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‘In but not fully of Europe’: Situating the Ottoman legacy in the heritage initiatives of the European Union and the Council of Europe

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) and Council of Europe (CoE) are in a continuous struggle to identify the internal ‘Europeanness’ of their narratives, borders, boundaries, and regions. Since the 1980s, they introduced numerous cultural policies and heritage initiatives to identify and promote what their policy rhetoric calls ‘European identity’, a concept always used in the singular. These policies and heritage initiatives validate only certain aspects of the past while excluding others. In this article, we analyse how the Ottoman legacy within Europe is integrated into official heritage initiatives. We offer a synthesised qualitative content and discourse analysis of data from three heritage initiatives – European Heritage Label, Cultural Trails of Europe, and European Heritage Days – to demonstrate how the deeply embedded Ottoman legacy is either significantly absent or presented in inconsistent and ambivalent terms in these heritage initiatives. We go on to argue that this depends upon crucial aspects of Europe’s civilisational anxiety where its Ottoman-Islamic past is concerned.

Keywords

Balkanism, European heritage, European identity, Ottoman heritage, South East Europe

Introduction

Since the 1980s, the European Union (EU)[1] and the Council of Europe (CoE)[2] have introduced numerous cultural policies and heritage initiatives to identify

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and promote what the EU policy rhetoric calls 'European identity'. These include labels and prizes, such as the European Heritage Label, European Heritage Days, and the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage, accompanied by broader initiatives pertaining to the ideas of European culture and associated funding schemes. In these initiatives, heritage is seen as a powerful political tool in formulating European identity and advancing projects on European integration (Calligaro, 2013; Lähdesmäki, 2016; Niklasson, 2017; Sassatelli, 2002). With these cultural and heritage policies, the EU asserts its role in constructing a European public anchored around a shared heritage founded on foundational narratives including Western Christianity and Greco-Roman antiquity (Shore, 2000).

This article analyses how the inclusion of Ottoman legacies into these shared heritage narratives of the European Union (EU) and Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (CoE) comes with many interpretive ambivalences. It applies Bryce's (2013) theoretical critique of Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, where he argues that Said's binary construction of East & West and Christendom & Islam is overdetermined when the Ottoman legacy *in* Europe is concerned. This is a series of cultural and religious forms specific *to* Europe and are consolidated into forms that are present in western Anatolia and the Balkans but largely absent in former Ottoman domains in Western Asia and North Africa with pre-existing Islamic, Christian and Jewish cultural forms. It builds upon Bryce and Čaušević's (2019) subsequent study, which applied these theoretical insights to the heritage tourism industries in selected South East[3] (henceforth SE) European states, the former Ottoman territories of Bosnia & Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Albania. It further refines these theoretical propositions through empirical means to solidify the notion of a recurrent 'anxiety' or 'ambivalence' on the part of international tourists to understand and accept Ottoman heritage in these contexts *as* European. In this article, we extend these insights at a grander institutional level, that of what we might term European cultural bureaucracy (Sassatelli, 2002), which seeks to standardise the trajectory of European heritage along particular historical narratives which rarely account for the entirety of the experience of its growing SE European citizenry, be they of Christian, Jewish or Muslim background. It does so by exploring the extent to which the theoretical propositions of Bryce (2013) and the empirical insights following for them elucidated by Bryce and Čaušević (2019) extend beyond the national contexts of consumption they were concerned with find expression at the level of European cultural policy and its various initiatives.

