

# REFLECTIONS ON THE METACULTURAL NATURE OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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## ABSTRACT

One of the most central findings of recent heritage research in cultural anthropology points to heritage as a social process and as the result of a metacultural operation. This article discusses the metacultural nature of heritage by focusing on the history of heritage both as a concrete social practice and as a powerful concept of cultural policy. For heuristic reasons, the article tends to put the conceptualisation of heritage as a metacultural product in question and proposes to translate concepts from ritual studies into heritage research.

KEYWORDS: Intangible Cultural Heritage • UNESCO • tradition • framing theory

In 1983, a local Belgian historian publicised a vehement argument for the protection of popular culture and folklore. In the third edition of his book on the most renowned carnival in Belgium, he argued:

If it is true that our customs are part of the cultural heritage of Wallonia, if they are an essential element of our cultural identity, then they merit protection against the anarchic and excessive liberalism that provides economic profits to the profiteers. The law [...] protects monuments and sites. However, it ignores popular customs. Do they not attest to the human past as much as does a church, a castle, a town, a beautiful tree, a landscape or a ruin? We spend millions for excavations in countries that are far away and whose civilisations influenced us only little, and in contrast, we forget to analyse our popular heritage scientifically and to safeguard it. (Glötz 1983: 84)<sup>1</sup>

The basic line of reasoning, which claims that popular culture as valuable cultural heritage is threatened by economic exploitation, provoked the author to demand legal measures based on a national policy for the protection of nature and monuments. Popular culture, so his argument went, was as valuable as material artefacts or extraordinary elements of nature, as this culture represented history. Evoking a kind of national impetus, the historian called for new laws that would focus on nationally anchored and localised traditions and not on civilisations far away. In the same vein, he later wrote:

If a community wishes to defend itself usefully, the least we can expect is that there would be the political will to offer the needed and effective support! We hope that our politicians will discuss this problem and that they will protect our popular cultural values, elements of our identity just as they rightly defend the elitist part of our heritage. (Ibid.: 86)

In the 1980s in Belgian popular cultural discourse, one could witness the catchwords of these two quotations becoming problematic: in the historian's perspective, traditions and folklore were no longer handed down 'naturally'. Economic uses of tradition even threatened their original nature. Only through political intervention could the supposed original and identity-sustaining character of folklore or traditional customs be safeguarded for the next generations. It is the process of transmission that seemed to be disturbed and it is the interpretation of this perceived dysfunction, as well as the cultural contexts in which this interpretation evolved, that led to central anthropological questions of heritage production. Here, the concept of heritage works as a moral argument in the protection of popular culture.

Ian Russell (2010: 29) offered and discussed a quite basic definition of cultural heritage as an "exchange relationship". This definition focuses on complex processes of transmission which Reinhard Johler (2009: 46) assumed function as a "mode of experience" in European modernity. Attempting to answer the question of who controls and arranges the transmission of cultural heritage also leads to an analysis of hegemonic structures (Kuutma 2007: 177). If the quoted reflections on the need for legal protection of folklore and popular culture were intended to provoke reactions from political actors, this points to a shift in responsibility and competence, and consequently to a shift in power relationships where popular culture would be governed by cultural policy. For the local Belgian historian, it was no longer sufficient that the local population performed a tradition for it to be reliably transmitted as a local cultural practice to the following generations. Rather this population is interpreted as powerless against accelerating processes of modernisation and globalisation. Hence, adequate cultural policy was needed to develop a legal framework to protect cultural heritage.

Moving from national cultural policy in Belgium in the 1980s to the international level of heritage protection 30 years later, the requests of the Belgian historian seem to be realised in very concrete heritage interventions: in April 2006, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage entered into force (UNESCO 2003). The main formal intention of this Convention is the protection of representative intangible cultural heritage, not least by means of legal interventions (cf. Bortolotto 2008; Aikawa-Faure 2009; Blake 2009; Leimgruber 2010; from an international law perspective, see Mißling 2010).

