in what Marx defined as the living labour and general intellect. For them, the parasitic character of capital increases in post-industrial or cognitive capitalism, as it becomes ever more dependent on the immaterial, communicative and creative potential of the people (Marazzi 2008). There is a clear convergence between the post-industrial and the heritage regimes of value, as today the production of 'things' is secondary to the creation of 'forms of life' or 'worlds' where the

commodities can be inserted (Thrift 2006). These immaterial productions involve an appeal to the passions, enthusiasms and affects of consumers, who are incited to create malleable environments for products. What is being created is thus 'subjectivity': the object of production is really a subject, defined by a social relationship or a form of life (Marazzi 2000). In other words, the social fabric becomes bio-political because it is the expressions of life and the immaterial production of knowledge that are being valorized and put to work (Virno 2003). Heritage, as a representation of forms of life that embody immaterial value, plays a fundamental role in this process in which communities and nation states are trying to feed into a global political economy of prestige (Isar 2011) that seeks to extract foreign exchange value by converting cultural commons into commodities (Armitage 2007). Especially in countries rapidly transitioning towards post-industrial economies, governments respond to cultural globalization by intensifying their investments into their domestic heritage sectors (Winter 2011). Governments, heritage academics and experts, architects, urban planners and service sector entrepreneurs have channelled huge investments to the restoration and shaping of heritage sites and urban centres as cities become ever more reliant upon service sector economies related to tourism and leisure. Drawing in the case of Shanghai's Expo, Winter (2012) notes how heritage achieves the twofold task of rearranging the political economy of the city to suit the needs of a tertiary economy and to carry on with the task of nation-building construction as the country projects itself onto the international sphere.

Thus, from the post-workerist standpoint, the concept of the commons emerges as a response to the constant appropriations of the common values created through the cooperation of social forces. The commons can be conceived both as a productive force and the form in which wealth is produced: 'commons suggest alternative, non-commodified means to fulfil social needs, e.g. to obtain social wealth and to organise social production. Commons are necessarily created and sustained by communities, i.e. by social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange that are not reduced to the market form' (De Angelis 2003, p. 1). The commons must be conceived as a separate realm from the private and the public. Private property draws on the capture of the commons in seek of profit (whether through control of land and real estate, or through the new rents of copyright and patents), whereas the public sphere creates the 'institutional arrangements that attempt to regulate access to it' (Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 151). Contrary to the standard liberal narrative considering private property as the locus of freedom and productivity as opposed to the public, Hardt and Negri argue that today the commons is the locus of freedom and innovation, whereas its privatization and regulation curtails the open-ended productivity of social life (2009).

Heritage as a commons

Similar to the peasant lands a few centuries ago, heritage is today a commons. In order for capital to be able to exploit a commons, it must be enclosed in the framework of a post-scarcity environment. Ostrom's (Ostrom *et al.* 1999) account of social-ecological systems of common resources focuses on 'users', 'harvests' and 'productions'. However, the implications of common property management in contexts of cultural preservation and sharing are not considered. In fact, 'realizing income from these sources requires deep involvement in multi-scale governance for the owners of the conserved resource to realize any monetary benefit from the "products"' (Bray *et al.* 2012). Agrawal (2001) identifies four relevant variables to the successful governance of the commons: the character of the resource system (different kinds of heritage entities), the user group (communities, tourists, experts and entrepreneurs), the institutional arrangements (UNESCO, national and regional frameworks) and the external environment (macropolitics, social and market functioning, etc.). An in-depth account of these variables falls beyond the scope of this paper. Also, these variables must be considered as a whole as heritage can serve multiple purposes at the same time: heritage processes are always intertwined. For instance, institutional heritage management is not only the product of the characteristics of the heritage resource and the user system, but also generate new preferences that shape user groups and construct new heritage.

In fact, the construction of heritage entities is in tune with the cognitive or post-industrial economy described before. Thus, it is simplistic to argue that heritage entities are being commodified (Goulding 2000): these are enmeshed in complex processes of emergence that create the affective environments where heritage makes sense in a constant interplay between past and present, global values and local contexts, discourses and materiality. As metacultural products and immaterial values flowing in the global hierarchy of value (Herzfeld 2004), heritage commons are not tangible, appropriable, consumable or exchangeable resources. In Lessig's terminology, heritage commons are 'non-rivalrous resources' to which the logic of scarcity does or need not apply (1996). Science, language, art, knowledge or heritage values grow when they are socialized and diffused. As Rullani argues, to 'extract value from knowledge, it is necessary to accelerate its uses through its diffusion... and as barriers limiting access to it breakdown, it becomes common heritage for all the potential users' (2004, p. 103). In fact, the value of heritage only arises in the open-ended interplay with other commons: an educated and sensitive population, interested tourists, informed institutions or solid academic networks. Accordingly, much more value can be extracted from the Castle of Oxford (UK) than from the Castle of Coca (Spain). Although the latter is better preserved and more impressive, it is located in a non capital-intense area and thus it is not possible to generate value from it through the establishment of enclosures.