From the earliest days of its expansion into Europe, Western European views of the Ottoman Empire shifted back and forth between condemnation of an expansionist and religiously alien power and the functional need to interact with it as a political actor on the European stage (Kontje, 2004). Therefore, as Bryce (2013: 108) argues: 'the undeniable iteration and deployment of the discourses of binary oppositions such as Christendom vs Islam and Civilization vs Barbarism coexisted with more finely grained, symmetrical interaction at cultural, commercial and political levels'. Todorova (1996: 46–49) situates this duality of conceptualisation and interaction with the Ottomans with those discourses circulating in Western Europe on the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans. She first maintains that '. . .it was a religiously, socially, and institutionally alien imposition on autochthonous Christian medieval societies (Byzantine, Bulgarian, Serbian, etc.) whose remnants can be traced, but they are treated as non-organic accretions on the indigenous natural bodies of these societies' (Todorova, 1996: 46–49). Next, Todorova (1996) identifies a 'complex symbiosis of Turkish, Islamic and Byzantine/Balkan traditions'. Its premise is that centuries of coexistence must have produced a common legacy and that the history of the Ottoman legacy is the history of all its constituent populations. In other words, Todorova argues that the societies of the Balkans, insofar as they have taken shape since the Ottoman conquest from the late 14th century, are the Ottoman legacy in Europe given the individual elements do not exist in this particular association anywhere else. Bjelić and Savić (2002: 6) notes, 'Balkan people perceived each other as both colonial rulers and as colonial subjects . . . a dual sensitivity which then gets translated into calling Bosnian Muslims 'Turks' – that is, the colonisers . . . whether Balkan nationalism is post-imperial or

. . . post-colonial, it is fair to say that it remains distinctly liminal'. Therefore, we can see a discourse emerging that has two irreconcilable elements which existed as a kind of timeless, non-specific 'Orientalism' and another which had to deal with the Ottoman state and its European successor states in pragmatic terms that were possible only in SE Europe and Anatolia (Bryce and Čaušević, 2019).

During the nineteenth and early 20th centuries, as the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire broke away, the question of Balkan nationalism presented a problem from the strategic perspectives of those European powers valuing stability in the region, whether through the maintenance of the Ottoman status-quo or a new system of independent nation-states. In terms of both British diplomacy and travel writing in south-eastern Europe (the protagonists of both endeavours often overlapped), Hammond (2006: 100) identifies a 'Balkanist' discourse closely linked to that of colonialism in which the population was portrayed as generally savage, mysterious and in need of civilised tutelage from an external source. In this way, both the shoring up of Ottoman authority in the region for much of the century as a sort of 'colonialism by proxy' and then the later subordination of the newly independent states as virtual dependents of British financial interests was justified. The Balkans were conceived of as being *in* but not fully *of* Europe in civilisational terms (Bryce and Čaušević, 2019; Todorova, 1996).

Arguing that traces of this discourse still inform assumptions about what is properly 'European' and policies proceeding from that, we offer a synthesised analysis of the European regional networks and urbanscapes by researching three heritage initiatives – the European Heritage Label initiated by the EU, Cultural Trails of Europe (CTE) and European Heritage Days initiated by the CoE. Our research explains how the deeply embedded Ottoman legacy is presented in inconsistent terms in these heritage narratives and presents arguments about the civilisational anxiety informing the EU and CoE. We proceed from the perspective that these heritage initiatives indicate the bureaucratic preferences and the institutional approach of the EU and the CoE cultural and heritage policies and politics (Aceska, 2023). This institutional approach of integrating Ottoman heritage narratives is further complicated by the fact that the CoE includes non-EU states with significant Ottoman legacies, such as Turkey, Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. While heritage is a powerful signifier of a sense of identity and belonging, the political mechanisms that produce it can validate only certain aspects of that past while excluding many others (Harvey, 2001). Any attempt to distil regional, national, supra-national, and indeed civilisational 'heritage' from written history and the intangible and tangible legacies of the past is a matter of ideologically informed choices being made about stories the representing community wishes to tell to both internal and external audiences. As such, the projection of cultural heritage is always a presentist activity and must be distinguished from the comprehensive written history from which it is drawn (Bryce et al., 2017; Lowenthal, 1998). This is a general phenomenon, and our intent is not to critique the practice per se but to call for expanding its content to meet the material reality of the Ottoman heritage legacy in member and aspirant EU states in SE Europe.

