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INTRODUCTION

The concept of ‘first-place’ as an Aristotelean exercise on the Metaphysics of Heritage

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The context

This special issue stems directly from a panel organised by Paula Mota Santos and presented at the 2014 annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). With a general focus within the Anthropology of Tourism and under the title ‘First-places’: critical dialogics of tourism in heritage places of a primordial collective-self, the panel gathered the papers that are now part of this special issue. The concept of ‘first-places’ was then broadly defined as the location from where purportedly a social identity is taken as having emerged by those who see themselves as related to it. The spatial range of the contributions was wide: Africa (Giraudo; Cardeira da Silva), South America (Berg), Europe (Dines; Mota Santos) and Asia (Zhu). Some of the papers published here are a more elaborate version of the AAA presentation (Giraudo, Dines and Berg); others have suffered some re-orientation of the core approach during the writing process (Cardeira da Silva and Zhu); and one paper (Mota Santos) is on a new terrain to the one presented at the 2014 meetings.

This set of papers and their critically engaged take on heritage results from the present historical moment. In the latter the marked neoliberal conditions of heritage regimes bring the need to understand the political struggles in which new ‘heritagized’ claims are reflected in an increase in rights-based discourses and practices and new forms of culturalized ‘politics’ (Coombs and Weiss 2015, 43). First-places partake of these new forms of culturalized politics. The challenge proposed by the 2014 AAA panel was to seek to both highlight and critically analyse the mutual entanglements of the social actors (and related socio-political instances) that construct and co-habit (even if only temporarily) first-places. As such, the aim of the panel was to explore through ethnographically-informed papers the ways in which people and places are bounded through feelings-imbued speech and action while standing shaped by shared, yet separate histories. This special issue has the same goals.

The heritage system as language

In heritage, taken as a value-producing system, an entity is made singular via the attribution to it of an added value: the patrimonial/heritage value. Having such added value bestowed removes the classified entity from the realm of the ordinary (Santos 2012, 445): no longer, for instance, just an urban area, or a valley, or a musical form but the objectification of a collective-self (for instance, and respectively: a city’s historic centre like the reconstructed old core of Warsaw, Poland; a site of a decisive battle between two warring factions such as the Somme valley WW I battle grounds; an...
expression of 'a way of being' like the Portuguese musical genre *fado*. A classified ‘object’ always comprises a narrative-as-meaning (Ricoeur 1981). For instance, in the three instances referred above we can read the resilience and undefeated spirit of the Polish as social identity; the tenacity and sacrifice of military men for the value of freedom at a critical moment in WW I; the musical objectification of *saudade* (a nostalgia-imbued sentiment) as a Portuguese way of being in the world. If heritage is discursive and thus always intangible by nature (Smith 2006, 56), being also a certain form of knowing things (Byrne 2009, 231), what I would like to foreground here is an understanding of heritage as a representational system (Hall 1997), a concept that comprises always both a symbolic system and signifying practices.

Languages are a prime example of a representational system: a set of sounds representing something beyond themselves whose viability as communication is based and dependent on social agreement (for English speakers ‘cheese’ \([tʃɪz]\) is the correct set of sounds to express the product derived from milk, while for French speakers that would be ‘fromage’ \([fʁɔ.maz]\)\), and whose use is permeated by issues of power (normative or upper class accents and vocabulary, versus regional or working class forms). The same three elements are at play in heritage making it akin to language in as much as it is also a representational system: in the same fashion as sounds in languages, heritage objects (either material or immaterial) represent something beyond themselves; their existence as heritage is dependent on social agreement (the classification or recognition of something as heritage), while the act of constituting heritage is in itself power laden, as it can be seen in the variety of heritage regimes and its entanglements with the state (Herzfeld 1991; Lowenthal 1996; Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000; Smith 2006; Silva and Santos 2012; De Cesari 2013; Bendix, Eggert, and Peselmann 2013; Coombs and Weiss 2015).

