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# A Critical Analysis of the Symbolic Significance of Heritage Tourism

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**Hyung yu Park and Marcus L. Stephenson**

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Dr. Hyung yu Park

*Lecturer in Tourism Studies*

*School of Health and Social Sciences*

*Hendon Campus, The Burroughs*

*Middlesex University, London, NW4 4BT*

*United Kingdom, [h.park@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:h.park@mdx.ac.uk)*

Dr. Marcus L. Stephenson

*Head of Tourism*

*School of Health and Social Sciences*

*Middlesex University Dubai, P.O. Box 500697*

*Dubai, U.A.E., [m.stephenson@mdx.ac.ae](mailto:m.stephenson@mdx.ac.ae)*

## Abstract

*This paper discusses ways in which domestic heritage tourism acts as a symbolic mechanism through which shared social memories of the nation's past can be evoked, conceptualised and communicated. The discussions aptly illustrate the view of heritage as a form of cultural production and how it plays a fundamental role in recognising and expressing the nation's existence. Attention is drawn to an analytical contention emphasizing the crucial significance of individual narratives and unofficial discourses in the production and reproduction of shared memories and collective sentiments, encountered and reproduced during heritage tourism experiences. In this context, it is asserted that the subjective interpretations of heritage places are socially important in understanding how national consciousness and notions of nationhood are projected. The paper critically explores the social and cultural dimensions of tourism experiences emerging from postmodern influences, including the advent of a commercially contrived heritage industry and the increasing significance of de-differentiated tourist experiences. These discussions lead to concluding assertions claiming that the contemporary nature of heritage tourism enables domestic tourists to critically understand their nation's unique 'moral geography'.*

**Keywords:** Heritage Tourism; Culture; National Identity; Nationhood.

## Introduction

Timothy and Boyd (2006: 2) define heritage tourism as follows:

*This form of travel entails visits to sites of historical importance, including built environments and urban areas, ancient monuments and dwellings, rural and agricultural landscapes, locations where historic events occurred and places where interesting and significant cultures stand out.*

Although the above definition signifies the tangible elements of heritage, this form of tourism can also be identified as an immutable outcome of the past inherited from one generation to the next. As an integral part of culture, heritage is an essential element of national representation which reminds nationals of the foundations upon which their sense of belonging is based. The discussions appropriately explore the view of heritage as cultural production and how it plays a fundamental role in imagining an essence of national identity.

Macdonald (2006: 11) appropriately identifies heritage as a 'material testimony of identity', primarily interpreted as a 'discourse and set of practices concerned with the continuity, persistence and substantiality of collective identity'. Therefore, as the forthcoming discussions illustrate, heritage is not just a tangible asset of the past represented as artifacts and sites but an intangible phenomenon manifesting diverse symbolic meanings and national embodiments. From this debate, heritage tourism is inextricably bound up with experiencing the physical and psychological remnants of the nation's past.

Heritage tourism is arguably one medium through which the idea of a nation and 'felt history' (Connor, 1993: 382) is re-emphasised and productively communicated. Domestic heritage tourism seemingly encourages

individuals to realise the essential elements of their own unique culture, nationhood identity and national history (Palmer, 1999). Consequently, this paper will begin with a discussion concerning ways in which heritage tourism acts as a symbolic mechanism through which shared social memories and experiences can be evoked, conceptualised and reconceptualised. Although heritage can perhaps be understood as a material and psychological testimony of identity, emphasis on the socio-psychological dimensions of identity are pertinent given that popular interest in heritage presentations and representations arguably manifests people's intention to be relieved of their personal and collective fears over society's discontinuing links with the past.

Heritage is a sign and symbol of people's ethnicities, nationalities and identities but yet subject to different meanings and multiple interpretations. Academic literature significantly concerns the fundamental reasons as to why and how heritage represents social identities, especially the implicit functions heritage institutions play in official and formal representations of national identity (Lowenthal, 1998; Pretes, 2003). Attention is thereby drawn to analytical debates maintaining that hegemonic and state-led discourses of heritage embody nationalistic-based elements. Yet, it is necessary to extend this observation to a considered acknowledgement of the importance of individual narratives, unsanctioned representations and unofficial discourses in articulating and affirming nationalist sentiment, especially the subjective nature of heritage interpretations, encounters and experiences. Moreover, it is asserted that experiences of heritage tourism can potentially enable

individuals to understand their nation's unique 'moral geography' (Smith, 1991: 16).

The transition from modernism to postmodernism seemingly induced fundamental changes in social and cultural forms of consumption. Under postmodern influences there are changing conceptions of tourist experiences and new consumption styles of tourism, as evident in the contemporary role of 'post-(mass) tourists' as critical and individualistic consumers. The latter part of this paper thus highlights these concerns and also critically indicates the social and cultural dimensions of a commercially contrived heritage industry, as well as the increasing sociological significance of de-differentiated tourist experiences. Moreover, given that the postmodern debate indicates ways in which social identities are expressed and represented, and how tourism experiences symbolically represent everyday life, the subjective and inter-contextual elements of domestic heritage tourism are further clarified in light of previous discussions.

## **Culture and Heritage: Embodied Symbols of Society**

### **Culture as a Symbolic System**

The emphasis on understanding culture in terms of manifesting symbols with varying semantic interpretations was evidently made by Geertz (1973), who highlights that the concept of culture is essentially a semiotic one. It is proposed that the meanings of signs or symbols as the main components of culture can vary over time and in different social contexts. He believes that human beings are suspended in 'webs of significance' (1973: 5)

that they themselves have spun. The webs of significance are predominantly concerned with the notion of culture, which represents a system of meanings and a set of relationships constructed from the interaction between language, behavior and meaning. Therefore, the analysis of culture is 'not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning' (1973: 5). Geertz (1973: 24) further asserts:

The whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is...to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them.

Williams (1961: 41) emphasises the ordinary aspects of culture conveying 'certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior'. Thus the study of culture should critically acknowledge the significance of the mundane realms of everyday experiences (Billig, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Edensor, 2002). Appropriately, Cohen (1982) indicates that viewing culture as something that is purely determined by learned behavior fails to grasp what it feels like to belong to a particular culture. His suggestion seems to be appropriate in understanding various ways in which culture is symbolically constructed and represented in such contexts as heritage tourism. In this regard, culture works as a 'symbolic system' with the capacity to 'create and recreate shared values' (Meethan, 2001: 117). The term 'culture' thus cannot be defined and analysed in a simplistic manner. It is arguably more appropriate to focus on the actual usage of the term in relation to different and varied contexts rather than seeking a single, universal and all-embracing definition.

As an integral part of culture, heritage can thus be perceived as a repertoire of meanings and values as well as an embodiment of symbols in a given society. As cultures and societies can be interpreted and portrayed in situational contexts, heritage representations, constructed by the cultural tourism industry, can be one mechanism in encouraging shared experiences and memories to be evoked, interpreted and (re-)conceptualised.