A fundamental question about heritage commons is the kinds of property, rules and ways societies arrange to solve the problem of its preservation and enhancement. The usual solution proposed to avoid the tragedy of the commons (i.e. the excessive exploitation and destruction of common resources) is to convert them into either private or public goods. According to Ostrom (1990), there are three fundamental ways for managing commons. The first is through external coercion from the state, which establishes heritage legislation, monitors behaviour and enforces compliance. However, 'this requires policy-makers to accurately assess the situation, and develop sufficient monitoring and effective but not excessive enforcement capacities at reasonable administrative cost' (Anthony and Campbell 2011). Young has coined the concept 'tragedy of the public' to argue that public decision and policy-making is susceptible to claims and demands of powerful interests and to corruption, which undermines the 'good governance of resources under public management' (2011, p. 74). Also, public management leads to the 'entrenchment of defenders of the status quo in legal settings, and the ossification of bureaucracies responsible for the implementation of policies' (Young 2011, p. 76). Different heritage scholars have pointed to the utilization of heritage by public institutions for the purposes of strengthening governmentality, nation-building processes and the reproduction of social and economic inequalities and segmentations (see Isar 2011).

A second way for managing the commons is to assign private property rights to assure that self-interested owners will preserve heritage. Contrarily to scarce goods like natural resources, property issues concerning heritage are complex matters. Thus, heritage commons can be held by private owners and be publicly managed (e.g. most palaces and castles). Also, and especially in states undergoing economic crises, institutions can delegate the management of heritage elements to private entrepreneurs (e.g. the Colosseum in Rome). However, the private appropriation of heritage values can be – and normally is – independent from property rights (e.g. the hotel owner that profits from the common heritage values of a village or an archaeological site without reinvesting those in the community or the asset). Young (2011) argues that the 'tragedy of the private' involves the utilization of goods for the interest of the owner and the favouring of specific uses over the common interest (e.g. shaping heritage for tourism consumption rather than to community revitalization) and the emergence of negative externalities (e.g. overuse and indirect or unintended destruction of heritage elements, loss of the 'appeal' of a heritage good due to its extrication from a meaningful social context). Thus, both private and public management of the heritage commons usually lead to situations of segmentation and alienation (Hafstein 2005). This is so because the capture of the common value that heritage generates by the logic of private property alienates the possessing subject from the object, and sets him or her apart and above the object as well as above other subjects excluded from the relation to the heritage entity (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 301). Spinozian-inspired anthropologies are clear at

signalling the priority of this fundamental inequality that renders futile ulterior attempts to negotiate the ‘rights over the object’ at the level of identity politics (Lordon 2006).

Similarly, it is necessary to deconstruct the idea that conceives heritage as a ‘common heritage of Humanity’ in Universal terms. Conceived as a Western metacultural creation, heritage is in itself an alien concept for most non-modern, non-western subjectivities. Thus, we must counter imperialist traditions of thought and practice that conceive heritage as global endeavour to ‘protect humanity’s outmost achievements’ (Bernbeck and Pollock 2004). This position is embodied by UNESCO, for instance in its condemnation of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in Afghanistan, considered ‘as crimes against the common heritage of humanity’ (Manhart 2001, p. 388). This Universalist understanding of the common implies a Western rationality that Castro-Gómez defines as the ‘point-zero’ perspective (2007), that is, the ‘God-eye view’ representing itself as being without a point of view.

This position disregards the complex power imbalances over the geo-body-politics of heritage, knowledge production and management (Grosfoguel 2007). Similarly, in attempting to produce ever more radical and alternative heritage knowledge, many scholars reproduce these epistemic schemas whereby studies *about* the subaltern are carried out rather than studies *with* and *from* the subaltern. Of course, this predominance of particular forms of heritage expertise ‘occurs precisely because they are both privileged by capital *and* at the same time enable the reproduction of capital, a process, which, by implication, allows certain forms of heritage, memory and identity to prevail’ (Winter 2011, p. 76). Accordingly, positivist and uncritical forms of knowledge are privileged in heritage projects (e.g. processual over post-processual archaeological knowledge) to serve the financial interests of those involved in gentrification processes or the management of heritage sites, from planners and tourism entrepreneurs to public bureaucrats and private investors. Clearly, these transcendental operations and metacultural selections estrange communities from their heritages and feed directly into the cultural tourism-development assemblage fostered by the state (Shepherd 2006). Would the common management of heritage solve the problems entailed by commodification? Would the devolution of heritage to the realm of the commons be an alternative to its privatization in cases of public financial or managerial incapability to manage it?

Commons and communities between the local and the global

The etymological root of ‘community’ (cum-munus) relates to the idea of ‘sharing a gift’ (Esposito 2009). However, differently from other meanings of ‘the word that have to do with individual reciprocity or donation, “munus”

implies a “gift” that exists only in the public sphere and for collective access’ (Barchiesi 2003, p. 5). Thus, it relates to an idea of the commons which is not opposed to ‘individual’ (who participates in the act of sharing) but to ‘property’, ‘as abdication/alienation from what is common as in the case of market exchange’ (Barchiesi 2003, p. 5). The nature of what is shared characterizes the specific nature of a community. Today, tradition and its valuable metacultural conversion into heritage within post-industrial economies are the ‘gift’ that many communities share. Similar to academic, neighbourhood, network or mining communities, we can then speak of heritage communities. However, we must avoid idealizing communities either as repositories of authenticity and identity or as sites of struggle against globalization. Communities are not automatically wise or democratic, and exist inside as well as outside and against capital (De Marcellus 2003). Not even Ostrom believed that local-level management was appropriate in all contexts. For her, there are no single solutions for the correct managing common resources: these must be tailored to complex and varied situations on the ground (2007). However, heritage commons are and have been necessarily created and sustained by communities, which are just the ‘basic bricks of society and close enough to control, to be responsible for and critical of’ (De Marcellus 2003, p. 2). Thus, communities are half-way between processes aimed at disciplining, segmenting and positioning them in the market, and alternative forces pushing towards a ‘governing through community’ (Rose 1999) and towards the identification and re-appropriation of collective values from below (Barchiesi 2003, pp. 3–4).