The Ottoman legacy in Europe

Amin (1989: 89–90) suggests that the invention of an 'eternal West' occurs when a group of societies, conceiving of themselves as having a shared experience and consciousness of Latin Christendom, and Enlightenment, at a point sometime in the nineteenth century, project this notion of collective self *backwards*, appropriating Greco-Roman antiquity as its antecedent, obscuring any sense that this also informed neighbouring successor civilisations in any comparable sense (see also Wolff, 1994). This European civilisational grand narrative excludes two other great historical states with a significant presence on the territory that came to be understood as 'Europe', the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire to a lesser extent and the Ottoman Empire to a far greater one. The religious heritage of Orthodox Christianity has been integrated to some extent within European narratives as first Greece, and later Bulgaria and Romania were admitted to the EU. Other SE European states where Orthodoxy is significant, such as North Macedonia, Serbia, Albania,

and Montenegro, have been recognised as candidate countries. Bosnia and Herzegovina also recently started its EU membership talks in March 2024 (European Commission, n.d. -a). All were, in whole or in part, former territories of the Byzantine Empire. The same, largely unproblematic, integration of the legacy of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, of which all of these European states were also, more recently, territories, has been less assured despite that empire's extensive tangible and intangible heritage legacy across SE Europe as well as its enduring religious impact on the region in the form of significant Muslim populations. This would seem to be an outcome of the civilisational assumptions embedded in the EU, where new candidate states are expected to accommodate themselves to a 'standard of civilisation' that has its historical roots in Western, Christian, and secular Europe (Stivachtis, 2008), with some elements of their cultural heritage more easily integrated than others.

Turkey, the principal successor state of the Ottoman Empire (a state named for its founding and ruling dynasty, the House of Osman), has been an EU candidate since 1999 but, aside from concerns related to its commitment to democracy and the rule of law, poses particular existential difficulties for the particular discourse of Europe mentioned above for a host of long-standing reasons with roots in the historical view in Europe of the Ottomans as invaders from the East, bringing with them not only another faith but one that was the principal contestant to Christianity in its various forms (Finkel, 2005). The Ottoman Empire, from its late 14th-century Anatolian origins, until it began in the early 16th century to extend its reach into the territories of its Muslim neighbours in the Middle East and North Africa, was focused on expansion in Anatolia and SE Europe and was, therefore, a participant in European power politics and a shaper of its European subjects' religious and cultural life over a similar timeframe (İnalcik, 2006).

The continuing European Ottoman legacy today is extensive and splendid and architectural glories as the 16th-century Selimiye mosque in Edirne in European Turkey, the Banyabaşı mosque in Sofia, the iconic White Tower in Thessaloniki and the (reconstructed) Old Bridge in Mostar are potent visual signifiers of its contribution to SE Europe's architectural landscape. Intangible heritage is present too in the cuisine, music and language of 'post-Ottoman' Europe, from variations on Turkish coffee, the old folk song, Üsküdar'a Gider İken, its provenance claimed and disputed among peoples across the Balkans and Turkey, and Ottoman-Turkish loan words which have been retained in many of the region's languages (Mylonas, 2019; Neuburger, 2004). The region's literature is shaped by its Ottoman past, with celebrated writers of historical fiction like the Yugoslav Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić and the Albanian Man Booker Prize winner Ismail Kadare, meditating on national identity and the fissures within it through the lens of their countries' respective experience of Ottoman rule (Andrić, 1996 [1945], 1977 [1945]; Kadare (2008 [1970]). The Ottoman legacy also lives in the contemporary social realities of SE European nation-states with (setting aside Turkey itself) large sections of the Bosnian, North Macedonian, Albanian, Serbian, Montenegrin, and Kosovar populations and significant minorities in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Greece retaining the Muslim faith that their ancestors converted to under Ottoman rule. In addition, the organisational shape of Orthodox Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism often bear the mark of their being co-opted as an arm of Ottoman imperial rule under the *millet* system (Sugar, 1977). This heritage is, therefore, a contested one in many post-Ottoman European states, with varying levels of acknowledgement of its being an intrinsic part of the complexity of any nation-state's historical development to perceptions of it as a legacy of an unwanted and alien conqueror. The strength of feeling can be seen most vividly and tragically in the wars leading to and following the breakup of Yugoslavia, which often followed not only ethnic but religious fault lines between Muslim Bosniaks and Albanians and Christian Serbs and Croats (Baker, 2015).

This, then, is a living legacy of European experience. If the EU and CoE are to fulfil their remit to celebrate and integrate the cultural heritage and histories of all their member states, present and potential, they must, therefore, acknowledge and represent them in their full diversity. As Bryce and Čaušević (2019: 103) argue, 'the designation of Ottoman heritage as religiously and civilisationally remote from Europe produces a de-historicised identity' for both

the peoples of the region and their neighbours elsewhere in Europe.

