

Heritage and multivocal history: Can the past inspire new futures?

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Introduction

Historical urban centers are complex spaces, their history involving the intersection of different types of power relations. In this sense, what does conservation and management mean? What role does past reconstruction play in shaping more democratic futures? Those questions raised in the discussions carried out at the *Authenticity and Reconstructions “A contemporary provocation: reconstructions as tools of future-making”* workshop which took place at the ICOMOS University Forum, March 13th-15th, 2017. As my current research and fieldwork in Brazil are focused in how public institutions can stimulate social and cultural changes, and taking into account the workshop thought-provoking questions, the aim of this paper is to discuss how heritage can become a means for social justice and political empowerment and how the past can become an important tool for promoting critical thought in the face of existing forms of social and gender inequality.

In this sense, I shall argue that forms of heritage management that guarantee human rights, cannot avoid debating perceptions of authenticity, reconstruction and policies of engagement. Although these premises are recognized in documents and charters, the challenge of how to integrate them into practices remains, and for such purposes, proposals for implementation must be constructed on the basis of knowledge of communities and their contexts. The two cases I will examine here have sought to set up a challenge that those working with such premises must face: if on the one hand we have more universal concerns from the point of view of human rights and access to culture, on the other, both cases demonstrate the intersectionality of social tensions as well as possibilities for new beginnings and narratives.

This led us to a series of challenges that, in the end, bring us back to current themes such as forced immigration, dislocation, identity, authenticity and reconstruction, global challenges that

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intersect with local problems like the social inequality, exclusion and ongoing process of gentrification that characterize life in Curitiba's historical center. Inspired by Barbara Little's (2007) proposal to question the notion that the past sustains the *status quo*, the partnership I set up with the Museu Paranaense (Parana State Museum), in Curitiba, southern Brazil put together people from different backgrounds (professors and undergraduate students from the History Department of the Federal University of Parana, Museum's staff, volunteers and social activists) and allowed debates on Curitiba's heritage conservation and management programs that have led me to perceive the urgency of debate on painful past.

The paper will then examine these projects developed at Museu Paranaense, pointing to some possible ways to use the past in the construction of a more democratic future. For these purposes first, I present the theoretical underpinnings of my approach, arguing that heritage management is not a finished product but part of a continuous process of social and cultural construction. Second, I provide an introduction to the projects we carried out and demonstrate their interface with the above-mentioned *Workshop* and the urgency to discuss social engagement in past reconstruction. Finally, I demonstrate the complexity of central urban areas and how engaging people in discussions on troubled and colonial periods of the past may lead to the critical reconstruction of those historical eras, while helping to democratize the present and build new perspectives on heritage management.

Heritage Management: Current Challenges

For several years now, discussions on the place of material culture and heritage and its potential contribution to public policy have occupied an important place in several areas of knowledge, including Archaeology. Rockman and Flatman (2013), for example, advocate the urgent engagement of academia and education and, from that perspective, go on to discuss the impact that sites and excavations have at local, national and global levels. In other words, for these authors it is impossible to speak of material culture without discussing political actions and decision-making processes regarding the choice of narratives to be constructed. Within this process, it becomes necessary to think about human behavior and different cultures in a broad sense, albeit in connection with the local; for these purposes, concepts such as reconstruction, resilience, sustainability and forms of communication should be discussed. Furthermore, wielding these diverse aspects becomes the central task of those who manage heritage and this is why clarity in decision-making and in the way different stakeholders are involved is fundamental, if the projects developed are to have a more intense connection to members of communities.

The growing attention that is being given to the social value of projects and the strengthening of the relationship between heritage management and local communities has produced new strategies for action based on interdisciplinarity. From a historical perspective, Díaz-Andreu (2017) asserts that the more traditional approach to artistic and historical heritage was modified for the first time during the post World War II period. If in 1948 the Declaration of Human Rights produced the earliest reflections on cultural diversity, the following decades were heavily marked by struggles of indigenous peoples and for the civil rights of minorities. In this ample debate, Diaz-Andreu highlights the year 1961 as an important landmark when in Chicago, USA, the organizers of *The Chicago American Indian Conference* invited native peoples to take part, for the first time, in an academic symposium. Furthermore, in 1970s, in Australia, and with ICOMOS support, the first version of the *Burra Charter* was drafted, a document that was fundamental in initiating the revision of principles of heritage preservation and management in order to decentralize decision-making and move toward engaging community participation in what was once the more exclusive terrain of academics and specialists.