In Belgium, this international instrument of a global cultural policy was received with great interest. Precisely argued, it was received with great interest in the French-speaking part of Belgium, Wallonia, where already in 2003 the Carnival of Binche had been proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. As in Germany or Switzerland, cultural policy in Belgium is structured by the federal organisation of the state. In Belgium, the three linguistic communities – the French-speaking (Wallonia), the Dutch-speaking (Flanders) and the German-speaking – are each responsible for their own cultural policy. Already in 2002, the French-speaking community adopted a decree regulating the protection of the intangible cultural heritage of Wallonia analogous to the protection of tangible cultural goods (cf. Demotte 2004). The rapid translation of UNESCO international policy into national law was quite remarkable, in particular in contrast to other legislative processes. Hence, one has to ask which socio-cultural and political substrate moved Belgian heritage policy forward and which ideologies, contexts and diplomatic or political constraints motivated Belgian politicians to realise an international convention on a national level.

As a “project of ideology” – as Estonian cultural anthropologist Kristin Kuutma (2007: 178) characterised the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage – national legislation concerning intangible culture fulfils different functions. With a federal decree focusing on popular culture, for example, federal politicians in Wallonia expected international respect for their federal policy and even for their federal traditions and culture (cf. Demotte 2004). On the other hand, the concerned politicians supported UNESCO’s cultural policy, or more precisely the policy of UNESCO’s general director at that time – Koïchiro Matsuura – who campaigned for the new concept of intangible heritage (cf. Aikawa-Faure 2009).<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the federal legislation concerning the protection of popular culture represents more than the arrival of a globally validated concept proposed by UNESCO on a national level. Rather, federal or national interpretations of UNESCO’s intangible heritage policy result in complex and even conflict-laden processes of negotiation. Neither did the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage that led to the Convention emerge from national or local discourses, nor did the national implementation of this international convention unfold in a cultural vacuum (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 183). Put otherwise, the concept of cultural heritage cannot be explained with linear models. In Binche for example, a concept of popular heritage (*patrimoine populaire*) was already elaborated in the 1950s in order to emphasise the authenticity of the local carnival tradition.

The focus on the emergence of the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage, understood as a tool of global governance, is important if one wants to understand the different functions popular culture fulfils in late modernity. In this perspective, intangible heritage as a concept of international cultural policy may be interpreted as a strategy to make popular culture accessible and consumable in a global market (Yúdice 2003; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006). However what in the context of heritage regimes is called intangible heritage is also performative culture that has very different sociocultural values in and for certain groups. A local carnival that is proclaimed intangible heritage of humanity will still be a ritual that produces group coherence and that mediates social conflicts. In this perspective the concept of intangible heritage is “metaculture” as Greg Urban (2001) puts it – it is culture about culture. Or as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) argues, heritage is an effect of a “metacultural production”.

Here, I am interested in the relationship between a discourse of Intangible Cultural Heritage that is based on a certain concept and the cultural practices linked to that concept as well as the cultural practices that are proclaimed intangible heritage. Therefore I will discuss four theses beginning with a reflection on the relationship between heritage discourses and heritage practices.

#### HERITAGE RESEARCH MUST DIFFERENTIATE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

Understanding of cultural heritage as an amalgam of discursive elements and of cultural practices that are shaped by these elements (for example, nomination practices, international negotiations, heritage bureaucracies etc.), leads again to Ian Russell’s proposal to characterise heritage as a process of exchange. The discussed example from Belgium shows quite clearly that, at certain key moments, this process had been interpreted as

problematic and even as malfunctioning (cf. Peckham 2003: 6f.). A central *leitmotif* of the discourse about a problematic transmission of traditions is the element of supposed economic exploitation that, at the end, also legitimises political actions. The transmission of heritage – in the arguments of heritage professionals – becomes problematic if only specific groups of actors or single actors obtain economic profit from a tradition.

The growing field of research discussing questions of cultural property, also to be found in the semantic field of cultural heritage, demonstrates the enormous political, social and economic consequences that occur when culture is transformed into a commodifiable good (Brown 1998; *Ethnologia Europaea* 2009; Bendix et al. 2010). Analysing the festival politics of a Catalan Corpus Christi feast, Dorothy Noyes (2006: 35–36) discussed the different functions of popular culture that came into the sphere of the heritage regime: “intervention”, “commercialization”, “corruption”, and “control” were four central modes of using a heritagised tradition. Eventually these transformations result in possibilities for the interpretive dominance over a tradition and give rise to questions of cultural property (Kuutma 2009; Tauschek 2009).