### **Conceptions of Heritage**

The conceptual notion of 'heritage' carries historical values and can be viewed as part of the cultural traditions of society (Wiendu Nuryanti, 1996). Heritage arguably plays a fundamental role in enhancing the identity of a region or nation, and is a major vehicle for expressing regional and national cohesion and unity. Heritage can therefore be defined as 'that which a past generation has preserved and handed on to the present and which a significant group of population wishes to hand on to the future' (Hewison, 1989: 16). This definition primarily focuses on heritage as an instrument for preserving remnants of a past that are cherished by certain groups of people, together with an inter-generational capacity to maintain elements of the past throughout different periods of time.

Yet, as Hewison's (1989) work implies, the transformation of heritage places into tourist attractions is increasingly influenced by the development of consumer-driven strategies not firmly by strategies based on conservational principles. This position also suggests that heritage is indeed a fragment of the past partially selected and deliberately presented for tourists to consume. Substantial attention

focuses on ways in which heritage places can be portrayed as areas of contestation and dissonance, especially when issues of ownership and interpretation are brought to the forefront of academic discussion (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Hale, 2001; Macdonald, 2006).

Heritage can thus be conceived as a selection of particular meanings and values accorded and accredited by members of certain socio-cultural groups. At the same time, heritage can be viewed as an intricate formation of certain ideologies or doctrines which future generations may wish to preserve. By drawing upon Nuremberg's (Germany) historical association with the Nazi Party, Macdonald (2006) emphasises the notion of 'undesirable heritage' as a thematic alternative to popular heritage discourses often conceiving heritage as a 'celebratory legacy' of the past.

Heritage representations can often be constructed in ways which socially and and/or politically exclude 'significant others' and their particularistic-based histories. Stephenson's (1994) observations of the heritage industry in Manchester (UK) serve to illustrate some of these concerns. He notes that Manchester's heritage centers and museums do not substantially acknowledge ways in which the African Caribbean diaspora has significantly influenced the city, asserting that the tourism product of Manchester is based on a vision or view of heritage that excludes important historical events and circumstances. The role of the transatlantic slave trade in contributing to the economic wealth of the city is one such illustration. Stephenson (1994: 15) further notes: 'Also scarcely mentioned is the active role of

Manchester's Abolition Movement and its conflicts with the city's slave traders'.

Heritage may be commonly identified as an immutable and inalienable (fixed and unchanging) outcome of the past inherited from one generation to the next. Understanding heritage as a static and tangible construction of the past, however, could exclude intangible resources including experience-based cultural events (e.g., festivals and traditional rituals). Therefore, heritage is not just a tangible asset of the past represented as objects and sites but an intangible phenomenon manifesting diverse symbolic meanings, embodied and illustrated in various national and regional contexts. It is important to carefully consider the significance of intangible heritage for enhancing cultural diversity as well as the deep-rooted interdependence between intangible and tangible heritage. It is contended that culture and history are legitimised as heritage once:

*...we and we alone give it a value-laden significance in anthropogenic terms. In other words, tourists go to see, not just artifacts but psychological artifacts, their meanings created differentially and a million and more times over, in the minds of each and every one of us (Boniface and Fowler, 1993: 158)*

Recognition of the socio-psychological dimensions of heritage is of paramount importance in understanding how personal perceptions, individualised meanings and subjective sentiments concerning collective social memories contribute to the long-standing (public) appeal of heritage institutions. These dimensions of heritage, rather than its physical assets, seemingly render the application of heritage in a given culture and

society as timeless and enduring. Their relevance arguably relates to ways in which the growing popularity of heritage has been concerned with relieving people's collective fears and worries over discontinuing links with the past, particularly in the context of an ever-changing society. This issue is also closely linked to a reasoned emphasis on intangible assets, subjective accounts and individual narratives in contextualizing nations and national identities. Barnard (1983) claims that shared heritage is critical in enabling each individual to possess and preserve the distinctive character of a nation's collective soul, which has the capacity to penetrate the national psyche.

Heritage could possibly be viewed as a symbolic embodiment of past, reconstructed and reconstituted in the collective memories and traditions of contemporary societies rather than being perceived as a mere apotheosis of bygone times. The past seems to be adapted and modified by present demands, where the creative side of culture and tradition plays a crucial role in facilitating and maintaining the process of symbolic construction. Heritage can thus be regarded as part of a 'symbolic system', what Geertz (1973) and Meethan (2001) believe to be the base for creating and recreating shared values in society. Furthermore, heritage is also recognised as a 'unifying sign' (Bessière, 1998: 26) which preserves and reconstructs the collective memory of a social group, thereby enhancing its social and cultural identities. Accordingly, Bessière (1998: 26) asserts:

Heritage, whether it be an object, monument, inherited skill or symbolic representation, must be considered as an identity marker and distinguishing feature of a social group.

Heritage is often a subjective element because it is directly related to a collective social memory...social memory as a common legacy preserves the cultural and social identity of a given community, through more or less ritualized circumstances.

Heritage tourism can therefore play a crucial role in providing certain 'ritualized circumstances' through which shared social memory can be effectively inscribed and communicated within specific heritage settings. Heritage can also be perceived and contextualised as one distinct form of heterotopia. Foucault (1986) identifies the nature of the space in which we live as being fundamentally heterogeneous, comprised of various sites imbued with contradictory meanings, antithetical perceptions and conflicting functions. He thus establishes the concept 'heterotopia' to refer to a distinct space linked with but contradictory to all other sites in a given society. Heterotopia is defined as one form of an 'effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites...that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault, 1986: 24). Heritage sites, museums and libraries stand as illustrations of heterotopias in that they can depict certain unchanged meanings and values of a given society. It is elucidated that:

*...the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile*



*place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity (Foucault, 1986: 26).*

Although Foucault claims that such heterotopias as museums and libraries emerged as a consequence of western modernity, the concept of heterotopia can seemingly be applied to a social space imbued with perpetual national values. In contrast to the formalities of the outside world, heterotopia is a space in which 'alternative social ordering is performed' (Hetherington, 1997: 40).

### **Heritage as a Representation of the Past**

Lowenthal (1998) argues that growing obsession with the past is inextricably bound up with a post-industrial inclination for society to dislocate individuals from families, neighborhoods and nations, and even one's former self. He states:

*Dismay at massive change stokes demands for heritage... Beleaguered by loss and change, we keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability... Mourning past neglect, we cherish islands of security in seas of change (Lowenthal, 1998: 6).*

This view concurs with Horne's (1984) influential claim which attributes this growing obsession to the crisis of contemporary reality. The incessant search by tourists for 'discarded dreamlands' (1984:1) is one rather conspicuous illustration of a process of harking back to the past in order to evade the reality of the present. He maintains:

### **Space here please!**

*Why should tourists be seeking the past? Why should the past have any particular*

*resonance?... Throughout the age of industrialism there has been a nervousness in finding valid expressions of modernity. The tourist experience, with its seeking for an authentic (and well-researched) past, has been part of the same crisis in reality that has produced so much scholarship, so much sociology and so many experiments in art forms... Uneasiness with the present was so great that...the past was nostalgically plundered to provide a modern sense of dignity and meaning (1984: 21-2).*

The concept of nostalgia, which implies a sense of homesickness and sentimental yearning for the past, exerts a strong influence on the symbolic construction of 'remnants of stability' in present contexts. Thus, there is a tendency to beautify and idealise the past as a way of relieving the fear associated with an unstable present and unpredictable future. Reconstruction of the nostalgic past amidst the growing disaffection of everyday life thus illustrates how heritage perhaps functions like 'islands of security' (Lowenthal, 1998: 6), relieving estranged individuals from an insecure and unsatisfactory present. Consequently, nostalgic sentiments of the past are viewed as forms of salvation from the harsh reality of everyday life and anxiety regarding future circumstance.