Methodology: qualitative content analyses and discourse analyses

We base our arguments on qualitative, so-called *latent* content analysis and discourse analysis of official EU and CoE documents, promotional material, and material commissioned for three heritage initiatives: the European Heritage Label (EHL), the Cultural Routes of Europe (CRE), and the European Heritage Days (EHD). EHD and the CRE are initiated and administered by the CoE, and the EHL by the EU. We have selected these initiatives as they represent the most illustrative heritage initiatives from both institutions compared to initiatives focusing on culture and cities, such as the European Capitals of Culture. The roles of the EU and CoE in the making of European heritage and common European identity largely overlap. Within both institutions, we distinguish between top-down initiatives with more room for local heritage actors in heritage-making processes. Regarding their differences, the CoE includes countries with significant Ottoman heritage but not part of the EU, such as Albania, Turkey, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, the difference in the number of countries with Ottoman heritage of the two instructions does not affect the results of this research. The EU has a sufficient number of countries with Ottoman heritage – Greece, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria – from which we draw conclusions.

Interpretive content analysis (Berg, 2001: 42) complements structured forms of discourse analysis within single studies (Hardy et al., 2004). We used qualitative content analysis to plan the analytical process and provide the foundations for our discourse analysis, which explored social practice and the broader social contexts at hand (Fairclough, 2013: 94). We aimed to understand the political factors influencing how legislators and power structures want to present and guide or impede the interpretation and understanding of Ottoman Heritage in Europe. Therefore, discourse analysis was an appropriate method in the latter stages.

We adapted Bengtsson's (2016) three-stage approach to qualitative content analysis. Stage one defines the background premises and grounds the argument that the projection of cultural heritage is a presentist activity, thus distinguished from a comprehensive written history (Bryce et al., 2017; Lowenthal, 1998). Stage two identifies the main research question: how are Ottoman heritage sites and intangible Ottoman legacies depicted within the context of the EU and its peripheral states? Stage three formulates the criteria for analysis by selecting a representative sample of content and context (Bryman, 2012: 419).

We sought to identify specific references to Ottoman heritage within the contexts of (1) multiculturalism, (2) religious connotations, (3) European heritage diversity, and (4) tourism development. These contexts were selected in alignment with Fairclough's (2013) framework, which underscores the importance of grounding initial screenings in broader social practices and the relevant social context under which the discourse analysis operates. Accordingly, these emerged as focal points not only through the preliminary content analysis of the EHL, ECR, and EHD narratives but also through a review of additional EU and COE policies and funding initiatives, for example, Strategic Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (European Commission, 2019; European Commission, n.d.-b), Cultural Heritage in EU, to name a few. These four thematic contexts derived from latent content analysis, mediate between our theoretical framework and discourse analysis. They thus form the foundational layer for the development of discourse analysis. The evaluation of which statements referred to those four foundational contexts was guided by concepts identified in the literature and found in the content that has been analysed, such as: border, national/nationalism, regional, national, Balkan(ism), European, Ottoman, migration, violence, territory, belonging, exclusion, identity, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim heritage.[4] These keywords serve as a nexus between the text, social discourse, and discursive practices (Fairclough, 2013), thus pivotal in conducting discourse analysis, guiding us to their fourth stage.

The fourth stage attempts to merge noted impressions into categories. First, we focus on hierarchical

approaches and the involvement of local actors in the heritage-making process. We understand the processes of making heritage within the EU and CoE as bureaucratically and ideologically informed choices made within a heritage regime, defined as an interplay of policies, practices, and ideologies between the nation-state and the EU and CoE international heritage institutions (Bendix et al., 2013). The poststructuralist standpoint asserts that a word's meaning and definition can never be finally determined (Fairclough, 1992: 66) and depends on context (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Through discourse analysis, the research explores the reasons behind the reproduction of state-driven approaches to valorising heritage sites that have been deemphasised or excluded from European Heritage canons. Further analysis focused on two main categories: discourses on the current development of cultural heritage and on barriers preventing effective valorisation of it.