This transformation is a complex process and linear models are not an adequate means for analysing its various dimensions. Certainly one could argue that symbolic recognition through a UNESCO label will be followed by different forms of economic commodification but, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, the concrete practices are even more complex, which is why she proposes differentiating forms of value with various interdependencies:

valorization (awards and plaques) tends to increase valuation, while valuation (discovering that an old table is worth real money) can lead to valorization by calling attention to values other than economic ones. All heritage is created, and economic arrangements are but one factor in shaping it. (2006: 194–195)

However, analysing the factors that shape heritage interventions and situating these factors in specific historic and cultural contexts can accurately reflect the constructed nature of cultural heritage only if research relies on the differentiation between practice and concept. Even if the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage is comparatively young, the practice of staging popular culture and of claiming cultural specificities and values is itself a long-standing tradition in European modernity (Noyes 2007; Bendix 2009: 254; Kuutma 2009).

When, in the middle of the 19th century, the railway that linked the little Walloon town of Binche, near the Belgian-French border, to the capital of Brussels had been accomplished, this technical innovation also had effects on the meaning and practice of the local carnival. Subsequently, the carnival gained new attributes such as “extraordinary” or “unique”. The media began writing of a “very specific character that can be found nowhere else”, and the carnival became in its totality “unique in the world” (*Le Binchois* 1896). Citizens of Binche who, around the middle of the 19th century, became increasingly interested in an almost forgotten annual performance that marked the beginning of the Lenten season, eventually arrived to transform these symbolic attributes into economic capital. This transformation was actively supported, for example, by an association of tradesmen. The newly erected railway station was integrated into the carnival parade in order to receive the arriving tourists; an electric illumination was installed to keep the tourists in the town for a longer time. These measures seemed to be a great success and so, in 1890, the local press resumed Shrove Tuesday: “In short, an

excellent day for our local economy, for the reputation of our town and its renowned carnival" (*Le Binchois* 1890).

Yet a touristic and journalistic gaze is not the only factor that produced the attributes of the carnival. One must explain, for example, why since the middle of the 19th century the number of citizens who were interested in actively performing the carnival grew. While a journalistic gaze underlined aesthetic and performative dimensions of this unique carnival before 1900, by and by questions about the historic origins of the carnival were asked. While media and tourists visiting Binche carnival were mainly fascinated by the gaudy and jolly atmosphere of the feast, new actors – historians and other scientifically interested intellectuals – began discussing different hypotheses of the carnival's roots. Historicity begins to be an important new value for the local cultural practice. In this context, the carnival as a unique testimony of history is also transformed into national heritage. In a local discourse the carnival is no longer a local ritual, it becomes a reflexive tradition that can be used in reflexive ways; symbolic values are negotiated and finally discursively fixed. (Tauschek 2010)

These extracts from a history of the discourse of Binche's carnival demonstrate almost paradigmatic characteristics that Hermann Bausinger problematised in his conceptual definition of tradition and the emergence of this concept. Traditions are products of modernisation processes because they are products of the reflexive safeguarding of historical forms, elements or performances (Bausinger 1991: 8). As the practice of safeguarding traditions is a reflexive act, this act can be circumscribed as a form of metacultural production, in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's words. The historic place where a "loss of cultural implicitness" – to cite Bausinger (*ibid.*) – becomes visible, can be situated around the middle of the 19th century. The "invention of tradition" established in the long 19th century – to cite another crucial concept – served as an important means to stabilise the nation and served crucial political functions in the nation state that might be similar to recent regimes of intangible cultural heritage (Hobsbawm, Ranger 1983). As structures of the concept of tradition and the concept of heritage may show many parallels, Bernhard Tschofen (2007: 23) argues that: "What is tradition for modernity may be world heritage for late modernity".