Also, under new forms of neoliberal governmentality that are increasingly experienced in the present, ‘collective attachments to cultural goods are cultivated and communities identified as subjects by diverse legal instruments, transnational agencies, corporate attentions, and global policy norms that focus on local cultural assets as significant goods and capacities’ (Coombs 2017, 373). There is also an important presence of market ideologies in heritage management and in its means of ‘valuation’ (see for instance Ashworth and Goodall 1990; ICOMOS-China 2004; Misiura 2005). We thus find an increasing emphasis on investment in cultural resources and human capital so as to yield economic returns, adding value to them so as to encourage tourism (Santos 2014), foster foreign direct investment, encourage product differentiation, and promote new forms of commodification of ‘cultural resources’ (Yudice 2003).

Although the above mentioned characteristics – heritage as language and increased importance of heritage as cultural resource – are all present in heritage subjects, they are more so in heritage sites that are first-places. Heritage (either material or immaterial) is a kind of space in the Lefebvrian sense (this is, it is socially produced) (Lefebvre [1974] 1991); in turn, space as anthropologically understood, is ‘place’ in as much as places are centres of value to which we feel emotionally attached or repulsed by (Tuan [1977] 2001). The concept of ‘landscape’ as developed in anthropology in the early 90s is a useful concept to think heritage locations (both as tangible and as intangible realities) in as much as it expresses the idea of space as a cultural process linked to differentially positioned knowledges, this is, to perspectives (Bender 1993; Ingold 1994; Hirsch 1995). Taking the heritage-site as ‘landscape’ means addressing it while taking it as ‘inevitably processual and transforming, integral to processes of objectification and the sedimentation of history, subjected to poetic and hermeneutic interpretation and as a place where value and emotion coincide’ (Morphy 1993, 205). In his study of heritage tourism in the Scottish diaspora Basu (2007) highlights the central role that space as landscape has in relation to social identity while underlining the distinction between dwelling on and in place, between the idea of a place and its materiality. Referring to the 1930s–1940s literary works of Scottish writer Neil M. Gunn in which person and place are intrinsic to one another, – although not in any simplistic conflation of blood and soil – Basu underlines Gunn’s literary work’s ability to show how different sensibilities, knowledges and understandings converge on the same landscape – which implies that,
experientially, there in fact is no ‘same’ landscape’ (Basu 2007, x). This experiential non-sameness of any given landscape, and particularly of first-places, is one of the elements that the set of papers in this special issue most clearly illuminates.

But how is the firstness of first-places constructed and imagined?

**The idea of firstness**

The notion of ‘firstness’ encapsulates two interconnected dimensions: one of order (as the one before all others) and one of quality (as the one essential to the things considered). We find this notion of firstness enunciated in several fields of knowledge. We find them, for instance, as principles both in Mathematics (as axioms, that is, a starting point for reasoning) and in Chemistry (the constituents of a substance that produce a certain quality). We find firstness also in Architecture as ‘cornerstone’: the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation in relation to which all other stones will be set. As such the cornerstone determines the position of the entire structure. We find firstness also in Philosophy, in pre-Modern Metaphysics, as ‘first principles’.

Metaphysics is often thought of in relation to a set of Aristotle’s books. However, Aristotle himself did not use the word in relation to that body of work. His fourteen books part of what we came to know as his Metaphysics are individually titled and were on what Aristotle referred to as ‘first philosophy’ – but also ‘first science’, ‘wisdom’ and ‘theology’ (Politis 2004, 2; Bertolacci 2016, 187). The title Metaphysics (probably) given by an editor of Aristotle’s work, was most likely meant as guidance to Aristotle readers that Physics, this is, the books about the natural world, should be read first, and only after should one read the books under Metaphysics. Although Aristotle refers to the matters part of Metaphysics as the study of ‘first philosophy’ this does mean that he refers the latter should be studied before the matters discussed in his Physics. Aristotle himself distinguished between things that are ‘better known to us’ (related to the world of ordinary experience) and things that are ‘better known in themselves’ (that usually appear as having a more abstract character than the former category). He maintained that we should begin our study of a given topic with things better known to us and arrive ultimately at an understanding of things better known in themselves (Politis 2004).