As Hardy et al. (2004: 22) argue, research of this nature is an exercise in informed creative interpretation that seeks to show how reality is socially constructed through texts. Content analysis thus provides a meaningful way to demonstrate these performative links at the heart of discourse analysis. Subsequently, discourse analysis concerns the production of sociocultural reality (Hardy et al., 2004). The analytical framework comprises three parts: textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis (Fairclough, 2013: 94). Although the stages are analytically separated (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 81), they are presented together to outline how the text is influenced by existing social practice, which can be found through the choice of words, phrases, grammar, etc. (Fairclough, 2013).

The Ottoman past and heritage present of Europe: three heritage initiatives

European Heritage Label

The EHL is the EU's most prestigious initiative to foster a cohesive European identity and is awarded to heritage sites accordingly (see Article 3 of Decision 1194/2011). This part of this article analyses several awarded EHL sites that refer to Ottoman heritage and their alignment with favoured narratives of Europe, content analyses of EU documents related to the EHL initiative, the EU's official decisions, reports of the EHL Expert Panel, and application forms of individual heritage sites, where available. The focus of the analysis is on narratives about the European significance of heritage written by the EU member states' heritage sectors as part of the broader EHL application process, relating to 'EU managerial practices' (Aceska & Mitroi, 2021; Vos, 2017). These narratives are subsequently evaluated by the EHL Expert Panel. This decides which heritage sites have a significant role in the making of the EU and eligible for the Label. The evaluation of the Expert Panel is published in evaluation reports, which are valuable sources for understanding the place and the meaning of Ottoman heritage in the EHL scheme. The analyses also include narratives about the European significance of heritage sites associated with the Ottoman legacy but rejected for the Label. Scholars have demonstrated that state heritage sectors have purposely removed Ottoman heritage from applications for EU heritage and cultural grants in line with what they considered to be 'European management practices' to increase their chances of success (e.g. Vos, 2017). Therefore, the ways the Ottoman legacy is framed in applications, even those of rejected sites, are valuable data sources. The analysis of the EHL depicted Ottoman Heritage discourse through three symbolic themes, mainly (1) Heritage Occlusion, (2) Heritage Obfuscation, and (3) Encountering the Imagined East and Constructing the West. Finally, they revealed the discourse of Tolerance.

None of the sixty heritage sites that received the label refer to Ottoman heritage directly, remaining dormant and *occluded*. Sites with a significant Ottoman past do not integrate it with heritage representing other periods and associated religious traditions in arguments formally presented in application forms to the EHL. The city of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, is rich in Ottoman heritage, both secular and religious. Yet, it is not mentioned in the report to the Panel (EC, 2017: 31). Similarly, in the European Capitals of Culture application, Plovdiv is compared to Athens and Rome to demonstrate its European identity and values (Clopot and Strani, 2020), *occluding*

the Ottoman tangible and intangible heritage legacy. There is an *obfuscated* reference made to the Ottoman legacy in several cases. The EHL initiative of Oradea Fortress in Romania mentions Ottoman Heritage, but it is offered as a representative of an *imagined East* of the kind Europe had to defend itself against. In the official report of the Panel it is stated that the significance of the fortress lies in its role in the 'history of central Europe defending itself against the Mongols in the 13th century and later Turkish [Ottoman] invasions' (EC, 2017: 34). Similarly, the European significance of the former Hajdú District Residence in Hungary, built between 1762 and 1871 for the Hajdú herders, has been framed 'in terms of . . . resistance against the Turks/ Ottoman Empire' (EC, 2014: 32). In the joint application of Croatia and Hungary titled 'Two fortresses – One Hero' which includes the fortresses of Szigetvár and Old Zrinski Town Čakovec, the heritage sectors of both states and the EHL Expert Panel framed the narrative as 'the historical defence of the West against the Ottoman Empire' (EC, 2017: 39). Here, Ottoman heritage is constructed in EHL narratives to represent an alien, aggressive *imagined* 'East', as a resource to support, but not included in, favoured European narratives.

