Postcolonial Europe?

Modernity, Imperialism and Heritage in the EU

Johanna Turunen

The West: Concept, Narrative and Politics

December 8–9, 2016, University of Jyväskylä

This paper sets out from the acknowledgement of the joint history of modernity and eurocentrism which also coincided with the rise of European imperialism and the birth of heritage. It is this relationship between modernity, imperialism and heritage that makes the combination of postcolonial studies and critical heritage studies a potent theoretical starting point. Within this paper, I will shortly outline the potential gains of using insights from postcolonial theory to study the current construction of Europeanness in the EU's cultural heritage initiatives[1].

Europe and the West: Modernity's role in defining Europe

My understanding of Europe is inherently linked to notions of the West. I see ideas of Europe historically as a precursor of the ideas of the West, but simultaneously believe that in contemporary terms the notions of the West, are incremental for Europe's understanding of itself and of modernity at large. Kwame Anthony Appiah has stated that "the very notion of something called 'western culture' is a modern invention.[2]" Similarly, Europe – as a place and as a culture – is often considered as an idea or a construction[3] which was given its contemporary meanings in modernity. In fact, it could be argued that it is precisely the ideas embedded in modernity that led to many of the contemporary ideas of European and Western hegemony that dominate our conceptualizations of the world. Enrique Dussel has criticized the Eurocentric understanding of modernity "for it indicates intra-European phenomena as the starting point of modernity and explains its later development without making recourse to anything outside of Europe"[4]. Dussel continues by arguing for reconstruction of modernity which would acknowledge the role that the peripheries played in enabling Europe's rise to the hegemonic status and the repercussions this has had on the societies living in those peripheries. According, to Dussel "there are two contradictory paradigms: that of mere Eurocentric modernity and that of a subsumed modernity from a postcolonial worldwide perspective, where it achieved an ambiguous double function as an emancipatory project and as a mythical culture of violence. [...] Modernity defined itself as an emancipatory project with respect to the 'us', but did not realize its mythical-sacrificial character with respect to the 'others'." [5]

In the narrative of modernity, the other is often silenced. Similarly, in the general narratives on Europe the colonial other has been silent. When discussed, "colonialism has been framed as the past property of individual nation states to be displaced by a new narrative of European integration free from the stain of colonialism."[6] However, I argue that it is precisely because of these potential silences, that their existence needs to be examined. Postcolonial theory has a long history of uprooting old narratives and deconstructing the characters of the other in these narratives. Gurminder Bhambra has described how "Europe has typically been represented in terms of its internal solidarities as defined against the others from whom it seeks to distinguish itself"[7]. The relationship between 'us' and the 'other' has in Europe traditionally been considered as an external

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[1] This paper shortly outlines the theoretical framework for my doctoral thesis - Manufacturing of transnational belonging: A postcolonial reading of the European Heritage Label. The thesis is part of the EUROHERIT research project (*Legitimation of European cultural heritage and the dynamics of identity politics in the EU*). For more information on the project, please visit www.jyu.fi/euroherit.

[2] Appiah 2016, "Culture". BBC Radio 4 - Reith lectures 2016. Available as podcast and transcripts; http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b081lkkj.

[3] See Bhambra 2009; White 2000.

[4] Dussel 2000, 471.

[5] ibid., 474-475.

[6] Bhambra 2014, 155.

[7] Bhambra 2009, 69, see also Stråth 2002.

relationship between the European imperial states and their colonies, but when combined with the notions of the West, it also becomes an internal relationship of Europe, where the othering is directed towards Eastern[8] or Southern Europe[9]. It is this discursive relationship between Europe and the Other, the West and the rest, the dominant and the marginalized, that turns European identity politics into a question of the postcolonial. And it is postcoloniality and its fragmented nature that offers a "heterogenous set of ideas that can be an alternative to other, more established forms of reflection about Western modernity"[10].

Europe and the rest: What role could postcolonial theory play?

Postcolonial thought emerged around the ideas of Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak. Initially it was heavily influenced by the anticolonial struggles and the literary analysis of the colonial discourse. In its contemporary form, postcolonial research takes many forms and many argue that postcolonial theory does not consist of a stable theoretical framework, but rather a viewpoint into research or a reading strategy[11]. Along with the expansion of the theory, also the regional focus has expanded radically. Europe itself is not postcolonial in the same sense that the formerly colonized regions are. Therefore, perhaps unsurprisingly, Europe *proper* has quite rarely been studied through postcolonial theory. Europe – as a source of imperial discourse – has naturally been a key focus of postcolonial research, but mainly in relation to how eurocentrism, othering and European imperial discourse has affected the various regions at the receiving end of the spectrum. Europe's failure to address its own colonial history and its ramification in contemporary Europe has gone under increasing critique[12]. Earlier postcolonial studies dealing more directly with Europe have traditionally focused on minority, diaspora and migration issues[13]; social issues related to diversity, racism and discrimination[14]; and the rights of indigenous people[15]. The fall of the Soviet Union and the following modernization or westernization processes of Eastern Europe, provided a new branching area for postcolonial studies in the mid-2000s. I propose, that now is finally the time to turn the postcolonial gaze towards Europe *proper*.