A friction and a creative tension arise when we juxtapose two ontological conceptions of community. Phenomenological accounts of community emphasize the radical embodiment of the individual in the community, a ‘being-in-common’ which highlights the pre-existence of community to our coming into being. Here, community is not a ‘something’ – an essence – but rather ‘something that happens to us’ (Nancy 1991, p. 2). This is the realm of the ‘given’, in which being is lived-in-common, and consequently, always shared and relational (Nancy 1991, p. 2). In this realm we can find the ‘given commons’, pre-existing realities which have been co-created by unspecified subjectivities during history and can be subject to heritagization processes, such as traditions, the past, material objects or buildings. This loosely defined group of entities constitutes the collective potentiality from which value can be created in post-industrial economies. On the other hand, the productivist ontology of Deleuze assumed by Hardt and Negri emphasizes the ongoing processes of construction/deconstruction of the commons, of what is shared whether material or intangible, necessary to sustain or shatter communities (Hardt and Negri 2009). What matters here is how the heritage givens are put to work through novel assemblages of value creation paralleled by novel discourses about past identities. Which heritage processes foster and which

prevent the creation of the commons? How does the appropriation of common heritage values affect communities?

Research on the commons shows that the ‘effective management of common pool resources through collective action is dependent upon the efforts of the resources users to establish an identity that is held collectively’ (Mosimane *et al.* 2012, p. 344). The bounded and immanent link between heritage, identity and community is fundamental because the more strongly a group of people identifies with a resource and ‘commit to act collectively, the stronger the collective action’. Consequently, ‘achieving sustainable use of common pool resources is thus determined by the interplay between collective identity and collective action’ (Mosimane *et al.* 2012, p. 344). Would the management of heritage as a commons avoid its commodification and therefore provide communities with positive feedback circuits that reinforce identification and collective efforts towards the preservation and enhancement of heritage? This question can only be advanced as a rhetoric hypothesis, as further theoretical and empirical research is needed to ascertain the implications of such management framework in reality.

The complexities and potentials involved and the tensions that arise between commons and community management are augmented by the fact that the local has been increasingly packaged as heritage in the global market. The ethnographic case study on *Commons management and ecotourism* in the Peruvian Amazon provided by Stronza (2009) demonstrates that community management of the commons has advantages as well as hindrances. Despite her case study not primarily focusing on heritage concerns and Amazonian communities not deploying complex discursive heritage constructions, she elaborates on issues that touch upon our study, namely the linkages between ecotourism and community. She wonders whether ecotourism is more likely to emerge and be more profitable in places where resources are owned communally, privately or publicly. Stronza analysed a situation in which local residents had partnered with a private tourism company since 1996 to build and co-manage an ecotourism lodge. Her research found three outcomes in favour of commons management that included ‘direct economic returns that act as conservation incentives, strengthened organization resulting from participatory management of ecotourism, and expanded networks of support from outside actors’ (2009, p. 56). Equally, she pointed to three challenges for collective action:

direct economic returns that enable expanded individual production and extraction, a new spirit of individual entrepreneurship that threatens to debilitate traditional social relations and institutions, and a conservation ethic that fosters dualistic thinking about people and nature and the zoning of places where resources are used vs. where they are preserved

(2009, p. 56)

In conclusion, the ecotourism initiative both supported and undermined the community management of common resources. It provided a more effective management framework and increased revenues, but at the same time disrupted social cohesion and ‘thus the potential for long-term, collective stewardship of the commons’ (2009, p. 58). Her nuanced approach shows that, without being a panacea, community management of heritage commons can pave the way for the exploration of novel forms of heritage preservation and enhancement.

The capture of commons and the becoming rent of profit

The new forms of value creation and extraction within post-industrial economies are fundamental for understanding how heritage commons are being appropriated. As Toscano notes, the ‘conundrum of contemporary capitalism is how to capture the invention of a difference and insert it into the cycles of production and reproduction. Whence the focus on forms of life, feeling and behaviour as indispensable categories for the analysis of today’s psychological economy’ (2007, p. 30). Institutional strategies of cataloguing and sanctioning aim at objectively ‘measuring’ the value of heritage elements. Those become publicly owned goods and are usually positioned in the market as valuable resources for tourism consumption. Pasquinelli (2010) characterizes contemporary forms of value extraction as parasitic because they appropriate social creativity through the exploitation of social production and the extraction of a rent from common values. This is what Vercellone terms the ‘becoming rent of profit’ of contemporary capitalism (2008). Profit is characteristic of the industrial era and refers to the power of capital to generate and extract surplus value from commodities and workforce (Pasquinelli 2010, p. 28). Instead, rent is the revenue that the owner of certain goods receives as a consequence of the fact that these goods are, or become, available in scarce quantities. Rent is related to the creation of artificial scarcities (enclosures) of a resource through monopolies or power that becomes not only ‘a mode of collecting the wealth generated by labour, but also constitutes a mechanism of de-socialisation of the common and of political, spatial and socio-economic segmentations of labour power’ (Vercellone 2008). To adopt Hardt and Negri’s (2009) terminology, the more capital permeates the heritage logics and squeezes its resources, attempting to measure heritage value so as to further impose it, the more it undermines the relation between the commons and the communities that sustain them: it acts as a corrupting influence on the generation and preservation of a lively (non-reified and non-commodified) common heritage.