Thus, the West's heritage was constructed in opposition to the *imagined* East. These discourses briefly presented in the EHL context, lead to the final discourse, *tolerance*. According to Hjerm et al. (2020), the challenge in conceptualising tolerance is based on the conflation of it with prejudice and intolerance; in other words, for tolerance to be promoted, prejudice must be present and, if not, created. For example, the town of Szentendre in Hungary received the Label because of its significance in the 'blending of Eastern and Western cultures' (EC, 2019: 22), as stated in the report of the EHL Expert Panel. Szentendre is celebrated for its 'spirit of multi-ethnic and religious *tolerance* . . . since the end of the 17th century, deriving from its cross-border location' (EC, 2019: 22), yet its Ottoman heritage does not feature in the EHL narrative about its European significance, instead orientalised to create a place where western European *tolerance* and dialogue is showcased. The report further states that 'the application develops a clear European narrative based on the site's function as a place of *tolerance* and dialogue and co-development of different cultures, stemming from the cross-border relations and exchange' (EC, 2019). European discourse is positioned here as *tolerant* towards its Eastern neighbour. In the account of the EHL Expert Panel, Plovdiv is presented as a crossroad of 'people and cultures . . . cultural diversity and religious *tolerance*' (EC, 2017: 31), without any specific reference to the Ottoman past that made much of that possible. A noteworthy example is the archaeological site of. The European significance of the site of Monemvasia in Greece is framed as 'a gateway of communication' between regions and cultures of East and West (EC, 2014: 26). In these cases, the outcome of the participatory role of Ottoman and Islamic culture which developed *within* Europe is alluded to but never explicitly acknowledged.

Unlike the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian and Byzantine Empires, Western Christendom and Greco-Roman antiquity are presented as positive and harmonious foundations of European history (Calligaro, 2013). The site of Carnuntum in Austria received the Label in 2017 because of its essential trade function in the Roman Empire (EC, 2013: 7). The Roman Empire, as emphasised in the report, is considered by some as the 'predecessor of Europe, combining different cultures, religions, and geographic areas under one administrative system' (EC, 2013: 7), despite vast tracts of it existing in North Africa, Anatolia and the Middle East. Similarly, Ancient Athens received the Label in 2014 as, according to the EHL Expert Panel, it is 'fundamental to the formation of essential aspects of European culture and identity', making an 'indelible mark on the definition of European common values took place' (EC, 2014: 5) despite being focused on the ancient eastern Mediterranean Greek and Hellenistic world. In this sense, the EHL represents a continuation of long-standing historical narratives in Europe, visible in this and other heritage initiatives of the EU. Athens was the first European Capital of Culture in 1985, and Florence the second in 1986. Laudatory arguments about the glorious past of the EU related to Greek antiquity can be found in other reports of the selection committee. Monemvasia is described as a place in which 'noteworthy intellectual and financial activities

originating from the islet contributed to the dissemination of ancient Greek literature in the West' (EC, 2014: 26). The marginalisation of Ottoman heritage within the presentation of EHL narratives has thus contributed to shaping the construction of a unified European identity through positioning itself as being *tolerant* towards, but not ready to accept Ottoman heritage, instead *obfuscating* it.

Cultural Trails of Europe

The CTE is an initiative launched by the CoE in 1987. It aims to demonstrate, 'by means of a journey through space and time, how the heritage of the different countries and cultures of Europe contributes to a shared and living cultural heritage' (Council of Europe, 2023). These encompass a broad range of cultural and historical signifiers which support particular narratives of Europe (Kearney, 1992). There are presently 44 trails. We select those where precedents are offered for potentially including the Ottoman legacy as an intrinsic component of European heritage. Themes presented in the analysis are summarised under the symbols of *Heritage Occlusion and Silence.*