Other authors also highlight the relevance of the *Burra Charter* for the construction of perspectives that try to align heritage and social values with conservation practices and policies (Jones 2017; Olivier 2017; Silberman 2012, for example). Jones (2017: 22), defending the importance of dialogue with members of the community, argues that social and cultural values are fluid and that often, if decisions remain restricted to specialists, the dynamic nature of the relation that society develops with heritage may be led astray. In this regard, oral history comes to the forefront as a method for getting to know the desires of the population, revealing their perceptions of memory, symbols and social practices for the purposes of conserving and managing heritage. Thus, it makes way for the production, negotiation and transformation of meanings, memory and values. The dialogue between scientific expertise and public desires are, for the above-mentioned author, creative encounters that renew actions and allow for less stagnant relations between memory and heritage.

Oliver (2017), in turn, makes an argument that is similar to Jones', but also insists that discussion on patrimony and community are important for the protection of human rights and the maintenance of democracy. In other words, conventions like those that took place in Florence and Faro as well as charters such as those of *Burra* or *Venice* are fundamental as guidelines on social inclusion and public participation in decision-making processes. In this regard, the public is not a mere consumer of proposals, but takes part in formulating them; it is therefore important to reflect on forms of engagement and interaction.

If the charters and conventions that I have mentioned were fundamental in raising or supplying significant guidelines for community participation in decision-making, the *Nara Charter* (1994) and the *Nara + 20* document took further important steps in that direction with regard to the issue of authenticity. Both of those documents reassert the importance of community participation, social inclusion and sustainability in heritage conservation, and recognize the challenges that globalization, urbanization, dislocations and new technologies bring about. In other words, in expanding the scope of what constitutes heritage and highlighting the importance of bridges between its tangible and intangible forms, these charters recognize the relevance of situating actions within their cultural contexts and preserving diversity. They also provide incentives for new methodologies, in their recognition that authenticity is a concept needing constant re-evaluation and resignification. In this regard, the identification of the rights, degrees of representation and responsibilities of different stakeholders is crucial to the development of sustainable public policies for heritage management. Thus, if authenticity is to have a resonance at social, emotional and identity levels, administration must in turn involve constant discussion of cultural values and the meanings of objects and places with the community.

Through these considerations, it becomes evident that the global struggles for civil rights that took place between 1950 and 1970 wrought debates that altered initial perceptions on heritage and established an agenda of debate on society, culture, politics and economics. The diversity of stakeholders and importance of community presence with an active role in this process brought with it new ethical issues and the rethinking of values, thereby placing concepts such as authenticity, reconstruction and memory in key positions that also required constant debate. Finally, it is important to emphasize that both the scholars I mention here and the documents that I have highlighted recognize the magnitude of challenges and the imperative of historical and cultural context for all debates.

The two following experiences I will discuss are deeply linked to these ideas and to Brazilian social and cultural context. From a theoretical point of view, the construction of more democratic public policies around heritage management emerges in Brazil, on the one hand, as Funari and Bezerra (2013) suggest, through the first critiques of Eurocentrism, as well as through the ideas of Paulo Freire (Tamanini, 2013), who although persecuted and exiled during the military regime (1964-1985) became known as the creator of a critical pedagogy and as one of the great defenders of educational methods based on solidarity. While the critiques of Eurocentrism opened the way for discussion on the importance of material culture and heritage reaching different publics (such as social scientists, schools, universities and media in general) placing Latin America at the top of the list in contributions to the critique of Eurocentric scientific discourse, Freire was a key figure in advancing perspectives on the role of knowledge and the social responsibility of the

educator. These ideas and practices, which spread throughout Latin America over the course of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, were crucial to the post-1985 development of experiences of heritage education in Brazil geared toward critical and shared dimensions of knowledge.