This ordering of reading and of acquisition of knowledge is also related to presence and absence of change in the reality under consideration. In his Physics Aristotle dedicated his attention to an order of things that is essentially marked by change – the natural world – while in the books of Metaphysics he dedicated his attention to ‘on hèi on’ (τὸ ὡν ἦ ὃν) ‘being qua being’ that is not marked by change. Although distinct, these two realms are unavoidably connected in as much as the unchanging first causes produce the mutable things (Politis 2004). The categories of first causes (of the realm of Aristotelian Metaphysics) and of mutable things (of the realm of Aristotelian Physics) are useful to think heritage, namely first-places in as much as they are constituted by both domains.

It is a long standing understanding in academia that social identity is a relational, contextual and processual construct (Hall 1996; Woodward 1997). There is also a long standing realisation in academia that social actors tend to experience and express their sense of social identity through ontological constructs (Lovel 1998; Cohen 2000). First-places are a result of performative imagination of a collective-self that constitutes these spaces as the physical location from where a social identity’s origin is taken as having emerged. They are ‘first’ in the Aristotelian dimension of order (that is, the one to exist before all other places related to the specific collective-self) and they are ‘first’ in the Aristotelian dimension of quality (that is, as the place that produced or seminally contributed to that particular form of being/collective-self). Also, ‘first-places’ have a tangible dimension – the actual physical structures that constitute the place (and as such they are of the realm of Aristotle’s Physics) and an intangible dimension – the social identity that attaches itself to the aforementioned physical structures (and taking the sense of social identity most frequently as expressed and lived by social actors themselves, this intangible dimension is of the realm of the Aristotle’s Metaphysics).

Heritage as performative spatiality (place is always performative and performed) is a construct profoundly imbued in the realm of emotion and affect (Smith and Campbell 2016). Due to first-places
'origin of a collective self’ quality, they are strongly embedded in the politics and poetics of affect and emotion. If the sense of a collective-self qua community can be argued as being [performatively] imagined (Anderson 1983, 5), first-places as performatively imagined places assume a highly central position in the symbolic construction of a collective-self. This might translate itself in a swifter readiness to be inserted in formal systems of heritage classification, be it regional, national, but most importantly global ones such as the UNESCO heritage listings. As a result of this highly-charged symbolic power that constitutes them, first-places have a strong pull-factor within a visitors’ economy, something reinforced by first-places frequent formal insertion within the globalised symbolic economy of the heritage system. Thus, the co-presence of tourism and heritage is both constitutive and a clear marker of first-places in present times.

The interest in first-places should not be seen as a validation of any Heideggerian-type of ontological constructs of social identity (Heidegger [1953] 1996), nor should Aristotle’s Metaphysics be taken as defending essentialism.5 In fact, the focus in first-places behind both the 2014 AAA panel and this special issue, while taking first-places as ‘cultural facts’, is geared towards a deconstruction of the social construct so as to illuminate the dynamics at play in this particular form of heritage places. The option in the organisation of the 2014 AAA panel, and consequently also in this issue, to take first-places within a visitors’ economy and related semiotics systems is not only brought about by the ever increasing relevance of the social practice of tourism in the globalised present (Urry 1990; Lanfant, Alcock, and Bruner 1995; MacCannell 1999; Dann 2002; Leite and Graburn 2009), but also because the visitors’ economy context presents itself as an arena where the performativity of the concept and thus its relational, contextual and processual nature, becomes more clearly visible (see, for instance, Bruner 2005). The papers of this themed issue cover a wide range of ethnographic instances where the ‘firstness’ of the first-places under analysis is imagined and constructed through very different paths making also use of different material and immaterial resources.