The first of these is the 'Routes of El legado andalusí', which deals with the Islamic civilisation of *al-Andalus*, which spanned most of the Iberian peninsula from roughly 711-1492CE. This civilisation extended across Iberia until its final remnant, the Emirate of Granada, fell in the late 15th century to the armies of the Spanish *Reconquista.* Al-Andalus represents the flowering of early Medieval Islamic civilisation in Iberia and had a significant cultural, intellectual and political influence on its neighbours in Europe and the Maghreb (Fletcher, 2001). While there is no direct relationship between *al-Andalus* at its final decline and the Ottoman Empire at its rise and apogee, it is notable that the CoE accounts for its Islamic nature and cultural exchanges with neighbouring Christian states, saying: 'beyond the impressive architectural heritage, with La Alhambra as a paradigmatic example, these routes bring back to life the literature, art, science, graphic arts, gastronomy, fiestas and traditions of al-Andalus. Eight centuries of coexistence left a profound mark on the land and its people, so the Andalusi legacy is alive and is everywhere' (Council of Europe, 2023). The Ottoman Empire and its legacy are arguably more significant in the areas of SE Europe where it ruled. In its visible built environment, the Ottoman past directly informs the religious lives and national identities of its former subjects, Muslims, Christians and Jews, to this day. This may be related to the historical distance and limited direct influence of *al-Andalus* on the lives of contemporary residents of Spain and Portugal, contrasting with the ongoing, living nature of Ottoman cultural and religious influence (the empire fell in 1923) on residents of SE Europe today (İnalcik, 2006). The Silence surrounding the depiction of the Ottoman Heritage in Europe is observable, and that *silence* speaks very loud. In a double-occlusion, Ottoman heritage cannot be talked about as entirely European because it is *too* present and has not been, in a sense, domesticated.

Second is The Phoenicians' Route. While of great historical distance, the attributes qualifying its make it of interest. The CoE (2023) states, 'the [Phoenician] route passes through all the Mediterranean countries, including many North African and Middle East countries . . . strengthening historical bonds . . . represented by a relevant heritage originating from ancient Mediterranean civilisations, present in numerous archaeological, ethnic, anthropological, cultural and naturalistic sites throughout the countries of the Mediterranean'. The Ottoman legacy, uniting the same territories and in a far more recent period, directly affects cultural heritage and contemporary cultural and political relations in SE Europeans today (see Brown, 1996), yet its presence is obstructed and kept *in silence.*

Third is the European Route of Jewish Heritage. CoE (2023) correctly states, 'the Jewish people are an integral part of European civilisation, having made a unique and lasting contribution to its development through the millennia'. This route passes through several SE European countries, yet no mention is made of the particular role the Ottomans played in providing refuge to Jews facing persecution in Iberia in the *Reconquista*. Indeed, subsequent Jewish communities facing similar persecution in neighbouring Christian European lands were also offered refuge in the Ottoman Empire throughout its history. This part of European cultural heritage remains occluded. Indeed, an essential dimension of

linguistic heritage, the Ladino language, is a consequence of this meeting of exiled Iberian Jews with the Slavic, Greek, Albanian and Turkish cultures of South East Europe and Anatolia (Shaw, 1991). Yet, this discourse is silenced in the context of representing European Cultural Routes (ECR). While this aspect of Jewish history in post-Ottoman Europe is not fully acknowledged, we note that a Jewish heritage route in Bosnia-Herzegovina is planned, lending credence to the notion that this is a discourse in flux.

European Heritage Days

EHD, a bottom-up initiative involving 50 countries, was launched in 1985 by the CoE. In 1999, the initiative was coupled with the EU to create events that encourage learning and understanding in countries that are a part of the European Cultural Convention. (Council of Europe, 2012). The EHD raises awareness about safeguarding Europe's complexity, richness and diversity (EHD, n.d.). EHD events aspire to finding transnational consensus for understanding and to inform public and private decision-makers about the importance of heritage management. Under the auspices of EHD, diverse ranges of events and exhibitions are developed, responding to topical heritage themes (Kende and Krekó, 2020; Marquardt and Lederer, 2022; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). Individual states' national coordinator is responsible for implementing and promoting the event, while locals can decide which sites to highlight and promote. These include a variety of stakeholders, from local government and cultural organisations This active involvement reflects each region's unique cultural heritage, yet can also marginalise silent narratives, as discussed in this section.

So far, 78,095 events have been organised since the inception of the EHD. Forty-three featured Ottoman heritage in the Overview and European Dimension outline. These stories and events are in Montenegro, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Romania, Turkey, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Albania and France. The EHD events analysed were selected based on the context and importance 'Ottoman heritage' content within the phenomenon of interest. Our analysis did not include sites where Ottoman heritage was mentioned only tangentially.