Pasquinelli notes the existence of a wide variety of rents and regimes of accumulation (2010). The ‘old’ rents – land and real estate – have been

described by Harvey in *The Art of Rent* (2002). These are related to the creation of capital-intense areas through gentrification processes normally related to the rejuvenation of urban centres and heritage enhancement. The formation of profitable regimes of rent can rely on the valuation of different sorts of historical heritage, as in Barcelona (Tironi 2009) or Berlin (Bernt and Holm 2009), or in the creation of novel assemblages of heritage restoration and museums as in the 'creative cities' such as Bilbao. In a somewhat similar fashion, Bourdieu referred to accumulation of cultural capital, Harvey to collective symbolic capital, while Marxists talk about the appropriation of the general intellect. Furthermore, during the 1970s, and especially after the 1990s, a growing number of territorial projects of enhancement have been set up in Western countries that rely on the territorial values of each area (Magnaghi 2005). Heritage is generally at the centre of these initiatives, whether cultural parks in Europe or National Heritage Areas in the United States. Normally, they are implemented in economically decaying or peripheral areas where the industrial economic model is coming to an end or never had a strong presence (Benito del Pozo and Alonso González 2012).

Broadly, these areas rely in common territorial and heritage values, whether natural or cultural, to generate new economies and cultural identities that provide territorial rents in the form of real estate value, tourism and service sector businesses. These processes are tightly related to the re-personalization of the economy and physical space, centred on the connection between the meanings elaborated and assigned to places by people and global flows of investment and value, that is, in the profitable tension between the local and the global (Bonomi and Rullani 2005). This implies that territories must compete in the global hierarchy of (market) value (Herzfeld 2004), in a relational interplay of identifications and differentiations which define their position in relation to other places.

Most of these projects tend to privatize the benefits obtained from the common heritage values of a territory. I have studied the outcomes of two territorial projects of enhancement in Maragatería and Asturias (Spain), in which neoliberal management models apply. Basically, public institutions are responsible for the expenditure that heritage preservation and enhancement entails while private owners accumulate the profits. Furthermore, European and national public funds are channelled to private entrepreneurs to develop tourism and service sector businesses. Those feed into the flows of tourism that arrive to the territory attracted by its common heritage without reinvesting in, or promoting, these same heritage values that guarantee their revenue. After more of two decades of large investments both in the case of Asturias and Maragatería, the deterioration of the territories shows that the projects have failed.

Projects in which the profits made from heritage commons are reinserted into the community or in the same heritage commons are scarce. One of these places is the Historian's Office (OHCH) of La Habana (Cuba), where I have

carried out ethnographic research since 2009. The OHCH is a semi-autonomous institution that owns most heritage sites, museums and buildings in Old Havana's World Heritage site. Contrary to most historic centre rejuvenation projects, the growing revenues from tourism, land estate rents and service sector economies are not privatized but rather reinvested in the heritage and museum sector. Moreover, huge investments are geared to the local community in the form of schooling and housing betterment programs, among others. Value is captured from tourism to serve the local community, whose livelihood is deemed fundamental for the reproduction of the heritage commons and consequently for guaranteeing the long-term continuation of tourism revenue.

Therefore, heritage is fundamental because what is being globally valorized is the '*lived experience* of people and their *identities*, individual and collective' and '*life* in its various aspects' (Rullani 2009, p. 243). There is no commodification of heritage, but rather heritage participates in processes aiming at the creation of affective environments where the commodities are inserted and make sense. This becomes clear in the case of the World Heritage Trail of the Way of Saint James (Europe), whose political economy I explored during my ethnography in Maragatería as it traverses the region from side to side. In brief, the Way has undergone a process of touristification that undermines its original 'spiritual' character (Sánchez-Carretero 2012). We can consider the Way as a commons sustained by the 'Way's community', which comprises pilgrims along with religious and civic pilgrims and volunteer associations. Traditionally, these social actors organize pilgrim's shelters which function on a free or 'on donation' basis. However, a dispositive of capture of the Way's values has been deployed by institutions and tourism entrepreneurs. The Way has started to be promoted and marketed as an alternative and cheap holiday choice in tourism fairs and managed as such by institutions. Similarly, a network of private pilgrim's shelters has been created that captures the common values of the Way, charging higher prices to pilgrims – considered as tourists/consumers now – while at the same time employing volunteer 'hospitaleros' – pilgrim shelter's workers. Clearly, the advent of market logics associated with these unfair practices is shattering the 'Way's community' that sustained the Way's heritage commons – i.e. the affective environment that provides value, including the solidarity practices, volunteer work and the overall spiritual character. Also, it threatens the long-time endurance of the Way as a tourism resource due to the dissatisfaction of pilgrims, who perceive the lack of authenticity and feel deceived by market practices in a supposedly religious and spiritual trail.