The proposed differentiation of practice and concept in the protection of cultural heritage may offer an important basis for understanding the relationship of tradition and heritage (*cf.* Kockel 2007) and, furthermore, for understanding cultural contexts and historical lines in the emergence of recent heritage interventions.

#### HERITAGE RESEARCH MUST HISTORICISE ITS OBJECT

Just as things have their own cultural biographies (Kopytoff 1986), so cultural heritage as a concept that shapes safeguarding activities has its cultural biography. A certain period of life in that biography – the birth of the concept Intangible Cultural Heritage – has been critically analysed by Valdimar Hafstein. Hafstein identified UNESCO's master narrative concerning the intangible heritage programme, which the international organisation sees in a letter of the Bolivian Minister for foreign affairs, dated 24 April 1973. In his letter to the general director of UNESCO, the Minister demanded better protection for cultural expressions such as music and dance against economically

motivated exploitation. Simon and Garfunkel's world hit "El Condor Pasa", based on traditional music from the Andes, was the specific catalyst for Bolivia's intervention. (Hafstein 2007) Thus, the move to protect expressions of traditional folklore was based on the political and even national indignation spurred by the fact that two American musicians earned enormous profits from a traditional Bolivian song.

Cultural geographer Thomas M. Schmitt interpreted a different incident as the origin of UNESCO's efforts to protect folklore. In his perspective the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage is the effect of Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo's activities to protect the traditional square Jemaa el Fna in Marrakesh when the construction of a tower building and a basement garage threatened the traditional practices in parts of the square (Schmitt 2008; cf. Skounti 2009). However, the search for origins of the concept Intangible Cultural Heritage obscures a genesis of the concept that is even more complex. Instead of defining single actors or single incidents as founding fathers of an intangible heritage policy, an anthropological perspective should rather consider facets of a polygenesis of the concept. This perspective should also focus on different national contexts and forerunners of a policy that today acts globally. One could argue that discourses about the value of cultural heritage arose in different areas with different conceptions and in various socio-cultural contexts. The cultural policy of the French-speaking part of Belgium may serve, again, as an example.

In the Belgian case, there were not only Walloon scientific actors who discussed the protection of popular culture in the 1980s. However, scientific discourse was translated into concrete political intervention when, in 1981, a royal decree announced the foundation of the Conseil supérieur des Arts et Traditions populaires et du Folklore (the Superior Council of Traditional Arts and Folklore). This council, as specified in its statutes, was to locate and define the most authentic folklore of the French-speaking community and elaborate recommendations for policy makers. The statutes state:

The council has an advisory function concerning the recognition of folklore manifestations and groups whose origins and whose inspiration come from traditions of the French-speaking community; more precisely, the most authentic among these. (*Moniteur Belge* 1981)

These guidelines, legitimised by political actors, were promptly translated into concrete action. In 1984, the Council started its work and presented a list containing the presumably most traditional, most authentic and hence most valuable traditional expressions of popular culture.<sup>3</sup> How can we explain this rapid action, which culminated in a concretely visible object such as a list? First of all, cultural policy for the protection of folklore was shaped discursively by a cultural climate; this climate, in turn, was the result of different actors – politicians, scientific actors, practitioners of a tradition, media, etc. – who influenced both in practice and in discourse conceptions of the cultural value of folklore or traditional expressions. On the other hand, Walloon cultural policy could rely on various existing institutions, and thus on a certain socio-cultural infrastructure that already focused on popular culture in different ways. First commissions for the scientific collection of and research on folklore already had been founded at the end of the 19th century.<sup>4</sup> The linkage between scientific research and policy also became manifest with the foundation of a federation of traditional groups in Wallonia in 1954 at the instigation of Albert Marinus, a Belgian folklorist who very actively promoted interventions

in support of folklore and who was linked with many international scholars of that time.<sup>5</sup> One central task of this federation was to bring different practitioners of cultural practices together in order to safeguard the identity-building quality of local traditions.