Read (1999) acknowledges that Hewison's (1987) analysis greatly contributes to conceptualising ways in which the heritage industry came to the fore through society's ever-increasing fascinations of the past in a given society, regardless of the fact that it mainly focuses on UK contexts. Apart from such apparent symptoms of national decline as economic hardship and political instability,

Hewison (1991) attributes the advent of the 'heritage industry' to individual and collective fears (and worries) over discontinuing its links with the past. Importantly, severance from the past might result in underestimating and destabilising 'confidence in the value of the social identity that comes from a secure past' (Hewison, 1987: 45). He emphasises that rapid transformation of the urban environment resulting from industrial and technological change poses a threat to those traditional ways of life that are nostalgically perceived to be authentic, stable and secure. Hewison (1987: 43) thus states:

*In the face of apparent decline and disintegration, it is not surprising that the past seems a better place. Yet it is irrecoverable, for we are condemned to live perpetually in the present. What matters is not the past, but our relationship with it. As individuals, our security and identity depend largely upon the knowledge we have of our personal and family history; the language and customs which govern our social lives rely for their meaning on a continuity between past and present.*

Present day concerns over disconnections with the past seemingly affect people's sense of security and identity. Re-enactment of the past, embodied and manifested in heritage presentations and representations, is perhaps of significance for the enhancement of collective and individual identities, the maintenance of a sense of security and the purpose of cultural continuity. In the same vein, Walsh claims that such heritage institutions as castles and country houses are generally deemed to 'possess the qualities which could maintain and promote the historical identity of the nation' (1992: 72). In this light, Paxman

(1999) argues that growing uncertainty over the collective endeavour to secure national culture and identity in England's rapid changing (multi-racial) society led to the phenomenal success of the National Trust in the 1990s, especially in promoting and developing heritage products. He interestingly contends:

*We must accept, first, that a sense of history runs deep in the English people. It may not be particularly well informed... but it is deeply felt and is one of the things that makes the people what they are (1999: 154).*

This deep felt sense of history embodied in heritage representations arguably contributes to an understanding of the need for cultural continuity, which potentially sustains shared memories of a given community. It is thus appropriate to consider ways in which heritage sites signify a strong sense of collective identity, regardless of whether or not the process of commodification is strategically employed for the contemporary reproduction of past artifacts, events and memories. Edson (2004: 345) asserts that heritage is of significance in that:

*...It allows humankind to transcend individual destiny to achieve continuity. The heritage resources have extraordinary emotional and intellectual appeal since they evoke a feeling of prestige and, therefore, a sense of pride. They help to generate an environment where the people can acquire an awareness of the continuity that exists in human creation, glimpse a past that they receive with admiration and gratitude, and project the future to which they will transmit the results of their own endeavors.*



Therefore, heritage is an essential re-enactment of the past and important in helping to sustain a nation's cultural continuity, albeit it in a diluted form. The appreciation of traditions, cultural forms and heritage representations seemingly provides opportunities for individuals to enhance their understanding of meanings and values embedded within heritage settings.

## **Conceptualising 'Heritage Tourism'**

### **Heritage Tourism and Cultural Consumption**

Along with Richards' (1996a) research, which illustrates that tourism demand in areas of European cultural and heritage consumption has increased rapidly, analysts have also revealed that the tourism and heritage industry has developed an ever-increasing fascination for turning the remnants of the past into tourist attractions, thereby elevating heritage as an essential component of regional and national tourism strategies (Eastaugh and Weiss, 1989; Light and Prentice, 1994; Boyd, 2000). Furthermore, the increasing movement towards developing niche tourism through the development of segmented and specialised products (see Novelli, 2005) has further facilitated the discursive interrelationship between heritage and tourism. In tandem with increasing concerns over maximising the socio-economic implications of the national heritage tourism industry, heritage conservation and preservation have been rigorously promoted by such international organisations as UNESCO (see Harrison and Hitchcock, 2005).

Therefore, heritage is seemingly closely associated with the key concepts of 'past' and 'tradition' which embody continuous and immutable elements, while tourism is

characterised by its changeable and dynamic nature. Nonetheless, as previously emphasized, heritage is not always a fixed or static outcome of the past, particularly when it is presented and represented in the context of tourism. As heritage seems to be reinterpreted and re-evaluated by the variable interests and variegated tastes of tourists, it should then be partly understood as dynamic phenomena relative to time and place. Ashworth (1994: 16) interestingly notes:

*History is the remembered record of the past; heritage is a contemporary commodity purposefully created to satisfy contemporary consumption... the raw materials...are a wide and varied mixture of historical events, personalities, folk memories, mythologies, literary associations and surviving relics, together with the places, whether sites and towns, with which they are symbolically associated.*

As heritage is part of contemporary cultural consumption, its industry proactively attempts to expand its attractiveness by adopting new approaches aimed at the development of commercial and entertainment-based products. The tourism industry is undoubtedly at the forefront of this trend. The difference between the old and new touristic situation is that a heritage message is formulated for entertainment as well as educational purposes (Boniface and Fowler, 1993). For example, the success of Jorvik Viking Centre (York, north England) as a tourist attraction is attributed to its 'edutainment' characteristics (e.g., innovative methods of display aided by technological devices and face-to-face interaction with Viking-costumed staff). The blurring distinction between education and

entertainment is a clear manifestation of the de-differentiation of postmodern cultural and social spheres. The traditional role of heritage institutions and museums is essentially to educate the public. However, focus on entertainment orientations relates to the increasing appeal of heritage and other cultural institutions as tourist attractions in new postmodern contexts. Such cultural institutions are arguably concerned with image projection and consumer satisfaction as key components for maximizing their appeal in the wider context of the leisure and tourism industries (Foley and McPherson, 2000). In pursuit of both knowledge and entertainment, new technological methods and commercially-oriented management strategies are actively facilitated.

MacCannell's view of tourism as a central device in re-appropriating and reshaping culture is clear, perceiving tourism as a form of 'framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs' (1992: 1). This view, however, is seemingly misleading. Tourism can certainly be conceived as a spur in the process of encouraging and enhancing the appeal of heritage to wider audiences but not necessarily in terms of adopting an ultimate role in the whole process. The role of tourism in awakening the potential of heritage in developing value-laden products should not be overestimated. The adaptation of both culture and heritage for tourism demand should be carefully considered in order not to fully distort or negate their original meanings and values. Thus, excessive interest in exploiting heritage for touristic consumption could lead to a loss in conveying its original meaning, apart from fabricating history in order to appear more authentic. Heritage tourism has a role to play

in meeting the changing demands of cultural consumption, thereby enhancing the overall quality of touristic experiences and increasing the potential of historic-based resources.