Therefore, as the creation and circulation of knowledge and of wealth tend to concur more and more, many questions arise which have a direct impact in heritage issues whose response, however, falls beyond the scope of this paper. How can we account for the wealth produced by the heritage commons? Does the non-measurability of the common goods pave the way for their open appropriation? On what basis can we establish the share of a wealth whose production relies on a wide multiplicity of producers and consumers?

Cognitive economies and the new rents on the commons

The issue gains complexity if we look at the ‘new’ rents imposing regimes of property over the ‘new’ commons: immaterial production of knowledge, information and meaning. All those values are embodied by heritage: it contains ‘knowledge’, people can learn from heritage, while it also conveys meanings and has aesthetic values. Intellectual property rights are at the same time a juridical dispositive to control the creation and circulation of knowledge and a mode of regulating the sharing of profits generated by the creation and diffusion of an invention or of any valuable entity (Lazzarato 2006, p. 131). The strategies concerning heritage sanctioning and documentation employed by national and regional institutions in the global competition for prestige (Isar 2011) tend to converge with these practices. Moreover, the categories employed by most contemporary theorists on cognitive capitalism and intellectual property coincide with those employed by Tarde to describe social cooperation a century earlier: value can be obtained by keeping the monopoly of a secret (patent – invention – sanctioning of heritage sites by institutions) and on the multiplication of the uses of an invention (copyright – imitation – positioning heritage in the market for tourist consumption) (see Lazzarato 2002). Whereas the former strategy works fundamentally for scientific and artistic creations, the latter is designed for cultural products like music.

The strategies employed to enclose the heritage commons can be situated half-way between both. This can be illustrated by thinking UNESCO’s recently created (2003) category of intangible heritage in terms of immaterial rents and the commons. Not so much because ‘intangible’ can be equated with ‘immaterial’, but rather because this heritage connects with the broader framework of post-industrial capitalism. In fact, the distinction between tangible and intangible heritage is flawed: it reproduces the Western modern dualism of soul/matter and disregards the fact that heritage is always both a tangible and intangible process (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004). Similarly, there is a misunderstanding about the cognitive economy as a virtual field of immaterial value while, in reality, the material cannot be replaced by the immaterial. Aesthetic and knowledge values can only exist through material vectors, and the immaterial generates value provided that it grants ‘meaning’ to material processes (Pasquinelli 2010). For instance, a music CD has to be physically produced and consumed, requiring the materiality of human bodies and their time for its consumption. Similarly, intangible heritage sanctions common bodily performances and ‘ways of doing’ in a sort of ‘heritagization of human beings’ that reifies those practices and packages them for consumption (Castillo Ruiz 2007). Therefore, what is crucial in the sphere of intangible heritage and immaterial production is the friction ‘between the free reproducibility of knowledge and the non-reproducibility of the material’ (Pasquinelli 2010, p. 9).

The declaration of the ‘Gastronomic meal of the French’ as intangible World Heritage in 2010 illustrates this point. Again, the Western ideal of a Universalistic commons underlies the whole process. Thus, according to official material authored by the French government, ‘we have realised the value that certain culinary traditions and cultures hold for all of Humanity’ (Oltolini 2010, p. 23). The declaration raised controversy immediately in countries such as Italy or Spain that considered their gastronomy equally remarkable, and that had promoted the more inclusive declaration of the ‘Mediterranean Diet’ as intangible World Heritage. Many questions arose concerning the limits of intangible heritage, its increasingly random character and absurdity, and its tight relation with political issues. In fact, France launched in parallel a culinary television channel, a national culinary museum and primary school culinary programs. Moreover, French senator Catherine Dumas considered that the World Heritage status would ‘help us fight certain European regulations that don’t conform with our tradition’ (Iverson 2010). This strategy highlights the importance of intangible heritage for nation-building processes and the gathering of Soft Power: the power of a state does not rely exclusively on coercion capabilities but also on intangible values of prestige, reputation or cultural attractiveness (Nye 1990).

However, from another point of view, the declaration can be conceived as a macro process half-way between the strategy of the copyright and the patent, aimed at the capture of rents from a common heritage. Here, immaterial value is generated in the friction between the reproducibility of common knowledge and customs – the gastronomic meal of the French is not bounded geographically or by time – and the irreproducibility of material vectors – the *real* experience can only be lived in France. Accordingly, the declaration serves to brand France as a whole, but also specific material products which can be only consumed in France, the way French people do, and even better with some specific chefs and using quality labelled products. Thus, a commons embodied in knowledge and tradition becomes a dispositive for the reinforcement of national cultural identities and memories and for positioning those in the market. Clearly, heritage contributes to the control of the value that arises ‘not from what is but from what is not yet but can potentially become, that is from the pull of the future, and from the new distributions of the sensible that can arise from that change’ (Thrift 2006, p. 7).

Capturing common values: a case study

The area of my research (Maragatería, Spain) illustrates a process by which the ‘given’ common heritage (the *life* of people and their houses, landscapes, material culture, traditions, etc.) is reassembled in ways that enable the social construction of heritage through metacultural operations that provide value.