Thus, the Walloon cultural policy of the 1980s was based upon a relatively broad infrastructure of practitioners and scientific actors – almost exclusively historians – and upon a surprisingly persistent argumentation. Ideas about how traditions and other cultural expressions could best be protected and even the very idea of protection that relied on a wide semantic field of cultural loss, focused on symbolic recognition in the form of archiving or listing cultural elements. Instruments such as lists, which today are powerful symbolic means in the international protection of heritage, had first been established in the protection of monuments and thus seemed to be adequate means to safeguard intangible heritage (cf. Hafstein 2009).

The circumscribed levels in a national or federal heritage policy did not proceed in a culturally enclosed container, rather they show manifold connections as well of discourses as of concrete actors. These connections however, cannot be characterised as linear or top-down, and they do not simply illustrate the entrance of international discourses on a local or national level. To the contrary, they symbolise the complex paths taken in the production of an international heritage discourse. The historian cited at the beginning of this paper acted and argued in the context of national heritage discourse, but he also interacted with an emerging international heritage regime when, at the end of the 1980s, he published an article that dealt with proposals for the protection of folklore elaborated by UNESCO in the 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore (Fraikin, Glotz 1988; cf. Kurin 2001).

In this perspective, the biography of cultural heritage is complex and the emergence of a concept like Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 1970s und 1980s symbolises the adolescence of a broader phenomenon. The rhetoric of intangible cultural heritage, one could argue, follows practices of valorisation and of protection, the production of cultural specifics and the discovery and staging of authenticity (Bendix 1997). One consequence of this process is the emergence of bureaucratic structures on national and on international levels that eventually may have an effect on the various performative forms of popular culture. These bureaucratic structures established detailed mechanisms to transform popular culture into heritage, which Kirshenblatt-Gimblett understood as a metacultural process.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE IS NOT METACULTURAL

The concept of metacultural mechanisms that transform cultural practices into reflexive cultural heritage is a helpful heuristic instrument for focusing on those processes that generate new meanings for cultural practices. The metacultural nature of heritage is the central argument of a cultural anthropological approach that underlines the production of meanings and values and that produced the central insight of anthropological heritage research: “Cultural heritage does not exist, it is made” (Bendix 2009: 255; cf. Smith 2006). Analysing the metacultural processes of value production also leads to the analysis of the historical dimensions of the phenomenon, as discussed above.



Photo 1. The Carnival of Binche with its main figures, the "Gilles", on Shrove Tuesday.  
Photo by Markus Tauschek

Cultural anthropologist Dorothee Hemme already brought reflections about the complexity of metacultural logics into the discussion when she reconstructed the heritagisation of the Grimm brothers in Germany. She argues that this heritage was differently interpreted in different cultural and historic contexts. What is today situated in a broad heritage industry is, in fact, only one step "in a long chain of 're-invented traditions'" (Hemme 2007: 230). In other words, metacultural and cultural operations go hand in hand. Reflexive aspects that have been produced through metacultural mechanisms can become *habitus* again and vice versa. This is the way since the invention of tradition culture as a process works. Reflexive traditions are constantly in the flow, involving reflexive as well as habitual elements that are constantly rearranged (cf. Handler, Linnekin 1987). This makes popular culture flexible to react to new situations and fulfil new functions (cf. Noyes 2009).

Until the 1950s the main characters of Binche's carnival – called Gilles – also performed elements of their ritual all over Belgium and in other countries: in 1937 they represented Belgian culture during the World Fair in Paris. In the same year, the Gilles represented traditional Walloon culture during the first international congress of carnival in Munich. And finally in 1958 for the last time, the Gilles performed 'traditional folklore' at the World Fair in Brussels. On a local level, the practice to perform the tradition outside the medieval city walls of Binche was criticised by the local historian cited at the beginning of this paper. In collaboration with Binche's Mayor the local cultural broker succeeded in popularising the idea that the carnival was only traditionally performed inside the city walls. Today this rule, which could be described as a metacultural tool in order to fix the assumed authenticity of the carnival and which occurred in a specific sociocultural context, became a non-reflected part of the ritual. One could argue that the historian's and the Mayor's intervention concerning the local rootedness of the carnival is one element in the discursive construction of heritage that is reflexively produced in the 1950s but which today is perceived as a traditional element of the performance.