First-places as ethnographically observed

This special issue opens with a paper by Rachel Giraudo on Botswana’s Tsodilo Hills (‘Male’, ‘Female’, ‘Child’, and ‘Grandchild’) whose formal heritagization started in 1911 and culminated in 2001 with their nomination as an UNESCO World Heritage Site. Giraudo’s analysis offers an ethnographically grounded take on this heritage site as a first-place where there coexist a multiplicity of languages and social dialects of belonging. Local ethnic communities, including the Ncaekhwe (or Ncaekhoe), Ju’hoansi, and Hambukushu, refer to the hills as the origin site for humankind and other animal species. Western systems of knowledge, namely archaeology, have devoted a particular attention to this site since the nineteenth century onward. In fact, in 2011 some archaeologists claimed Tsodilo as a site with evidence of early modern human (that is, symbolic) behaviour. To the question of how can hybridised cultures with multiple narratives of belonging coexist as ascribed to the same first-place, Giraudo presents this heritage site as constituted by heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981), that is, a presence of multiple voices that represent various social groups. In her paper and detailed ethnography, Giraudo considers how a primordial collective-self is both experienced and contested through heritage tourism, both national and international, and how affect and emotion enable and challenge the co-occurrence of heteroglossic heritage, as well as the oscillating role played by the Bakhtin (1981) inspired centrifugal and centripetal forces. Giraudo examines this first-place ‘heteroglossic heritage’ in the context of the postcolony and opposes it to both ‘heritage dissonance’ (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) and Smith’s (2006) ‘Authorised Heritage Discourse’, arguing for a possibility of a coexistence of authenticities.

With the second paper we move to a European stage: Naples, Italy. In it Nick Dines discusses the ambiguous relationship between heritage tourism and everyday life in the historic centre of Naples, the old (and thus, ‘first’) part of the city. This is an urban area long characterised by a lower-class residential population and intermittently considered off-limits to tourists, but who, nevertheless, has become the focus of a burgeoning heritage tourism industry over the last two decades. Framing his analysis within the dynamics of tourism as fuel for urban renewal of old city cores, Dines anchors his multicentred textual
and ethnographic analysis of Naples' centro storico on the concept of 'precariousness' (a concept taken as poised between anxiety and liberation). According to Dines, not only does this concept allows us to make sense of the complex relationship between tourism, heritage and everyday social life in central Naples, as the positive element part of precariousness (liberation) poses a challenge to those accounts that see in the advent of a visitor economy the inevitable 'museumification' and gentrification of historic centres.

The third paper is by Kimberly Berg and focuses on Patagonian Welsh identity. The presence of Welsh immigrants in Argentina, namely in the Chubut valley, Patagonia, dates from the mid-nineteenth century and was related to the English colonisation of Wales. The firstness of this social identity (in the two Aristotelian dimensions discussed above) would seem self-evident: first settlers of the region and true keepers of 'Welshness' (traditions and language). However, Berg's detailed and ethnographically grounded analysis shows us not only how that firstness is historically constructed, as how it is, not just intertwined, but actually dependent on the firstness of the indigenous Patagonian populations, namely the Tehuelche (but not the Mapuche). Berg's subject matter is also inevitably imbedded in a centrality of present day global circuits in as much as: (1) a handful of Welsh-founded towns throughout the Argentinian Chubut Province have, in recent years, become an important destination for Welsh tourists to experience 'authentic' Welsh heritage; and (2) the Welsh community in Chubut Province distinguishes itself from other ancestry groups in the region through a constant exchange with the 'homeland' via cultural and educational programmes. The specific Argentinian national framing of this 'authentic' (the Aristotelian unchangeable 'being qua being') Welsh identity includes an opposition/negation of a Spanish colonial identification is also addressed by Berg. This paper shows how, rather than emphasising the singular or solitary nature that first-place claims often imply, tourism narratives of firstness may also be plural and mutually constructive.

In the paper by Maria Cardeira da Silva we are kept in a markedly globalised and multi-sited arena in as much as it is centred on Jewish identity – namely Moroccan Jews – and its globalised entanglements. Cardeira da Silva's ethnographic core are hagiographic practices (the *hillulot* festivities). These have taken on certain features that place them where pilgrimage intersects with ethnic or roots tourism and leisure travel. The author questions the paradigm of social studies based on centre-diaspora model while testifying to the emergence and fabrication in Morocco of new first-places (a Moroccan state-promoted heritagization of Jewish heritage) as a cultural, political and economic fact. Not neglecting other examples of new groups of Moroccan Jews and Muslims in Morocco and elsewhere who act together to rescue Jewish heritage from the hierarchical agenda of Moroccan state, Cardeira da Silva suggests that the firstness objectified in specific heritage-production actions is thought of in relation to the legendary Andalusian Islamic *convivenza* (eighth to fifteenth centuries), working as a resource for the Moroccan State as a sign of distinction (a Muslim state that is also Jewish) both in the global stage and within Islam as a whole.