Poria et al., (2003) challenge the existing perceptions of heritage tourism, especially those mainly linked to tourists' appreciation of historic places and sites. Instead, they contend that heritage tourism is a phenomenon related largely to tourists' motivations and perceptions of the site itself rather than simply the site's attributes and artifacts. Attempts to investigate the significance of the demand side of heritage, particularly people's subjective perceptions and aspirations, are seemingly overshadowed by a major emphasis on the supply aspects of heritage and heritage management as a tool for economic development (see Wiendu Nuryanti, 1997; Rowan and Baram, 2004; Hausmann, 2007). It is important, however, to critically acknowledge people's socio-psychological needs and perceptions of heritage settings in an endeavour to advance an alternative approach to understanding the role of heritage tourists and tourists at heritage places. This can be explained by considering motivations of the visit and the relationships between tourist perceptions and tourist behavior patterns. A deep understanding of heritage tourism based on tourists' motivations and perceptions can be further effective and relevant in such contexts as domestic heritage settings, religious sites and the places of ancestral connection (see Stephenson, 2002).

Nonetheless, despite recognising that the significance of individual perceptions of visits to heritage sites contributes to broadening the spectrum of heritage tourism formations, too much emphasis on the demand side could then

lead to neglecting the supply side of heritage tourism, including the attributes of sites and objects on display (and their relationship to patterns of tourism consumption). Conceptual and empirical-based studies ought not to lose sight of the interconnections and interrelationships between the demand and supply components of heritage tourism. Hence, concentration on one component should duly acknowledge the ontological relevance of the other component.

Apostolakis (2003) believes that the categorisation of 'heritage tourists' depends on the consumption patterns of heritage attractions. From the existing literature concerning heritage tourists he classifies two contrasting groups: the descriptive group and the experiential group. The first definitional group places an emphasis on the 'material components of culture and heritage such as attractions, objects of art, artifacts, relics, as well as more intangible forms of culture and heritage such as traditions, languages, and folklore' (2003: 799). The second definitional group focuses on the individual's experiences and her/his perceptions of the destination site, and when choices need to be made to consume heritage experiences. Apostolakis (2003: 799) further claims:

*The experiential definition of heritage tourism thus embodies an interpersonal element. The linkages between the site, the potential tourists' motives and their perceptions can be conceived as an interactive process.*

The experiential definition of heritage tourism seems to be appropriate for exploring meanings and perceptions associated with visiting specific heritage sites and settings, particularly where meanings attached to the sites are

closely related to issues of cultural and national identity. It is anticipated that recognizing tourists as experientially defined could bestow valuable insights concerning ways in which the interactive relations between tourists and heritage representations provide commentary on, and/or enhance awareness of, national belonging and collective solidarity; especially with regard to how social memories are embodied, communicated and evoked at the site itself.

### ***Heritage Tourism: 'A Sacred Journey of National Discovery'***

The act of tourism has been perceived as a modern and secular form of pilgrimage (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990), often involving non-ordinary experiences (Lett, 1983; Jafari, 1987). Lett (1983: 39) views tourism as a set of activities 'which constitutes the sacred dimension of social life and stands in direct opposition to work and the profane dimension of existence'. Informatively, Jafari (1987: 152-155) argues that the act of tourism can be composed of three different phases: 'separation phase', 'declaration phase' and 'repatriation phase'. In the 'separation phase', tourists disconnect themselves from the ordinary realm of their daily contexts by actually getting involved in the act of traveling. Tourists then become gradually immersed in the 'declaration phase', a non-ordinary and 'emancipated' lapse into the state of touristhood where normal behavior and routine circumstances of everyday life become reversed. In the final stage of 'repatriation', tourists return to ordinary life and resume everyday responsibilities and roles.

In examining the anthropological elements of Catholic pilgrimage, Turner and Turner (1978: 20) draw significant attention to the state of

'communitas', where pilgrims are able to experience intense contact with others and share a special degree of social solidarity contrary to the norms and structures of everyday life. In acknowledging the interrelationship between pilgrimage and tourism they elucidate that tourists potentially experience an 'almost sacred, often symbolic, mode of communitas', further stating that a 'tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (1978: 20). Accordingly, attaining the mode of communitas, where people can experience 'direct, personal, immediate and unmediated' relations (Lett, 1983: 48), is arguably a significant element in uplifting and elevating heritage tourism experiences. Heritage tourism could thus be closely intertwined with experiencing collective elements of national belonging and embracing virtuous encounters, and thus partly understood as embodying an essence of 'civil religious pilgrimage'(1).

The act of exploring the national past and realising its crucial influences in present contexts seems to be similar to the act of searching for religious origins and re-enacting ritualistic aspirations. Experiencing a heightened sense of shared national belonging with other nationals during heritage tourism experiences could perhaps be interpreted as manifesting a mode of 'communitas'.

There are perhaps various ways in which sacred experiences of nationhood can be encouraged and facilitated beyond individual experiences and interpretations. One key element is the crucial role of the tour guide. Cohen et al., (2002) identify two contrasting roles of the modern tour guide: the leader and the mediator. The leader is a modern variation

of a 'pathfinder' who traditionally focuses on 'instrumental leadership', which incorporates the outer-directed and physical elements of tour-guiding (2002: 920), i.e., regulating and directing tourists. The role of the mediator is to interpret the heritage setting as well as facilitate the spiritual and inner-directed aspects of the tour (Cohen et al., 2002). Tour guides in heritage places are generally regarded as mediators of meanings, symbols and values that underpin heritage displays and representations, where they are often proactive in articulating a communal sense of shared belonging (Katz, 1985; Dahles, 2001; Cohen et al., 2002). In comparison with commercial tour guides, the mediator role needs to be understood as a form of mentorship involving a 'dual type of guidance, both geographical and spiritual, such as is offered by leaders of religious pilgrimages' (Cohen et al., 2002: 920). In this regard, Schmidt (1979: 445) claims that tour guides can facilitate tourism as a religious experience by way of providing an 'organized ritualized enactment of reverential respect to these sacred places'. As a process of experiencing the nation's sacred centers, it can thus be argued that heritage tourism can be interpreted as one important form of pilgrimage or spiritual journey involving the discovery and / or rediscovery of nationhood identities.

### **Heritage Sites as Places of National Identification, Belonging and Legitimacy**

#### **National Heritage and National Identity**

The past is an indispensable element of defining and understanding nations. A nation's history shapes and maintains its own

distinctive identity. As Hall (1996: 212-13) claims:

*Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found...identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.*

Buildings and monuments of historical significance stand as symbols and icons of national legitimacy and solidarity. Thus at this stage of the discussion the heritage industry arguably plays an essential and unique role in maintaining and reinforcing notions of national identity (Johnson, 1999). Interestingly, Hitchcock (1996) explains that material culture in a given society is a visual expression of identity. He further claims that the use of material culture can be understood as one of the most obvious manifestations of identity communication. The presentation and representation of heritage places can thus greatly contribute to the processes of identity communication, particularly within the context of domestic tourism. In addition, it is acknowledged that such heritage places as monuments, castles and museums are actively employed in promoting an idea of the nation (Walsh, 1992). However, it is not necessarily the physical manifestations of heritage resources but the meanings and symbols attached to them that are of greater significance in shaping an essence of identity and history.