The new functions that culture transformed into cultural heritage fulfils are the product of a complex process: "heritage is a mode of cultural production that gives the endangered or outmoded a second life as an exhibition of itself" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 56). Similar arguments are phrased by Ullrich Kockel who argues that heritage "is culture that has (been) dropped out of the process of tradition", and, further, that heritage "refers to cultural patterns, practices and objects that are either no longer handed



down in everyday life [...] or used in ways significantly removed from their historical trajectory, for example, as signs or citations deployed in very different contexts" (Kockel 2007: 20–21).

The consequence of this theoretical model of the heritage production process is that this heritage is no longer *habitus*, implying a teleological 'historical trajectory'.

In Kockel's perspectives, there is a strong dichotomy that separates traditions from heritage. The one is handed down quasi naturally, the latter in reflexive modes. In particular, the conception of cultural heritage as a second life, far from 'original' cultural contexts, had been criticised recently. Thus, folklorist Harm-Peer Zimmermann, referring to Nietzsche's philosophical reflections on the forms and functions of history, argues that a second life is not necessarily an alien representation or less valuable:

Why should a second life be less valuable than a first one? Why shouldn't it be even more valuable? Why does one a priori deny the vitality of a (post)modern reproduction or of a revitalised cultural heritage? (Zimmermann 2009: 579)

Zimmermann puts his finger on a crucial dilemma of heritage research: What is the relationship between cultural practices and the effects of heritage interventions conceptualised as metacultural mechanisms?

Critical voices in a scholarly discussion about intangible heritage regimes occasionally share the position that popular culture could better or more naturally evolve without UNESCO's interventions (for example, Schneider 2005). Dorothy Noyes (2010) plausibly argues that UNESCO's heritage nominations offer a wide range of forms of instrumentalisation. It is clear that these specific forms of instrumentalisation only exist because of the proclamation of certain forms or items of heritage as of universal value to humanity. However, in what follows I present an argument for relativisation, based both on elements from the history of German Volkskunde and reflections from ritual theory. This relativisation is especially crucial because unidimensional models for the consequences of UNESCO's heritage interventions and their realisation on national levels again produce problematic dichotomies.

It was in 1962 that German folklorist Hans Moser published a programmatic article entitled "Vom Folklorismus in unserer Zeit" in which he critically discussed the phenomenon of folklorism with the use of many different examples (cf. Bendix 1988).<sup>6</sup> In a dichotomous perspective, Moser arrived at the idea that folklorism adulterated original, authentic and old folklore. His goal was to understand the virtually international phenomenon by which folk culture was used and even instrumentalised. Hence he argued:

There are many possibilities for cultivating existing original forms of tradition in a certain direction, but also for extracting them from their life sphere and making them independent, thereby transforming them artificially or artistically, [...] and then inventing folkloric practices when there is no more original substance, in order to offer an impressive mix of authentic and fake culture to an audience that today is very perceptive. Transformation and presentation of second hand folk culture demonstrate what is meant by the term folklorism. (Moser 1962: 180)

Moser linked the idea of second hand folk culture with the touristic, mediatised and political uses of culture. In his conception, folklorism was not a phenomenon of recent decades; rather it was a historical practice. However, recent forms of folklorism – of the

1960s – basically were determined by economic factors. Presenting his reflections about folklore and folklorism Moser started a very productive discussion in German *Volkskunde*. Already in 1966, Hermann Bausinger proposed critical arguments in a detailed discussion of Moser's folklorism critique. His main thrust was to refute Moser's dichotomy of first and second hand culture: "First hand and second hand traditions are intertwined in many ways. A tradition researcher falsifies his findings if he categorically wants to exclude one of these aspects." (Bausinger 1966: 63) Further, he articulated theoretical consequences of Moser's perspective: "Those who play off folklorism against the 'original folk culture', transform the latter into a closed circle, where it inevitably mutates into folklorism" (ibid.: 70).

The parallels to recent heritage definitions and to certain critical arguments to these reflections in the 1960s are quite remarkable. Moser initiated a debate that finally led to more reflexive approaches in folklore studies in Germany requiring scholars also to think about the implications of their scientific knowledge. Another crucial result of the German *Folklorismus-Debatte* was a theoretically founded conceptualisation of popular culture that avoided establishing false dichotomies – 20 years before historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger presented their concept of the "invention of tradition", which in many aspects resembles Moser's ideas. Finally the insight that folklore and folklorism are identical is one of the most important theoretical advances of German *Volkskunde* in the 1960s.