Thus, the 'given' heritage is arranged so as to grant a form of distinction to certain villages as culturally specific 'brands' in the global market in connection to global flows of tourism and investment. This enables certain (private) social actors to capture those values that arise in the friction between the material vector (the common 'given' heritage) and the immaterial vector (the 'metacultural' social construction of it as something valuable). The picture is complicated by the fact that the 'old commons' still survive in Maragatería, in the form of communal properties (lands, real estate assets and woods), rights over hunting and mushroom collection areas, and local communal institutions. Local people call these assets 'patrimonio' – heritage – in the sense of a property that can be inherited, thus far from institutional and academic understandings of the concept that refers to the metacultural selection of certain objects according to specific values (Hall 1999). However, the communal property over those goods is losing significance owing to the steady decline in the value of the material vectors (agricultural and cattle land, woods or rural real estate) in the competitive global economy and the intellectual and cultural privileging of individual forms of property (Brown 2006). Also, the Spanish State is waging a battle against the 'Juntas Vecinales', the autonomous neighbour councils that manage common properties and decision-making in the villages since medieval times. In fact, a July 2012 draft of a decree-law envisages the enforced suppression of these institutions.

Clearly, local communities are being disempowered and their capacity to harness the communal potential values they hold, in the form of their past, traditions, materiality or people's ways of life, is being undermined. These elements, arranged in a certain way, can become assets in the global regime of tourism as immaterial value. Accordingly, highly profitable private tourism enterprises have been established with the support of European Union funds for rural development that tap into these immaterial common heritage without acknowledging the source of their value. The shift from the material to intense immaterial regimes of value accumulation leaves communities not only devoid of legal instruments for their protection, but also of the necessary cultural tools for dealing with the new situation. My research explored the ways in which common heritage was captured by public and private social actors in the transition towards a post-industrial economy in Val de San Lorenzo, along with the consequences of the process for both heritage assets and the relation between those and the community.

Val de San Lorenzo is a village of 700 inhabitants located in the peripheral and underdeveloped area of Maragatería. Today, it is known for its gastronomy, folklore and monumental architecture, although its economy and demography are still decaying (Alonso González 2009). The distinctive character of Val de San Lorenzo stems from the engagement of the majority of its population in textile production since medieval times. The gradual modernization of textile machinery during the nineteenth century upsets the

balance between resources and demography, leading to a migratory exodus whereby half of the villagers left for Argentina, Cuba and Mexico between 1870 and 1940. This entailed a disruption in the common forms of property and decision-making that prevailed in the village hitherto.

During that period, the village had to negotiate the different pathways towards industrialization and modernization. Two clear tendencies emerged. On one side, a group influenced by the liberal ideas coming from the emigrants in Cuba and Mexico strove to create private textile companies with salaried labour which carried out all the productive processes. They privileged individual forms of property and entrepreneurial mentality. On the other side, most villagers were receptive to the socialist ideas coming from those who had migrated to Buenos Aires. They considered fundamental to preserve the communal lifestyle and forms of management to avoid social conflict and change, and thus established a communal textile company and factory called 'Comunal' in 1920, which was expanded in 1953. However, only a part of the productive process was done in the 'Comunal': the house and the family remained as the basic units of production. The ideological charge of the process was low and it would be deceiving to consider it as a communist initiative. Rather, it represented a form of adapting the pre-industrial communitarian ethos to a new form of production, which resulted in a sort of 'folk industrialization'. The fact that the fascist dictatorship of General Franco tolerated it demonstrates this point. With highs and lows, the communal factory survived until 2000.

During the boom in the Spanish economy between 1960 and 1980, those who had embraced the liberal credo and created private factories made great profits. They could afford to invest in symbolic capital and elements of distinction. Thus, they built huge houses with brick and concrete, materials that conformed to the patterns of modernity (Figure 1) and abandoned their old vernacular houses made with stone and straw (Figure 2), which became a symbol of poverty. In turn, the revenues of communal producers remained lower. To avoid the shame of staying symbolically bounded to the past and poverty, they covered their stone façades with limestone or concrete (Figure 3). Also, they organically added new productive and functional areas within their houses and workshops as they could afford to modernize them.

After Spain joined the European Union in 1986 and the market opened to global competition, industrial profits declined and both liberal and communal producers closed down their businesses gradually. In an attempt to reinvigorate the economy of the village through a shift towards a service-based economy, liberal entrepreneurs and the city council implemented a plan of heritagization. This was supported by the European structural funds, which aimed precisely at counteracting deindustrialization processes and at fostering the transition towards tertiary economies.

In a clear example of public enforcement over common goods, the city council enacted urban laws that sought to reinforce the 'traditional' aesthetic



FIGURE 1 House built with modern materials, a symbolic representation of power in the village.

atmosphere of the village. Heritage legislation favoured the use of stone and old-looking tiles in buildings, restricted the use of concrete, bricks and plastic, and forbade the popular stone benches where people used to seat together and chat because those were considered to disrupt the aesthetic homogeneity of the village. With the support of the Regional Government of Castile and León, the former 'Comunal' factory was bought to the communal society and transformed into a Textile Museum in 2006. The heritagization of the building involved emptying it of materials perceived to be ugly and to go against perceived notions of tradition, such as metal, bricks or concrete, and to paint it with the supposedly traditional colours of the area (Figure 4). The story told in the museum is one of technical progress and modernization, in which textile objects and machines are ordered from the primitive to the most recent in a clear evolutionary fashion. Paradoxically, the narrative of the



FIGURE 2 Remnants of an abandoned vernacular house built with stone and straw.