The popularity of heritage tourism, particularly within domestic settings, relates to the fact that its images and symbols encountered and experienced during visits reveal a past that is 'ours', which appears to be both socially familiar and communally enduring. The remnants and traces of a nation's past are expected to be 'appealing in one covertly projective way or another to the historical and sacrosanct identity of the nation' (Wright, 1992: 2). It therefore needs to be highlighted that cultural heritage, linked to projections of local or national identity, should not necessarily trivialise the fact that cultural artifacts and practices have a symbolic as well as a physical function.

The relationship between national heritage and national identity has become closely interrelated and inter-contextualised. There are several examples where heritage presentations and representations are systematically developed and promoted in order to enhance a distinctive culture and exalt a sense of national belonging (Pitchford, 1995; McLean, 1998; Henderson, 2001). Henderson's (2001) study, for instance, draws attention to ways in which heritage presentations in Hong Kong contribute to the construction and negotiation of meanings associated with national identity formations. Hong Kong's heritage, representing a mixture of Chinese and British (colonial) cultural elements, is perceived as an important signifier in defining a distinctive (fused) identity at a time of social transition, de-colonisation and cultural uncertainty. Henderson argues that perceptions of national identity are personal and fluid, changing over time and depending on given conditions. However, it is maintained that people with the same nationality can share a common core of

feelings and beliefs through heritage tourism experiences.

It may appear that the craving for heritage in relation to exalting a sense of history, real or fabricated, is regarded as a conspicuous effort to solidify a sense of belonging to a nation at a time of significant cultural and social change. However, historical and social discourses of identity represented in heritage contexts need to be carefully handled, particularly if it is to be argued that representations of the past are open to falsification or exaggeration via the construction of partial truths (Read, 1999). Furthermore, the relationship between heritage and national identity has been more complicated by the expansion of the tourism industry, particularly with reference to the advent of cultural and heritage tourism in recent years (Light and Dumbraveanu-Andone, 1997). Within tourism contexts, heritage seems to be constantly reconceptualised and reconstructed in an attempt to meet the specific demands of tourists and reflect the socio-cultural changes of the contemporary world. Appadurai (1990: 9) argues that the past cannot merely be engaged in representing a 'golden glow of nostalgia ruled by the politics of the good old days', but should actually symbolise a 'synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios' serving to develop and facilitate various ways of reaffirming and reinterpreting connections with the past in ever-changing cultural and social contexts. Appropriately, Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996: 105) emphasise contemporary usages of the past:

*The interpretation of the past in history, the surviving relict buildings and artifacts and collective and individual memories are all harnessed in response to current needs which*

*include the identification of individuals with social, ethnic and territorial entities and the provision of economic resources for commodification within heritage industries.*

### **Heritage Tourism, Identity Construction and Cultural Production**

With its political role in supporting nation-building and national identity, the heritage tourism industry is recognised and utilised as a major economic activity (Urry, 1990; Ashworth and Turnbridge, 1996; Franklin, 2003). However, McIntosh and Prentice (1999) argue that the commodification of pastness can be interpreted as a way of facilitating the search for identity, finding the true self through appropriating the past. In illustrating that formation and reaffirmation of identity are encouraged through visitation of places associated with constructions of pastness, McIntosh and Prentice (1999) relate the creation of identities to the consumer's position in a given time and place. Accordingly, they state:

Identities are thereby created through amassing insights into what is associated with the emergence of a culture, and appropriating these insights is pertinent to the consumer's own understanding of his or her place in time and space (1999: 590).

In his discussion concerning the development of heritage tourism in Ireland, Johnson (1999: 204) claims that heritage should be understood as 'part of broader suite of representational practices that raise important and diverse questions about how the past is mediated', as opposed to being perceived to be contrived of modern products harnessed by the tourism industry's commercially-driven strategies. Therefore, heritage tourism involves the



'ideological framing of history and identity', where heritage is contextualised as an 'alternative way of mediating the past to popular audiences' (Johnson, 1999: 187).

Harvey (2001) appropriately acknowledges the importance of considering the establishment of heritage through a long-term historical process of development. He argues firmly against those who have implied that interest and fascination with the past is a recent phenomenon, leading to the advent of heritage as both an industry and a commodity. Harvey's emphasis on the 'historically contingent and embedded nature of heritage' (2001: 319) draws caution to views which often conceive heritage as a modern outcome and to perspectives which stress that heritage is integral to the commodification process. Edson (2004) emphasises the immense symbolic significance of heritage in presenting the dichotomy of both material and spiritual values of heritage representations as a way of reconstituting and reproducing meanings and values underpinning such representations. He maintains that:

*...the idea of heritage has greater symbolic meaning than the object, time, or place, that is, historical reference. The dramatic and representative values of heritage expressions are often subordinate to symbolic or mnemonic allusions. However vague or personal these references may be, they stimulate a response that implies understanding. The heritage in most circumstances can be regarded as identity through time and, if so, that identity (individual or group) verifies something (heritage) as being important... Real or imagined heritage manifestations are viewed as elements of continuity (2004: 338).*

The view of heritage as cultural production seems to play a fundamental role in imagining an essence of national identity. Both heritage and identity are given form and structure through physical remnants of the past. As implied earlier, heritage attractions are regarded as 'sacred centers' or places of spiritual and historical pilgrimage, powerfully revealing the nation's unique 'moral geography' (Smith, 1991: 16). Such cultural and heritage institutions as museums and royal palaces seemingly portray and disseminate the essence of high culture and elements of national authority (and state power). However, the range and scope of these 'sacred centers' should not necessarily be restricted to the presentation of heritage settings driven or imposed by an official ideology of high culture.

Pretes (2003) explores the links between nationalism and tourism by examining three tourist sites in the American state of South Dakota: Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Wall Drug Store and Rapid City Dinosaur Park. He concludes that visits to these places may help to 'create' and 'strengthen' national identity through identifying and recognising hegemonic-based discourses of the nation (2003: 126). Mount Rushmore, for instance, signifies such national values as independence, freedom and liberation, and through carefully placed images of four 'great American presidents' this memorial signifies USA's presidential power. However, excessive analytical focus on the dissemination of an official (state-led) discourse of heritage as an embodiment of nationalistic sentiment could actually neglect attention to understanding the crucial significance of individual narratives and unofficial discourses in the construction, conception and (re-)interpretation of heritage narratives and discourses.

Wright (1985: 5) informatively notes that the national past is constantly re-enacted and re-embodied as a 'vernacular and informal sense of history' in everyday contexts. Therefore, it is germane to recognise that the heritage setting can be popularised when it is reproduced in the ordinary and mundane realms of everyday experiences. Hence, heritage tourism experiences enable individuals to understand the unique 'moral geography' of their nation embedded in everyday contexts, thereby exalting a collective sense of belonging and contributing to the fulfillment of internalised aspirations of national identity.