Two experiences

Silberman (2012), discussing the relationship between human rights and heritage management, argues that more important than merely elucidating them is to incorporate them into practice. This is a fundamental debate, since definitions of heritage and their management belong to a context of translation of past to present and because social, cultural, political and economic interests intersect in decision-making processes. The relationship with issues of human rights, in the case of the preservation of cultural diversity, is fundamental for the construction of critical perspectives on the past. In other words, political engagement must be aligned with the multivocality of the past in the building of a public discourse that seeks social justice, since heritage must be a part of community life and its values. In this quest for cultural spaces it is important to be willing to revise more traditional concepts of heritage.

Such reflections, along with the Brazilian social theory on the role of knowledge and the social responsibility of the educator, provide fundamental sustenance to the two experiences that I go on to describe. Taking currently prominent issues as my point of departure - racism, gender inequality and gentrification - the two projects I discuss here sought to map problems regarding the historical center of Curitiba, people's perceptions and the Paraná State Museum as a space where community debates on a turbulent past and social exclusion could begin to take place.

1. Racism, silence and re-signification

The *Largo da Ordem* is considered the historic center of the city of Curitiba and many of its buildings are heritage, such as the Romario Martins House (Casa Romário Martins), the Red House (Casa Vermelha), the Museum of Religious Art (Museu de Arte Sacra) and the Water Trough (o Bebedouro). Although the area underwent successive renovations, particularly over the course of the 20th century, affecting original structures through reconstructions and changes to building façades, the locale enjoys numerous visitors, especially on Sunday mornings when a handcrafts fair spreads over the grounds. However, as a region close to the city's center area, it is currently undergoing gentrification processes that mix higher-priced housing with lower rent apartment buildings, many of which are occupied by Haitian immigrants who have come to Curitiba in search of employment and a better life. Thus, the region is now an area frequented by people of diverse

socio-cultural origins, with a high prevalence of those coming from marginalized groups who are more visible during the evening hours.

The Paraná State Museum is about a ten-minute walk from *Largo da Ordem*. It is housed in a palace that was once the home of a German immigrant who became quite wealthy. Albeit located near the historical center and constituting an institution that dates from the 19th century, which makes it one of the country's first national museums, until very recently the museum catered primarily to city schools and rarely attracted tourists. In the research that I coordinated, supervising UFPR undergraduates in History (the team that carried out the research was made up of 18 undergraduate students - 12 of whom were on scholarship and 6 volunteers, all members of the honors training program "PET-História", for which I served as tutor during the period), we found that schools from neighborhoods in the outlying periphery did not recognize the historic center and the Museum as the part of the city that they belonged to. Our initial research, carried out in 2013 and 2014, showed that people generally saw the *Largo* as place of the handcrafts fair or of European culture, but not of their own history. It was through these findings on how disconnected this heritage area was from local culture that the idea we had in 2015, to study the *Largo's* Church of the Rosary (Igreja do Rosário), a place of worship founded in 1737 by enslaved Afro-Brazilians, came about².

The public presentation of our research results included the participation of people with connections to the Black movement. This was a particularly instigating moment, since it was the dialogue between academic researchers and social movements that had taken us to the Museum in the first place. Given the fact that our group was already engaged in other projects involving the Museum, these new conversations led to a proposal involving the revision of its exhibit circuit, immediately embraced by general director Renato Carneiro Jr. and the coordinator of the Museum's History Department, Tatiana Takatuzi. A working group including university professors, students, historians, a member of the Black movement, activists and museum staff was put together to carry out an inventory of Museum materials and a study on how to make changes in the exhibit circuit. The response to and engagement in the new environment were quite intense, and little by little, people who had never frequented the Museum because they considered it to be an institution