Why go into this retrospection on a national scientific debate? If one wanted to transfer the findings of the folklorism debate to heritage research one could argue that there is no metaculture, but only culture (see also Roginsky 2007). These arguments on the nature of tradition or of popular culture more generally can be profitably discussed against the background of further reflections in ritual studies. These reflections confirm a theoretically motivated scepticism concerning first-order or second-order popular culture on the one hand and the concept of metacultural mechanisms on the other.

#### HERITAGE RESEARCH MUST RETHINK THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRAME AND CONTENT

In a 2006 work, Laurajane Smith interpreted heritage as a complex result of processes, knowledge and discourse: "The discursive construction of heritage is itself part of the cultural and social processes that are heritage" (Smith 2006: 13). As a consequence, heritage practices and heritage discourses have to be analysed in integrated approaches. UNESCO interventions with different actors, discourses, selection and nomination procedures, etc., not only construct an important aspect of cultural heritage – they are cultural heritage. A coincidence of practices and discourses or concepts can be further contextualised by way of arguments from ritual studies.

In January 1952, Gregory Bateson observed two playing monkeys in San Francisco's zoo. He realised that these two monkeys were aware that aggressive actions were different from playful ones (Bateson 1955). But how does this differentiation unfold when morphologically playful and aggressive actions are identical? To answer this question, Bateson elaborated a metacommunicative framework which allowed for the idea that the monkeys detected playful actions as such. With further analytical reflections, Bate-

son introduced the metaphor of the frame that separated a content – a game or a ritual, for example – from surrounding reality. Erving Goffman picked up Bateson's framing theory and tried to apply it to complex social situations. The framing concept thus became relevant in ritual analysis where, in an analytical perspective, one could make a distinction between the ritual performance itself, as the content of the frame, and a reality that is outside the ritual. In counterdistinction to this conception based on a hierarchical and linear dichotomy of frame and content, Don Handelman offered a problem-centred critical discussion of Bateson's framing theory. Arguing that frame and content are complexly intertwined, Handelman (2004) used a new metaphor – the Möbius-frame – to realise these interweavings theoretically. The Möbius-frame concept makes it impossible to differentiate precisely inside and outside; the two dimensions are in a reciprocal relationship – inside is outside at the same time. I propose to transfer this theoretical approach into the analysis of practices proclaimed valuable heritage and the various concepts of heritage. They are two sides of the same medal coin.

In a blog of the research group The Constitution of Cultural Property at the University of Göttingen Dorothy Noyes recently offered critical reflections about what responsible heritage research should look like. Looking at the history of folklore studies, Noyes argues, folklorists are aware of the reduction of very complex issues. However, in international heritage regimes political actors often worked with problematic reductions using concepts and definitions of community, tradition or identity that are often essentialist. Noyes's aim can be defined as a humanistic one: in the tradition of political research in the best sense, Noyes's ultimate aim is to give voice to all those actors that are neglected by a mighty heritage regime. However, even if this argumentation is comprehensible, one could ask if it implicitly separates frame and content by making propositions to those actors that are situated, in Bateson's model, out of the frame. The critical question becomes: Would we also propose anthropological concepts to local performers of a tradition if we see that they have certain understandings of ethnicity, identity or community? This does not mean that critical heritage research should not critically evaluate international heritage regimes. Notwithstanding, Handelman's insights on frames and contents may help to discuss the analytical ground for such a critical heritage research.

If one transfers Don Handelman's reflections onto the relationship between the content and the frame of rituals to heritage research one consequently has to rethink conceptualisations of metacultural mechanisms. If, in Handelman's perspective, inside and outside of a ritual constantly change in a dynamic way, one can't clearly separate metaculture from culture. Put otherwise, heritage research must focus on the international and national negotiation of legally defined concepts and at the same time study those cultural practices that came into the heritage sphere reflecting on contact zones between these two dimensions (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006).