In exploring ways in which domestic tourism at Angkor (Cambodia) contributes to ongoing formations of collective identity, Winter (2004: 331) asserts that conceiving this heritage site as a form of 'living heritage' is crucial in the articulation of contemporary national and cultural identities. He challenges popular and normalised notions of heritage landscapes as 'abstract, objective and value neutral' (2004: 330), where official histories are traditionally perceived to be deeply grounded in unbiased truths and dispassionate commentaries. Instead, emphasis is placed on the concept of memory as a fundamental agent in actively constituting and reconstituting times and places in multiple and varied ways in a given heritage landscape. Social memory, evoked through personal and subjective experiences of the heritage setting, arguably plays a more significant role in the upkeep of cultural and national identities as opposed to such physical manifestations as buildings and objects of historical significance.

Merriman (2000) notes that heritage tourism enquires have been overly concerned with

ways in which the past is commodified, eschewing the possibility of constructing a creative version of the past based on an individual's personal experiences and memories. It is further suggested that those museums and heritage institutions engaged with non-commercial representations of the past, especially those operated under the auspices of the public sector, might play a pivotal role in providing materials for people's creative construction of the past. The focus in this context is to recognize such emotional materials as shared social memories and values.

Franklin (2003) regards travel and tourism as an integral part of national life through which people encounter a collective past and generate an idea of nationhood. Moreover, heritage tourism has a pertinent role to play in socially promoting the nation through encouraging displayed customs and cultural traditions, as well as ownership of national values and meanings, to be symbolically appreciated and collectively shared amongst national (domestic) visitors (Palmer, 1998). Importantly, heritage is a sign and symbol of people's ethnicities, nationalities and identities but yet subject to different readings, multiple interpretations and diverse meanings, and influenced by the institutional endeavors of the heritage industry. The role of heritage tourism as part of a 'set of processes and social relations' (Hitchcock, 1999: 21) is integral to ways in which people's ethnicities and identities are constantly reconstructed and negotiated in situational contexts.

## Postmodern Influences on Tourism and Heritage Contexts

### Tourism and Postmodern Culture

Since the late 1980s, postmodernism has been utilised as a concept to describe the development of new socio-cultural, political and economic spheres, representing a shift towards distinctive experiences which are, to a degree, split from organised, structured and rational contexts of modern society. Appropriately, Tarnas (1991: 395) states that postmodernism demonstrates:

*...an appreciation of the plasticity and constant change of reality and knowledge, a stress on the priority of concrete experience over fixed abstract principles, and a conviction that no single a priori thought system should govern belief or investigation.*

As indicated, postmodernist perspectives attempt to counteract modernistic ways of understanding the nature and function of social and cultural spheres, especially the emphasis on perceiving cultures and societies in an overly essentialist manner. Urry (1990: 84) emphasises that modernism was characterised by 'structural differentiation' involving the development of normative and institutional distinctions within various cultural and social spheres. The process of differentiation also implies that each domain of culture is selected and interpreted by different class-oriented audiences.

Under the increasing influence of postmodernism relatively uniform, modernist and auratic (historical) discourses have given way to discourses and representations which are more varied, post-modernist, vernacular

and regional (Lash and Urry, 1987). Lash and Urry (1987: 286) claim that postmodern culture is predominantly concerned with being 'anti-auratic'. Overarching meta-narratives concerning the differentiations of socio-cultural spheres have thus come to be replaced by accounts of popular mass culture. Featherstone (1991: 96) specifically explains the essence of postmodern change in direct relation to changing perceptions of cultural consumption, stating:

*The general expansion of the cultural sphere within contemporary Western societies not only points to the enlarged markets for cultural goods and information, but also to the ways in which the purchase and consumption of commodities, an allegedly material act, is increasingly mediated by diffuse cultural images via advertising, display and promotion... Here one can point to the increasing salience of forms of leisure consumption in which the emphasis is placed upon the consumption of experiences and pleasure (such as theme parks, tourist and recreational centers) and the ways in which more traditional forms of high cultural consumption (museums and art galleries) become revamped to cater for wider audiences through trading in the canonical, auratic art and educative-formative presentations for an emphasis upon the spectacular, the popular, the pleasurable and immediately accessible.*

These fundamental changes in the form of leisure consumption are also clearly manifest in heritage and tourism contexts. Traditionally, sites of cultural and historical significance tended to be more frequented by those individuals who had sufficiently high forms of economic and cultural capital. Likewise, an

initial form of cultural appreciation through tourism was ultimately preoccupied by those who represented high culture. The era of the 'Grand Tour', for instance, was a testimony of the rights of social elites to travel to places for the purpose of acquiring cultural knowledge and intellectual advancement (Towner, 1985; Black, 1992). However, since such heritage places as visitor attractions appeal to wider sections of society their social significance has rather dramatically changed in recent years. Lowenthal (1998: 11) explains the pervasive appeal of a nostalgic past:

*In times past, only a small minority sought forebears, amassed antiquities...Such pursuits now lure the multitude. No longer are only aristocrats ancestry-obsessed, only the super-rich antique collectors, only academics antiquarians, only the gentry museum visitors; millions now hunt their roots, protect beloved scenes, cherish mementos, and generally dote on times past.*

Development in communication and travel networks, and the increase in disposable income and leisure time, paved the way for more mass tourism experiences (Urry, 1990). More recently, the 'de-differentiation of class culture' (Lash, 1990: 11) provides individuals with increased opportunities to participate in activities once considered to be a social right for elite groups. However, the perceived socio-economic transition from Fordism to post-Fordism substantially impacted the tourism industry, particularly with respect to new consumption styles of tourists and changing perceptions of tourist experiences. In sharp contrast to Fordist characteristics of mass-consumption, as well as the mass-production of standardised goods and styles, post-Fordist

traits are arguably based on flexible production, individualistic consumption and multiple preferences (Henry, 1993). From this it may be assumed that tourist consumption patterns have thereby become more post-Fordist than Fordist in orientation. Shaw and Williams (2004) note the creation of more specialised niche markets in patterns of post-Fordist tourist consumption compared to the collective consumption of such undifferentiated products as package tourism. The development of such niche markets as special-interest tourism is expected to cater for the varied and specialised tastes of contemporary tourists, i.e., 'post-tourists' (Feifer, 1985: 259). Nonetheless, the perceived change from 'Fordist' to 'post-Fordist' modes of production and consumption is not necessarily a clear and distinctive transformation. This transition needs to be understood as one way of understanding contemporary socio-cultural changes rather than a *fait accompli*(2).

For Urry (1994), the expansion of heritage tourism is closely associated with the rise of postmodern forms of consumption. A variety of heritage products are produced and marketed as commodities for this new group of tourists, who distinguish themselves by highly diversified patterns of consumption. In tourism, as in other sectors of consumption, there is a constant search for new experiences and sources of stimulation that help to distinguish particular social groups (Richards, 1996b). It is believed that post-tourists are increasingly self-confident and willing to encounter different and diverse experiences of other cultures and environments. In order not to be beguiled by the 'environmental bubble' of the tourism industry (Cohen, 1972), particularly in the context of the

institutionalised experiences inherent in traditional forms of mass tourism, it appears that post-(mass) tourists place greater emphasis on individual choices, customised experiences and subjective aspirations.