2 The general goal of our research was to collect written and material documentation on the Church and thereby access aspects of Afro-Brazilian culture present in Curitiba since the colonial period. We also looked at the process of restoration of the Church in the 20th century, as part of the area modernization. Thus, our tasks included registry of tangible and intangible heritage - the former, dealing specifically with material which pertains to the architectural transformation of the church in *Largo da Ordem*, and the latter, referring to Black culture and religiosity in Curitiba. Discussions were carried out in the quest for broader social debate on the effacement of memories of Afro-Brazilian struggle and daily life in the region, since prevailing perceptions in the city of Curitiba promote the biased notion that it was settled and built by European immigrants, and those of German, Polish and Ukrainian backgrounds in particular (for detail see Funari and Garraffoni 2016).

focusing on elite culture began to visit it and use its collections for research purposes, thus bringing a new dynamic to the institution.

Mendonça and Ramos (2017), discussing the experience, commented on the major difficulties presented by the restricted nature of the collection itself. Yet they also noted that the possibility to retell stories of conflict such as the Contestado War. Using photographs from Museum archives or displaying clothing from religious festivities from the Anthropological collection in conjunction with the Church of the Rosary and the *Congada* procession allows a vision in which the Afro-Brazilian population is not represented as submissive but as cultivating their own perceptions of the sacred, of work and beliefs. Visibility is thereby given to cultural aspects which are customarily marginalized in a city that has been essentially constructed as heir of a German culture.

With the welcome reception and intense debates that our work evoked, another important issue also came to the forefront: the low representation of women's presence, given the fact that the existing exhibit circuit was not only largely white but also almost exclusively male. Hence, alongside discussions on Afro-Brazilian culture, and the working group on the topic that was set up within the Museum, my colleague Priscila Piazzentini Vieira and I put together a discussion group on women's presence and began work on a new front: gender studies.

2. Women's History and Gender Equality

As I mentioned earlier, the dislocation of reflections on Afro-Brazilian culture from the historic space of *Largo da Ordem* to the Museum's exhibit circuit was a result of other projects that were being carried out in partnership with that institution, encouraging us to re-situate it within the city's historic center as a site for public debates linked to community and social movement interests. One such project, in 2014, was linked to the concerns of student members of feminist collectives which had begun inquiries into the absence of women within the Museum main exhibition. On the occasion of the inauguration of a new wing of the museum devoted to industrialization in Curitiba, young women history students who were participating in our project uncovered the story of the Venske ribbon factory and proposed putting the story of its women workers into the exhibit through the use of photography. From a museographical point of view, this was a very interesting undertaking, since it meant that the factory would be presented to the public from the point of view of women's work, as well as from the perspective of its owners, thereby stimulating reflections on class and gender. This effort provided us with our first opportunity to discuss women's presence with the Museum staff, receiving the wholehearted support of the historical coordinator Tatiana Takatuzi from the very start. On the occasion of the exhibit opening as well as through comments that were made afterwards, we were able to perceive the impact it had

made on the public. This public reaction, as well as the increase in numbers of museum visitors, involvement on the part of the Black movement and the working group that was created to discuss racial issues, were together factors that motivated us to take on a new project, delving even further into discussions on the past and on social exclusion.

Furthermore, it was precisely the work we did with the Venske ribbon factory that revealed the wealth of existing Museum collection material, the realization that it was home to wide range of cultural material that would enable us to approach Women's History from different angles - paintings, clothing, necklaces from different indigenous peoples, machines (typewriters, telephones, sewing machines) that represent women's work throughout different periods of the 20th century, pottery from different indigenous people and *quilombola* (marron) communities, diaries, photography, and many other artifacts that have not yet been published, studied nor exhibited for public view. In the face of such ample possibility, we were anxious to create new means for socializing and circulating academic knowledge. Thus, we began to hold debates and conversation circles with the community at large, geared toward the collective construction of an exhibit on the history of women in the state of Paraná and seeking to promote social and cultural development through forms of women's empowerment.