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I discussed some aspects of the relationship between the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage and cultural practices that are linked to that concept as well as practices or performances transformed into heritage. I argued that the practices of safe-

guarding popular culture have a long history in European modernity. Hence, a differentiation in concept and practices seems to be a useful heuristic step. Both dimensions need to be situated in specific historical contexts.

One possibility to describe the relationship between heritage as a concept and cultural practices that are proclaimed heritage is the conceptualisation of metacultural mechanisms that produce values and meanings of popular culture. However, the focus on metacultural processes that transfer culture into heritage should avoid dichotomic perspectives of culture pre and post UNESCO proclamations. Therefore I discussed two arguments: the first one is based on the Folklorismus debate in German Volkskunde with the important insight that first hand and second hand culture are identical. The second argument is based on reflections from ritual theory with a similar analytical result. This does not mean that we should abandon the idea of metacultural operations. Rather, heritage research should rethink the relationship between frame (concepts, heritage interventions, bureaucratic structures, etc.) and content (traditional practices, performances, rituals, etc.) and should ask how this relationship is preshaped. In Binche, for example, the effects of the proclamation as heritage of humanity were not revolutionary as the local tradition had been transformed into national heritage long before UNESCO certified the patrimonial qualities of the carnival tradition.

When the Carnival of Binche was proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003 local actors were proud about this international distinction. Citing elements of the honoured carnival a big party was organised in Binche. A new tradition seemed to be born when in the following year the local carnival committee decided to celebrate the proclamation date once again. It was in 2004 when a critical comment on the celebration of the proclamation was published in a local newspaper: "As the carnival itself became already an event that got too serious – not at least since it was a masterpiece of humanity – local people should better celebrate their carnival on 6th of November – the proclamation day" (*La Nouvelle Gazette* 2004). Then one could get drunk without disturbing the honourable tradition. And finally – so the position of the commentator – after 100 years one could no longer differentiate between the real authentic carnival and the carnival performed due to the proclamation as heritage of humanity in November. Eventually the comment suggested that it was quite possible that the celebration of the proclamation itself could be proclaimed heritage of humanity in the future.

This local interpretation of UNESCO's heritage interventions shows how local actors judge the transformation into heritage in a highly reflexive way. It also shows how difficult it is – especially for local actors – to separate pre and post UNESCO effects, or to separate frames from contents. Eventually the ironic friction demonstrates that reflections on metacultural aspects of traditions are negotiated not only in scientific contexts but also in the context of cultural production.

#### *Acknowledgments*

Many thanks to Ellen Hertz for inspiring comments and to the anonymous reviewer for clarifying remarks.

## NOTES

1 All translations by the author.

2 In an interview the responsible employee of the Wallonian ministry of culture, an art historian, was absolutely aware of this diplomatic dimension. She described this dimension as a “subtle game of balance”. Following Marcel Mauss, one could argue that the federal heritage policy was a gift that provoked a reciprocal exchange.

3 These were, for example, different carnivals and processions.

4 The discovery of folklore and traditional cultural practices in Belgium in the 19th century can be interpreted as a paradigmatic process much like those in many European countries. In 1904, for example, musician and conservationist Ernst Rudorff founded the *Bund Heimatschutz* in Germany. One of the aims of this association was to safeguard “morals, customs, feasts, and traditional costumes” – intangible cultural heritage *avant la lettre* (cf. Tschofen 2007).

5 In 1947 Marinus was a founding member of the International Folk Music Council. In the same year he was elected vice-president of the Commission internationale des arts et traditions populaires (CIAP); this commission, in turn, together with UNESCO, founded the Conseil international de philosophie et des sciences humaines, which today plays an important role as a non-governmental organisation that judges candidature files for the intangible heritage list.

6 Moser was a specialist in historical approaches and, together with Karl-Sigismund Kramer, founder of the so-called *Münchener Schule*. Both researchers aimed to establish historical folklore studies that reflected critically on every used source. The context for this historical approach was a kind of counter-movement against mythological and ideological interpretations of folk culture during the Nazi era that were based on problematic conceptions of continuity.

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