It cannot be denied that contemporary Europe is still inherently a product of the same imperial cultural processes and discourses of Western hegemony that gave rise to imperialism. I argue that our contemporary ideas of difference and the world outside of Europe continues to be strongly influenced by the colonial discourse. Despite the end of imperialism and the official colonial discourse, some of these ideas are still embedded in the European understanding of itself and of the rest of the world. Following Kania, I argue that "thinking in postcolonial terms offers an interesting and alternative outlook"[16] to studying Europe and the West. First, central to understanding postcolonial theory's relevance for Europe, can be explained through the idea of coloniality. Coloniality "refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production

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[8] See for example Kania 2009; Mayblin 2013; Mälksoo 2009.
[9] See for example Dainotto 2007.
[10] Kania 2009.
[11] See for example Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin [1989] 2002; Kania 2009.
[12] See for example Bhambra 2009, 2015, Hansen and Jonsson 2014.
[13] See for example Bhabha [1994] 2004; Brah 1997.
[14] See for example Kalonaityte 2010¸Thomas 2013.
[15] See for example Valkonen 2016.
[16] Kania 2009.

well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations" [17]. Through the study of coloniality, it is possible to shift the focus to analyzing the remaining effects and traces of colonialism - also within Europe. Secondly, the ability to deal simultaneously with the past, the present and the future, offers a suitable starting point for studying European identity politics. Bhambra has proposed that postcolonial research "works 'backwards', in terms of reconstructing historical representation as well as 'forwards' to the creation of future stories"[18]. Whereas postcolonial seeks to understand the contemporary in the past and in the future, critical heritage studies and have sought to frame heritage as a contemporary social, political and economic phenomenon. They see heritage as being "primarily *not* about the *past,* but instead about our relationship with the *present* and the *future*"[19]. Combining these two approached we are provided with a theoretical approach that moves between the layers of the past, the present and the future and allows us to study coloniality as an overarching determinant of Europeanness.

Through adopting insights from the post-colonial framework this research seeks to disrupt the hegemonic narrative of Europeanness through giving space to the issues and processes that are silenced or left out of this narrative. As my research focuses specifically on the European Heritage Label (EHL) and the heritage policies and initiatives of the European Union, the central aim is to analyze the nominated EHL sites and identify potentialities of alternative discourses these sites could activate. Especially sites with clear potential discourses of dominance are investigated. These sites can include sites with clear colonial/imperial reference (for example the Sagres Promontory in Portugal) and sites where political, economic and social dominance has taken a more "intra-European" nature (for example the Great Guild Hall in Estonia)

United in Diversity: Belonging in the European Union

In addition to promoting a joint European narrative, the EHL initiative seek to create a sense of transnational belonging among the European citizenry. I will look into how the narratives of Europeanness are used to manufacture belonging among the European citizenry and what role diversity and multiplicity of voices plays in this process. Neither European diversity and nor immigration to and within Europe are new phenomenon. Rather one could say that diversity is constitutive of Europe – evidenced also by the EU motto "United in Diversity". Within this research, the construction of 'Europeanness' and belonging will especially be analyzed through the concepts of ambivalence and hybridity. Although criticized for their inability to fully account for the power dynamics in identity construction, the importance of these two concepts lies in their relevance for both the postcolonial world and the metropolitan centers. Theorized especially by Homi K. Bhabha[20], the strength of both ambivalence and hybridity lies in their ability to bring forth a more nuanced understanding of colonial subjectivity, than the traditional binary opposition between us and them. This allows also a more nuanced research into the European narratives and the internal and external forces that are currently influencing the relationships between the European 'us' and the 'other'. Through ambivalence and hybridity, we can also move towards seeing Europe in more inclusive and non-binary terms. One way to move beyond binaries, is through the concept of pluriverzalization. "Pluriverse implies breaking with the uni-verse, which might involve the coexistence of diverse life projects, but subsumes and hierarchizes these,

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[17] Maldonado-Torres 2007, 247.
[18] Bhambra 2009, 70; see also Bhambra 2007.
[19] Harrison, 2013; 4, original emphasis, see also Graham and Howard 2008.
[20] Bhabha [1994] 2004.

obeying the mono-logic by which they all revolve around one central historical, cultural, political and economic organizational axis - coloniality."[21] Suárez-Krabbe places this desire especially on five marginalized groups in Europe: Muslims, Black/Afro-Europeans, Roma, Latino/as and colonial subjects from Southern Europe. However, I argue that it has even wider adaptability to the study of group relations within Europe.

As I hope has become apparent, the postcolonial turn in heritage and European studies is not necessarily simply about creating more equal representations of the other, but it entails a deeper understanding of how we should view us (as European) as inherently defined through our relationship and entanglement with the other. It is a call to recognize the hybridity embedded in Europeanness. A focus on deeper interconnectedness of different cultures and national and regional histories can form a basis for more equal and inclusive narrative of Europeanness – one which could also create new openings for the migration discussion in Europe. In Bhambra's words: "[t]he accumulation of 'other' voices in fields previously dominated by particular 'Western' or 'Northern' voices can only enhance the theories and policies that we then establish on the basis of this knowledge"[22]. I will end with a descriptive quote by Stuart Hall, when in a discussion on the African, Asian, Jewish and Irish influence in Britain he stated that "the majority, mainstream versions of the Heritage should revise their own self-conception and rewrite the margins into the centre, the outside into the inside. This is not so much a matter of representing 'us' as of representing more adequately the degree to which 'their' history entails and has always implicated 'us', across the centuries, and vice versa."[23]

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[21] Suárez-Krabbe 2014, 155.
[22] ibid., 39.
[23] Hall [1999] 2008, 225.

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