Using Museum collection material to discuss women's history means sensitizing people about untold stories, pondering processes of creation of memory and political heritage and proposing new narratives on the past. In this regard the project, which began in March 2017 and is planned to span two years, seeks to transform museum narratives and implement greater discussion of women's presence in public spaces and heritage sites, customarily understood as male spaces. In this regard, we contribute to the dislocation of conventional ways of representing the history of the state of Paraná as military and political, and largely white and male, toward the demonstration of diversity of experiences, including women, workers, elites, indigenous peoples and Afro-Brazilians³.

This provides the community with an opportunity to re-connect with experiences from a past that has been silenced and an invitation to think about women's condition in the present. As Rago argues (2013), the building of a plural, inclusive historical culture demands the documenting of the experiences of women from different walks of life who actively engage in contestation, thus permitting the elaboration and dissemination of a collective feminist memory and aiding in the transformation of the hegemonic historiographic discourse which has tended to erase women's presence from events.

3 Cf. <https://culturamaterialegenero.wordpress.com/>

As a proposal which deals in memory and heritage, as well in as narratives scantily visible in the past, we highlight Little's (2007) insistence that modifying our ways of relating to community is crucial insofar as it is this which makes social transformation possible. Furthermore, we must be aware that in opening Museum materials up to exhibit women's untold stories, we must prepare to encounter testimony of pain, struggle and resistance. Making such experiences evident may generate more authentic narratives which, when constructed through dialogue with the community, help to continue to turn the Museum into a place that is concerned with civic renovation and social justice, a space of plural memory, a stage of debate and change in sync with the community. This new position is fundamental so that people, in visiting the Museum, are encouraged to rethink their values and resignify their place in the world.

Taking Stock of Experiences

The two experiences I have related above are very recent – in fact, the second is currently underway. Both can most certainly be considered fruit of a series of earlier discussions consonant with the concerns of the *Workshop on Authenticity and Reconstructions*, promoted by the ICOMOS University Forum, March 13th-15th, 2017. Albeit considerations on the Museum as a space of public debate were already present in the previous work we had been engaged in, *Workshop* discussions undoubtedly contributed a new perspective, particularly with regard to issues of authenticity and reconstruction. It is important to emphasize that our conceptual point of departure was focused on the diversity for more authentic past (Little 2007), as it is necessary to translate past to present in order to reconstruct perceptions in a more democratic direction. The *Workshop* helped me reshape the focus and to understand that authenticity and reconstruction can be means to construct multivocal narratives and become important premises for a discussion on painful and exclusionary past to move step toward a more democratic present. In this sense, authenticity, reconstruction and future- making become axes for the definition of the kind of engagement we seek.

I believe that the first step to progress in these discussions and in dealing with the difficulties they imply is to understand that the concepts we are mobilizing are historical and therefore in constant need of debate. Even if we are not always able to create long-term policies in Brazil, keeping this dynamic in mind is fundamental if we are to guarantee more democratic forms of access to the past. This is why I believe that *Workshop* discussions were fundamental to the proposal for a more fluid agenda understanding heritage as an unfinished product, involved in continuous processes of reconstruction. Furthermore, in placing priority on the connection between tangible and intangible heritage, the narratives and power relations that emerge from them are

brought to center stage. Understanding that authenticity and reconstruction are not a matter of neutral decision-making processes but the product of power relations, creating projects that stimulate dialogue between stakeholders and the broader community become fundamental for the construction of more sustainable public policies, as the Nara Charter makes explicit.

Thus, negotiation is fundamental and keeping in mind circumstances and contexts is part of the process of recognition and administration that involves three variables: heritage, people and political/economic factors. In the case of the projects we have mentioned, these articulations have been crucial: if our initial goal was to reconnect people to the Afro-Brazilian past of the *Largo da Ordem* region, community demands and partnership with the Parana State Museum were key elements in construction a space for debate. Although historical buildings had undergone renovation and were thereby altered at the beginning of the 20th century from a perspective that sought modernization, whitening and urban social hygiene - which means that many of the buildings cannot be considered original in a strict sense, with their re-making influenced by scientific racism-the discussions, research of written documental sources and conversations with members of social movements were indispensable for the reconstruction of narratives of resistance, work, culture and religion (Mendonça and Ramos 2017).