Post-tourists seem to be increasingly aware of the fact that tourism events are staged and commodified. Accordingly, from this it can be asserted that the objects of the tourist gaze are, to a greater or lesser extent, deliberately constructed and contrived for tourists to consume. Such tourists are becoming more aware of the nature of various tourist environments and are more critical of the goods and services they select and/or consume (Urry, 1990). Furthermore, post-modern tourists endeavour to construct and develop their own narratives and sense of historic places in order to create 'individual journeys of self-discovery' during visits to heritage places (Wiendu Nuryanti, 1996: 251). It is seemingly necessary to be aware of the status of 'post-tourists' in order to discern and examine particularistic-based characteristics of contemporary forms of heritage tourism.

### **The Heritage Industry: Commercialized Products and Pseudo Experiences**

As indicated earlier, another conspicuous phenomenon of the tourism industry influenced by post-modern change is the growing popularity in representations of the past. Technological advances after the industrial revolution era introduced new and innovative ways of communicating with the past. The increasing obsession with re-enactments of the past is not just confined to the development of heritage representations but to popular culture

spurred by nostalgic sentiment. As Rojek (1994: 4) insightfully observes:

*Nostalgia industries continuously recycle products which signify simultaneity between the past and the present. For example, hit television shows from the sixties are retransmitted in the 1980s and '90s and reproduce or beat their original success; top pop songs from the fifties, sixties and seventies are re-released and become number one hits all over again; and fashions that were discarded as infra dig in our twenties are triumphantly championed by our children thirty years later. Increasingly, popular culture is dominated by images of recurrence rather than originality.*

Analysts have indeed discussed ways in which the increasing demand for past representations is closely related to the needs of modern societies to encourage and enhance a clear continuity with the past (Wright, 1985; Hewison, 1987; Ashworth, 1994). This concern consequently led to the advent of a commercialized 'heritage industry' institutionally linked to the leisure and tourism industries (Hewison, 1991: 166-7). The aegis of the heritage industry is inextricably bound up with such key tenets of post-modernism as 'simulation' (Baudrillard, 1983) and 'hyper-reality' (Eco, 1986). Hewison (1987: 135) appropriately contends:

*Post-modernism and the heritage industry are linked, in that they both conspire to create a shallow screen that intervenes between our present lives, and our history. We have no understanding of history in depth, but instead are offered a contemporary creation, more costume drama and re-enactment than critical discourse.*

The development of the heritage industry seemingly facilitated the blurring boundaries between history and heritage. Here, it is argued that the heritage industry promotes entertainment and commercial values by presenting a past that is a hollow pastiche of history rather than accurately portraying its truth. Commodified heritage is often criticised as a denigrated version of history which seemingly fails to capture the essence of the nation's cultural and social identities. Hewison (1987) emphasises that the commercial need for exploiting historical tales has consequently led to the advent of the heritage industry. He states:

*Yet we have no real use for this spurious past, any more than nostalgia has any use as a creative emotion. At best we turn it into a commodity, and following the changed language of the arts, justify its exploitation as a touristic resource. The result is a devaluation of significance, an impoverishment of meaning (1987: 138).*

Recent tourism markets have paid special attention to the promotion of heritage as a tourism resource. The tourism industry is often blamed for being responsible for the excessive commodification of heritage, which is often systematically packaged and sold for tourist consumption. The range of nostalgically motivated and commercially contrived heritage attractions is increasingly appealing and socially palatable to tourists (Hewison, 1987; Urry, 1990; Halewood and Hannam, 2001; Vesey and Dimanche, 2003). Hewison (1987: 32) argues that heritage 'means everything, and it means nothing, and yet it has developed into a whole industry'. Interestingly, Richards (1996a: 13) indicates that the heritage industry has been

founded upon a 'whole new breed of attractions and intermediaries who supply culture specifically for tourist consumption'. This is also consistent with Hewison's (1987: 144) fierce criticisms viewing heritage as a 'bogus history' and a commercially contrived form of entertainment. The heritage industry is denounced not only for the emergence of quasi-heritage (pseudo) products but also for distortion of intrinsic meanings. Given the commodified portrayal of heritage tourism, pastness can variably be described as 'retrochic' (Samuel, 1994), 'romanticized fiction' (Merriman, 2000: 3) and / or an 'aberration of "real" history' (Hewison, 1987: 138). In explicating two contrasting applications of the meaning of heritage, Merriman (2000: 8) maintains:

*These positive values of care and identity are in sharp contrast to the more negative and pejorative views of the term heritage. In this sense, as used in the 'heritage industry', the word has become synonymous with the manipulation (or even invention) and exploitation of the past for commercial ends.*

However, intellectual opposition to the growing popularity of the commercialised nature of the heritage industry has become more moderate during the last decade, especially as significant attention has focused on the positive aspects of utilizing the past through developing commercially-led approaches. Read (1999), for instance, notes that a heritage industry which makes the past popular in the present actually plays an essential role in making historical resources more accessible. In this regard, heritage is also expressed as a form of 'cultural production' expressing new social identities which can be packaged and promoted within



tourism development contexts (Robb, 1998). Such observations thus draw caution to the rather critical viewpoints highlighted by such key authorities as Hewison (1987) and Lowenthal (1998), who are preoccupied with denouncing heritage as a commercially contrived industry.

### **De-differentiated Tourist Experiences**

Earlier academic literature in tourism studies emphasised the distinctive and extraordinary nature of tourist experiences (MacCannell, 1976; Graburn, 1989; Smith, 1989). Smith's (1989: 1) conceptualisation of the tourist as a 'temporarily leisured person who visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing change', positions the tourist experience as disparate from the routine experience of everyday life. This notion is clearly illustrated in MacCannell's (1976) portrayal of tourism as a modern counterpart of pilgrimage, involving a search and quest for authenticity which cannot necessarily be fully actualised in modern everyday life. He identifies the act of sightseeing as a 'ritual performed to the differentiations of society', maintaining:

*The differentiations of the modern world have the same structure as tourist attractions: elements dislodged from their original natural, historical and cultural contexts fit together with other such displaced or modernized things and people (1976: 13).*

In contrast to the shallow and inauthentic nature of modern everyday life, tourists are expected to encounter real and authentic experiences only when they succeed in dislocating themselves from their own culture

and society. Graburn (1989) also highlights the differentiation between everyday life and tourist experiences, claiming that tourist experiences manifest non-ordinary characteristics. However, the processes of de-differentiation as crucial features of post-modern change have fundamentally transformed the cultural and social formations of contemporary societies. Lash (1990: 11) focuses on the process of de-differentiation in the cultural realm, which he believes:

*... is no longer 'auratic'...that is, it is no longer systematically separated from the social. This has to do with the partial breakdown of the boundaries between high and popular culture and the concomitant development of a mass audience for high culture.*

Therefore, the distinctive boundaries between such cultural spheres as high and popular culture, history and heritage, past and present, and entertainment and education have been less visible. As Urry (1990: 82) states:

*Postmodernism involves a dissolving of the boundaries, not only between high and low cultures, but also between different cultural forms, such as tourism, art, education, photography, television, music, sport, shopping and architecture.*

Uriely (2005: 203) further highlights the processes of de-differentiation which blurs distinctions among 'normative, aesthetic and institutional spheres of social activity'. Likewise, the conspicuous distinction between tourist experiences and everyday life is increasingly challenged by the application of postmodern paradigms to the understanding of tourism. As distinctions have become

increasingly blurred, existing perspectives have thus been confronted with the view of producing modifications to set ways of perceiving situations, particularly those perspectives which view tourism as being fundamentally alien from everyday life. Understanding tourism experiences as part of everyday life is arguably of symbolic significance in recognising the importance of consolidating a sense of national belonging and collective solidarity in everyday and mundane contexts.