‘Comunal’ museum disregards the existence of a common productive system and a communal society in opposition to the private entrepreneurs. Equally, it ignores the role of emigrants, women or workers in the textile process. Clearly, the fundamental role of the museum is to guarantee the immaterial value of the label ‘Val de San Lorenzo’ that reinforces the identity of the village and helps positioning it in the market as a tourism destination. Also, it grants symbolic value to the luxury textile goods that the few remaining entrepreneurs produce.

In parallel to the activities of the city council, liberal entrepreneurs reinvested their capital in hotels and restaurants and in the restoration of old houses (Figure 5). Ironically, they were those who had readily embraced modernity and its materiality and built houses with bricks and concrete which are now considered to represent ‘ugliness’ within the postmodern heritage regime of value (Bendix *et al.* 2012). In a clear postmodern metaphor, today the former liberal entrepreneurs build huge modern brick and concrete houses but cover them with expensive old-looking stones and tiles so as not to disrupt the ‘traditional atmosphere’ of the village (Figure 6). Instead, the changes in the houses of communal producers reflect the will to acquire the formerly inaccessible materials such as concrete, bricks or corrugated iron roofs. Paradoxically, now they cannot afford to build with stone now due to its rocketing prices, even though urban laws enforce it. Clearly, this situation clashes with the will of tourism entrepreneurs and the local council to preserve the formal homogeneity and urban harmony of the village for tourism purposes.

In sum, the ‘given’ common heritage of the village, its material culture, pasts, traditions, craftsmanship and surrounding landscapes have been rearranged and put to work for the valorization processes implemented by local



FIGURE 3 Vernacular houses are normally covered by concrete and limestone, or painted. Living in a stone house is considered a sign of backwardness and poverty by local people.

entrepreneurs and public institutions. They have abandoned material production and the search for profits in the factory for a model based on the capture of the rents generated by the common heritage values of the village through



FIGURE 4 *Centro de Interpretación Textil La Comunal* after the restoration and heritagization process.



FIGURE 5 The real state market rocketed in the Maragatería area during the 1990s and 2000s. Heritagized houses were the most desired and therefore expensive properties for both local entrepreneurs and urban newcomers looking for second residences in a rural area.

tourism and service-based economies (hotels, restaurants, leisure time and house restoration companies, etc.). The museum and urban policies endeavour to generate a distinctive identity and to establish a new ideal of community and



FIGURE 6 Postmodern house built with a modern structure and covered by a traditional-looking envelope of vernacular tiles and stones.

identity that recreates a sanitized image of the past and a shared tradition that never existed. These new strategies of cultural representation stand for and symbolize the values of the ruling classes, subjecting the rest of the community to its dominant meanings (Hall 1999). This process of identification is fuelled by the agency of self-aware social actors that consciously and purposefully promote certain subjectivities and discourses about identity. In other words, they can thematize identities and create cultural self-representations, generating discourses that reify an identity from a metacultural position. This entails a detachment of the enunciating subject from the object which is being 'identified'. The modern identity of a village can then be reified as an essential identity (Castro-Gómez 2007) to which some heritage elements are attached. Thus, the private management of the heritage commons involves a transcendental operation that creates a cultural representation of identity intended to be marketed and connected to flows of tourism and investment. This disregards the immanent links between communities and heritage, and places certain subjects – normally local economic and cultural elites – in a different sphere that is extricated from the common life of the community.

This situation entails a twofold oppression. At the level of identity politics, it excludes the voices and does not represent the identities of the majority of people in the community. Most people in Val de San Lorenzo have never stepped into the textile museum and reject the heritagization process. Thus, the collective identity – the shared meanings which direct the behaviours of the community – has been detached from the common heritage assets: the immanent relation between commons and community has been curtailed. Today, most people consider that heritage preservation and the museum only benefit a few social actors in the village, a belief which undermines the degree of individual identification with the collective and the potential for long-term heritage conservation.

At the level of subjectification and agency (Grossberg 1996), the heritagization process does not acknowledge the common sources that underpin the value that is being captured by local entrepreneurs. During the process of industrialization there was a dialectical tension over the appropriation of the commons of the village – craftsmanship and know-how, reputation as textile producers in the Spanish market, the means and materials of production, etc. – between a communal society and private entrepreneurs. However, during the post-industrial period the new values enclosed are the immaterial commons – aesthetic beauty, traditions, arts and crafts, folklore, etc. – which are being materially captured by a few people while the village rapidly decays economically and demographically. This entails a disaffection of the population with their textile past and traditions, a split between subjects and objects. Could we devise models of re-appropriation of the commons to oppose its privatization in the post-industrial period and thus recover the missing bond between community and commons?

