

## *European Products: Making and Unmaking Heritage in Cyprus*

GISELA WELZ

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Whilst reading Gisela Welz's new book, I was reminded of a walk I had taken in Nicosia more than 10 years ago. With Haşmet Gürkhan's book *Düñkü ve Buğünkü Lefkoşa* (Nicosia Yesterday and Today) in my hand, I was on a 'heritage quest', looking for a street whose life and residents he had written about, and which had been divided and cut off by the wall marking the division of the city post 1974. Finding the street and the shrine of Kara Baba as he had described it, I was amazed to discover a boat yard right up against the wall, with sailing boats in various stages of construction and repair. What was, to my eyes, an entirely unexpected and eccentric local urban economy had emerged in the gaps created by the coastal bias of Cyprus's tourism and the spatial politics of the Cyprus conflict. With 'heritage' now a dominant mode of production, driving the transformation of urban and rural economies across Cyprus, there will be little room available for such idiosyncrasies in the commodified spaces of the island's towns and villages, as Welz's careful analysis of the material processes of heritage making and unmaking in Cyprus reveals.

Welz's book is the product of a decades-long engagement with Cyprus which is both personal and professional. Out of this long-term engagement emerges an eye for what links such, at first sight, unrelated practices as the restoration of vernacular architecture, cheese production, and city makeovers. These she locates in the particular form of globalisation Cyprus has signed up to through accession to the European Union, mediated by a major shift to managerialist procedures and technologies of governance. 'Heritagization', argues Welz, comprises not only a 'massive reorganization of public memory' (p. 27), but is at the same time a 'vector of Europeanization' (p. 151), a channel for the harmonisation of laws, policies and practices through which Europe is effectively enacted and becomes part of daily life for at least a section of the population. Each chapter of the book offers a vignette of these practices in relation a particular heritage case, and these specific examples are topped and tailed by the introduction and conclusion, which set the political context of the argument.

The seven chapters of the book are organised under three headings – 'Heritage Regimes' concerns rural heritage making and projects aimed at the revival of villages and the rural economy through conservation and rural tourism. 'Food, Culture and

Heritagization' explores the 'full meze', which has become a staple of tourism hospitality, and the controversial listing of halloumi as a protected 'origin food'. 'Ambient Heritage' examines the commodification of landscapes and townscapes – the former in relation to the protection and exploitation of the Akamas Peninsula, the latter in the context of the 'European Cities of Culture' programme, in which cities compete for the title by demonstrating how successfully they can embody an idea of European urban cultural space. By tracing the paths of European legislative and policy practice across each of these chapters, a picture emerges of the tensions and contradictions, not only between the ambitions of a Europe-wide project and its local realisation in Cyprus, but between different policy arms. This results in the paradox, for example, of a food origin-listing regime that favours the commercial interests of big halloumi producers over small-scale 'craft' cheese makers, driving another nail in the coffin of rural economic viability, and exacerbating the problems of decline that other European-funded rural heritage and tourism projects are trying to address. The concluding chapter brings the situation right up to date with a critical reflection on the effects of the financial crisis and the impacts of the Troika and austerity measures on the Republic of Cyprus, which highlights the neoliberalism implicit in the European project. This, for me, was one of the most fascinating parts of the book, opening up questions concerning the role of elite classes in driving and capitalising on investment flows within a globalised heritage economy, which the usual preoccupation with the uses of heritage in projects of ethno-national identity and state formation tend to obscure – particularly in the context of Cyprus. Whilst these processes are by no means unique to the European Union, the EU, as Bianchi (2005) points out, plays a decisive role in pushing liberalisation measures in its neighbourhood and trading partner countries, in order to open up and extend the free European market in services, which is so far incomplete, and which offers rich pickings from the privatisation and commodification of the public realm.

This is not a book about the Cyprus conflict. Nevertheless, its contestations inevitably surface in this account of cultural heritage production, and, without wishing this to become the focus of the book, I should have liked to see some of the issues raised, for example, by the Protocol 10 arrangements for the suspension of the *acquis communautaire* in the north, dealt with more fully, rather than relegated to parentheses and footnotes. This, however, should not detract from the book's achievement, as Welz, moving between interlocutors in Brussels and Cyprus, and reflecting on developments spanning 25 years, delivers a fascinating insight into the multiple layers of heritage practice and the making – and unmaking – of Europe in Cyprus.

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## References

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- Gürkhan, H. (1996) *Dünkü ve Bugünkü Lefkoşa*. Nicosia: Galeri Kültür.