What is also pertinent about the postmodern perspective is that the past, especially the way it is articulated, perceived and negotiated, is merged into the postmodern present. Thus the past and the present have become de-differentiated and no longer perceived as separate and discontinuous elements. Nonetheless, Harvey (1989: 54) cynically notes:

*Postmodernism abandons all sense of historical continuity and memory, while simultaneously developing an incredible ability to plunder history and absorb whatever it finds there as some aspect of the present.*

Harvey's observation thus implies a critical awareness that analysts should not necessarily take the de-differentiation principle to extreme by suggesting that a shared (social) memory is made completely redundant in postmodern societies simply because symbols of the past are appropriated, reconstructed and represented in the present. Indeed, as this paper duly illustrates, it is the subjective and inter-contextual dimensions of a shared social memory that can help to reconstruct (and revive) elements of a nation's past and history in ways which reflect its present needs and circumstances.

## Conclusion

Domestic heritage tourism does not simply concern the touristic consumption of heritage artifacts. This form of tourism embodies a social process involving the projection and reaffirmation of national meanings and values. Furthermore, the socio-psychological dimension of heritage is important in understanding how the symbolic significance of heritage is essential in enhancing its long-standing appeal as a potent reminder of nationhood. Recognition of heritage tourism as fundamental in communicating social memories of the past thus plays a pertinent role in exalting the 'spiritual' principle of the nation. This signified percept can be venerated in a way which perpetuates the nation's past as something which is perceived to be ever immortal and enduringly perennial.

This paper thus clearly argues that heritage tourism practices have a prominent role to play in 'nation building', asserting that heritage discourses are not completely related to the presentation of an official ideology of history but subject to personal, informal and subjective interpretations. Accordingly, heritage tourism is not always predominantly related to emphasising one dominant reconstruction and reinterpretation of collective memory assisted by state-based, hegemonic forms of national sovereignty. Rather, it facilitates ways in which individuals variably position themselves in the broader context of the cultural construction and symbolic embodiment of nations and national identity.

The discussions illustrate ways in which national heritage sites can enable individuals to contextually perceive shared elements of social memory and nationhood. Consequently,

heritage tourism is thus believed to be ontologically purposeful in enhancing a sense of national belonging. As a symbolic embodiment of the past, heritage is reconstructed and reconstituted in the collective memories and traditions of contemporary society rather than a mere apotheosis of bygone times. As a 'unifying sign' (Bessière, 1998: 26) or part of a 'symbolic system' (Geertz, 1973; Meethan, 2001), heritage lies at the core of preserving and strengthening the collective memory of a social group; influencing and impacting constructions and reconstructions of people's social and cultural identities.

Although it is asserted that heritage discourses and narratives are not completely related to the presentation of an official ideology of history, empirical study would help to provide a range of diverse case illustrations concerning tourists' subjective and inter-subjective (and unsanctioned) interpretations of heritage sites and spaces; particularly through the employment of qualitative-based methods sensitive to the ethnographic production of interpretive data concerning people's perceptions and experiences (see Stephenson and Bianchi, 2007; Stephenson et al., 2007). Nonetheless, this paper acknowledges ways in which heritage tourism potentially enhances and exalts nationalist sentiments.

The latter discussion of the paper suggests that new forms of tourism consumption characterise the creation of individual and tailor-made tourism products which are less structured and more independently sought after than mass tourism products. This trend reflects ways in which tourists have become more critically aware of tourism activities and

selective of the choices they make. Importantly, the application of postmodern paradigms to an understanding of tourism draws attention to the blurring of distinctions between tourist experiences and everyday life, facilitated by a debate which contributes to the modification of existing perspectives which conceive tourism experiences to be fundamentally alien from everyday life. Thus it could be postulated that tourism experiences are part of everyday life and thus of symbolic significance in consolidating a sense of national belonging and collective solidarity in mundane contexts.

Academic critiques concerning the commercialisation of the heritage industry have been prevalent in tourism and heritage studies. Nonetheless, more recently there is a realisation that the process of multiplying the past can be socially and culturally constructive, even though commercial orientations are purposely pursued. Thus discussions concerning the role of the heritage industry in the context of post-modern change imply that as historical resources are becoming more available, access has seemingly become more democratised and consumption has become less socially differentiated. This issue is certainly pertinent to the popular appeal of national heritage settings to wider sections of society.

In light of the main discussions highlighted in this paper, heritage tourism can enhance a sense of belonging as well as exalt a shared understanding of what is deemed to be important and what should be preserved for future generations. Yet although it is asserted that heritage tourism proactively reconstructs nationhood experiences, this argument may only contribute full critical value to heritage tourism studies once multifarious factors

constituting 'nations' and 'national identities' are highlighted and evaluated. The identification of the socio-cultural, geo-political and historical characteristics of nations (and nation-states) would provide applicable theoretical configurations to then logically address the ontological peculiarities of heritage tourism and national representation.

Finally, the study topic would benefit from critical attention to emerging paradigms manifest in the study of heritage and citizenship. Indeed, Brubaker (1996) maintains that discussions of citizenship in the age of the nation-state are largely about constructions of nationhood and meanings of belonging (see also Migdal, 2004). Therefore, it would be pertinent to conceptually explore ways in which domestic heritage tourism can reinforce and/or re-enact a sense of what it means to be a modern citizen, stimulating further discussions concerning the ethnic and cultural elements of citizenship symbolically and politically embodied in national heritage settings.

### **Notes**

(1) See West's (2005) study concerning the conceptual significance of 'civil religious pilgrimage' as a spiritual means of discovering an enchanted past from national history. Drawing upon the narratives of Australian backpackers at the Gallipoli Battlefields in Turkey, the study emphasizes that this type of pilgrimage creates new dialogic relations and contexts where national history can be consistently reinvigorated as part of contemporary consciousness.

(2) Some analysts contend that if a modification to the conceptual application of Fordism in understanding tourism consumption and

production is imminent, then it would be appropriate to utilize the term 'neo-Fordism' as opposed to 'post-Fordism' (see Agarwal, 2000; and Torres, 2002). In her study of tourism development in Cancun, Torres (2002) informatively illustrates newly-emerging elements of tourism development explained by such neo-Fordist dimensions as 'mass customisation'.

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