It is important to emphasize that if during the colonial and imperial period the Church of the Rosary was the place of gathering for Afro-Brazilian brotherhoods and indigenous peoples, in the 20th century the *Largo* became the site of the first strikes and struggles for workers' rights. These stories were buried by the city's Official History, which privileged Northern European presence. In this sense, the Museum has come to play a strategic role: near the historic center, home to large and diverse collection, and with a staff willing to open the doors of its storage room to the University and the community, it has contributed to generating new narratives. We heard many visitors comment that it was the first time in their lives that they had ever come into the Museum.

From this experience came debates on women's presence. Workshops and conversation circles connected to the current project, "Gender and Material Culture: the History of Women at the Paraná State Museum" took class, race and gender intersection as their central theme. From the first stages of the project in 2014 to the public that attends today, people's enthusiasm and engagement stand out: as a project that involves a partnership between two public institutions, the Federal University of Paraná and the Paraná State Museum, financial resources are scarce, but this does not deter voluntary participation. Participants come from different walks of life - professors and schoolteachers, artists, photographers and community leaders. These dynamics show that people's relation to heritage, memory and narrative, when based on negotiation, is capable of producing rich reflections on belonging, dislocation, violence, inequality, conflicts and identity. Certainly these relations and the narratives that tell their story are not harmonious ones, but the movement as a

whole works to democratize access to the past and its diversity, creating new forms of authenticity connected to the meanings that have been constructed and their contrast to a turbulent past. Most importantly, public debate has brought new forms of preservation, including demands made for State support and more inclusive cultural policies.

Concluding Remarks

Brazil, although not a nation that is currently at war, has a past marked by popular revolt and wars at different moments throughout its history. Over the course of the 20th century, it has also been plagued by State-perpetuated forms of violence, as well as high rates of gender and race-related violence. In other words, it is permeated by situations of social tension that often produce a chasm between what is officially considered heritage - usually that which is tied to the cultural values of the traditional elites of the country - and the desires of its people, in terms of identity and memory. Given these particularities, the researches and fieldwork I have been carrying on demonstrated that public policies for the management and reconstruction of the past must include debates on gender and racism. In this sense, the urgent need to discuss painful past does not, as Little reminds us (2007: 149; 158), imply a quest for a harmonious narrative of the nation; rather, it calls for a multi-vocal perspective on the past that allows us to capture human diversity in its fullest and to celebrate it today, making way for empowerment and social justice.

Racial-ethnic and gender tensions emerged full force from our discussions on *Largo da Ordem's* past, turning the Paraná State Museum into a space newly open to debate. Welcoming different types of demands was crucial to providing people with a past of marginalization to find there a place where they could speak and be heard. Through discussions on Afro-Brazilian culture and women's public lives, the community again returned to the museum with a new series of demands, which now included critical vision and demands coming from indigenous communities of the region.

As a museum under state government jurisdiction and of renown tradition, the discussions on new approaches and narratives that have taken place there have also led to a reconsideration of practices on the part of the institution's own educational team. Together these actions have brought other possible narratives on the city's historical center forward, highlighting the diversity of peoples who have occupied or passed through its spaces since the 18th century.

Limitations in time and resources - whether from the state government or the Federal University - have not constrained the actions that have enabled a widening of horizons and have made it evident that seeing heritage not as static but in connection with the dynamics of people's desires, not as an end in itself but the starting point for discussions on dislocations, conflict, pain

and resistance, is a crucial element for democracy today. When we see authenticity and reconstruction in terms that are not merely materialist but conversant with notions of intangible heritage, we are able to define forms of engagement that serve as empowerment and critical reflections on memory and forgetting. To strike a balance on these aspects is a challenge, yet negotiation is a route along which absence, power, dislocation and resistance can be discussed, that is, a way to democratize our celebration of the past and create public policies that aim at reducing class, race and gender inequalities and the social tensions that are linked to them.

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