This is important because the failure of public and private models of heritage management leads to the gradual destruction or the decrease in the value of the heritage commons. This can occur through a loss of authenticity – considered here as the bounded relation between a community and a specific heritage – that can lead to a lower tourism satisfaction. Also, the livelihood of heritage fades away as people in the village lose interest in the preservation of textile objects and traditions, of buildings and overall urban aesthetics, and of the environment broadly. Some individuals might even act purposefully against the heritagization process, as the man in [Figure 7](#) who is getting rid of the stone coverage of his house to leave the ‘ugly’ bricks and concrete in sight. Similarly, unintended side effects of the heritagization process undermine the heritage value of the village as a whole. For instance, the huge need of stone for the restorations and for the building of new ‘old-looking’ houses, along with its high market prices, has led many to plunder the traditional stone walls that served to enclose cattle. Those had fallen in disuse but granted a distinctive character to the surrounding landscape of the village. Clearly, the absence of an ontological status granted to the ‘immaterial commons’ reduces the overall value of the village even in capitalistic terms (as a brand) because the value that can be captured by private entrepreneurs is reduced as well. More importantly, it precludes the positive reproduction of the forms of life



FIGURE 7 A man gets rid of the stone coverage of his modern house, leaving the ‘ugly’ bricks and concrete in sight.

that shaped the ‘given’ heritage, that guarantee its preservation and reproduction, and whose development paves the way for increasing the value of common heritage values. Disregarding this fact leads to the reification of heritage and to break the relation between communities and their heritages.

Facing the failure of public and private heritage management and the increasing revalorization of collective tenure frameworks for the management of the commons worldwide (Brown 2006), could we say that heritage is more likely to be preserved in places where it is considered as a commons and owned communally? Would touristification projects be more profitable in that case? What would entail for national and international heritage institutions to acknowledge the common (not public or private) ontological and legal status of some heritage elements? It is necessary to move from a negative conceptualization of the commons as that which is being enclosed by private and public actors to a definition that acknowledges its positive ontological character. Ultimately, affirming the positive ontological status of the immaterial commons and the necessary immanent connection between those values, specific forms of life and different understandings of heritage is a conceptual move that leads us beyond essentialist conceptions of heritage often connected with conservative politics and policies.

Conclusion

As a metacultural discursive notion, heritage is the product of a Western colonial operation that nominates certain entities (heritage knowledge – objectification), severs the relations among them (heritage sanctioning and appropriation – repression) and introduces them into novel relational networks (heritage commodification – administration), imposing certain meanings and worldviews in the process (Haber 2011). The ‘coloniality of power’ (Mignolo 2012) is still at work under the new guise of cognitive capitalism: today, material goods are not sought anymore, but rather property over capital-intense common immaterial vectors such as aesthetics, information and knowledge that enable the creation of rents. Moreover, understanding heritage as a commons is in tune with Latour’s project of de-epistemologizing and re-ontologizing knowledge activities (2007, p. 87). The construction of heritage must be conceived as a gradual process whereby different chains of experiences are assembled to generate new valuable affective environments and objects relationally, in the interplay between the global hierarchies of value and the local contexts. Therefore, concerning heritage knowledge practices, heritage commons cannot be considered to be valuable objects waiting to be discovered ‘out there’ – as naive empiricism would have it – nor in here, in our minds – as social constructivism would have it. As Latour notes, both strategies imply an epistemic ‘salto mortale’ which carry on posing the misled

question of ‘what is heritage?’ rather than the situated inquiries of how, from what, by whom and how well is it constructed. Conceiving heritage as a commons requires researchers to avoid approaching a situation from the safe disciplinary boundaries of established systems of thought and to be open to other paradigms in which specific theories interact with the dynamism of diverse historical-political configurations (Mignolo 2007). What matters are the differential uses of ‘heritage’ as a *universal* or as a *situated* concept in the framing of processes of privatization of common values and attempts to re-appropriate them. This decolonial perspective points to a situated conception of the commons, which should be conceived as a verb. Thus, we should ask, what heritage processes work towards building community and new forms of common life? Which reify heritage and tend towards governmental or market regimes that shatter the being-in-common of communities and threaten the long-term preservation of heritage?

By giving an ontological status to heritage commons as non-scarce resources, scholars can open new pathways for research. First, by abandoning the logics of Western universal knowledge that imply a split between researcher and object of study, we acknowledge our positioning within real contexts and the productive character of knowledge (Latour 2007). In other words, scholars should become mediators between communities, institutions, markets and knowledge practices. This implies working towards the connection of global hierarchies of value with local settings in ways that respect not ‘humanity’s common heritage’, but the situated immaterial values that the common heritages of communities represent. These should not be idealized as locus of struggle against globalization: communities are both within and outside capital logics. What matters, however, is to preserve the immanence between communities and their heritages to guarantee their reproduction and livelihood.

Strategies should be devised to protect or re-appropriate the common heritage values, working towards the continued livelihood of common heritage practices rather than just documenting their fragmentation, criticizing their commodification or, worse, measuring the values of heritage and paving the way for touristification processes. This sort of ontological politics does not only aim to preserve the ‘given’ heritage, but rather to construct it in ways that maintain the immanent relation between communities and ‘the things they consider to be worthy of being valued’ (Novelo 2005, p. 86). This precludes the alienating meta-cultural split between objects and subjects that characterizes processes of enclosure of the commons. These usually entail a deterritorialization and shattering of the collective identities of communities that disrupt social cohesion and thus the potential for long-term collective stewardship and reproduction of heritage values. Exploring heritage as a commons requires us to carry out in-depth empirical research in specific heritage contexts while at the same time evolving internal disciplinary knowledge practices. Conceiving heritage as a commons opens up some pressing and exciting new areas for future research that we have only started to outline here.

Notes on Contributor

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