Next is Yujié Zhu's paper on the present day heritage regime of the city of Xi'an (Shaanxi Province), the former Chang'an, capital of the Tang dynasty. The centrality of heritage in Xi'an's urban development is backgrounded by the new stage of modernization of the People's Republic of China as framed by President Xi Jinping under the banner of 'China Dream'. Within this general nation-reference framework, Xi'an/Chang'an's former pivotal role within the Silk Routes make it a privileged objectification of cosmopolitanism and even pre-Modern globalisation, a powerful symbolic economy resource in the globalised present. Zhu supplies detailed ethnographic data on the city's restoration plan that aims to transform the densely populated areas of Xi'an's inner city into a contemporary functioning replica of the Tang Imperial City by 2050. The paper integrates three main strands: an analysis of heritage discourse in China, a historic overview of Xi'an city development and its recent 'Tang Imperial City Restoration Plan', and an ethnographic account of the various responses from different social/ethnic groups to Xi'an's heritage policies and actions (Han local inhabitants, the local Muslim ethnic minority [Hui] and a Buddhist temple community). Zhu identifies in Xi'an a juxtaposition of different interpretations and understanding of the past that leads to new practices through negotiation and contestation, but argues that the story of Xi'an (in its first-place format as the Imperial capital Chang'an) is one example of China's efforts to implement nationalism through defining and legitimising heritage production and consumption.
Promotion of a national-identity feeling and the creation of a related ambiance through architectural structures are elements also part of Mota Santos’ paper, the last in this edited issue. In her paper, Mota Santos analyses the relationship present day visitors have with a 1940s theme park built in Portugal whose theme is the Nation. In it, visitors come across miniature buildings that represent different regions of the Nation. Since in the 1940s Portugal was a colonial empire, the reality being depicted includes parts of the globe that in the 1940s were Portuguese colonies. The latter are today presented as being part of the Portuguese-speaking world, and the park presents itself to visitors as a place where globalised Portuguese heritage is depicted. However, the material structures and forms of representation put in place during colonial times are very much left unchanged. Mota Santos’ analysis focuses on the affect that this theme park and its heritage keeps on producing among Portuguese visitors, and specifically among young adults, the majority of whom have visited the theme park as children during family holidays or school visits. Based on the ethnographic work carried out with the young adults visiting the park and their narratives on the meaning and affect experienced through the visit, Mota Santos argues for the characterisation of this theme park as a hyperreal first-place.

Notes

1. The participation in these meetings was made possible through funding supplied by CAPP/ISCSP – Universidade de Lisboa.
2. Probably Andronicus of Rhodes (Politis 2004).
3. Metaphysics was the collective title given to this set of books by Andronicus of Rhodes who titled those fourteen books ‘Ta meta ta phusika’ (τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ) ‘the after the physicals’ or ‘the ones after the physical ones’, the latter being the books contained in what is called Aristotle’s Physics.
4. This relation between a social identity and a space is not a matter of geographical hazard: quite often the topographical features of a place are seen as holding in them qualities that are directly related to the characteristics of the purportedly originated social identity.
5. According to Politis (2004, 17–18), Aristotle’s conception of essentialism is not a purely semantic conception, i.e. it is not an a priori or an analytical truth.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Paula Mota Santos is an assistant professor in the Department of Political and Behavioural Sciences at Fernando Pessoa University, Porto Portugal. She is also a research fellow at the Centre for Public Policy and Administration from the University of Lisbon. She earned a PhD in Anthropology at University College London and has been a visiting scholar at the College of Environmental Design from University of California at Berkeley. She has also often collaborated with this university’s Portuguese Studies Program. Her work is mostly centered on the relationship between social identity and space with a specific interest in cities. She has published on immigration, heritage, tourism, and themed spaces. She also has an interest in visual anthropology, namely documentary film, and anonymous photography. She has published on heritage, urban development, immigration, themed spaces, film and tourist photography and has directed two documentaries.

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