In this research analysis, Ottoman heritage in EHD is presented through four thematic symbols: *the sword, the bridge, the border and the conversation*. These thematic symbols discuss *exclusion* and attempts at peripheral *inclusion*. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, EHD uses the mediaeval *sword* (EHD, The Vrbas Sward in the Stone, n.d.-c) found in the River Vrbas as a signifier. The narrative around *the sword* tells of trade between the Bosnian Kingdom and the Dubrovnik Republic (1419), the conquest of the Bosnian Kingdom by the Ottoman Empire in 1463, then by the Habsburg Empire, and its reintegration by the Ottomans. The *sword* epitomises not simply a representation of Ottoman heritage in Europe but, indeed, Ottoman heritage as intrinsically European. The intersection of the historical legacies of one mediaeval kingdom (Bosnia), one Republic (Dubrovnik) and two empires, Ottoman and Habsburg, is presented through the narrative of the main protagonists: the Janissary Konstantin Mihailović, King Stjepan Ostojić, and Grand Duke Hrvoje Vukčić. The *sword* symbolises power, protection, authority, strength, and courage; metaphysically, it represents the penetrating power of the intellect (Linklater, 2019). The *Janissary* Konstantin Mihailović who moved between Christianity and Islam and the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, gained the noble military title Dizdar (*fortress commander*) in the Ottoman army and was later knighted by the Habsburg Empire. The mediaeval sword is represented as a unique aspect of European heritage where the Ottomans are part of European identity and represented as such. It also integrates the liminal experience of Balkan residents of the period who often oscillated between the two empires in their regional struggle. Both empires are represented as 'the other', but regardless, in an integrated way with, for instance: 'with this project, we wish to raise awareness about all heritage in Europe' (EHD, The Vrbas Sward in the Stone, n.d.-c) The Ottomans, in this context, are represented not as *the Ottoman heritage in Europe* but *as European Heritage*, thus including the vernacular meaning of heritage representation within European teleological canons. The story of the sword and its owner highlights the notion of inclusion and the challenges of creating binary divisions of 'us' and 'them'. As noted, 'we

want to try and give a new approach to the study of cultural heritage . . . and to step outside of the institution' (EHD, The Vrbas Sward in the Stone, n.d.-c), with greater inclusion as the goal.

In 2020, the theme of the EHD in Montenegro was *bridges*, represented as 'places where the sides merge' (EHD, Bridges, Place Where Sides Merge, n.d.-d), symbolising communication and union. In many cultures, bridges represent the link between what can be perceived and what is beyond perception (Warnaby and Medway, 2008). It also represents the bravery of crossing to the other side where there is a fear of the unknown (Metykova, 2014). Montenegro represented itself as a 'bridge between the West and the East' (Metykova, 2014). Other territories (e.g. Hong Kong, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Turkey) use this trope to overcome potential tourists' uncertainties as they cross ideological frontiers (Bryce, 2012; Bryce and Čaušević, 2019; Zhang et al., 2015). Montenegro is similarly positioned, evoking primordial conflict: 'various civilisations that have conquered the city for centuries . . . creating an eternal conflict between East and West' (EHD, Bridges, Place Where Sides Merge, n.d.-d) In this context, Montenegro's representation positions Ottoman heritage 'on the other side of the bridge' and Montenegro facilitates that crossing.

Third, the *border* context. The old military border between Habsburg and Ottoman domains in *Cvelferija*, Croatia depicts how heritage signifies narratives of spatial division. The slogan 'We kept the border on Sava' (EHD, Military-border drill 'We kept the border on Sava', n.d.-b) epitomises a contradiction with the legacy of the EHD, which is to promote diversity and tolerance (Council of Europe, 2021). Heritage representation is constructed around narratives of the protection of Europe against its Ottoman enemy. This trope is present in many EHD events, such as the presentation of natural and cultural heritage in Silistra, Bulgaria, representing the Ottoman border (EHD, 2017), contradicting a European Heritage Convention Treaty.

The museum 'Cvelferija' with the slogan 'Museum where the past lives in the present' is also a part of EHD in East Croatia (EHD, Military-border drill 'We kept the border on Sava', n.d.-b). This project shows that the identity of citizens is embedded symbolically in a vision of the past and present, where the historic border between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires is conflated with the current one between the EU and its other. Thus, the representation of the site symbolically represents division under the auspices of EHD. The European dimension is presented here: 'we wish to present the life of the people of that time, but also the strong will of today's generations to preserve and nurture the importance that border soldiers had at that time, as well as to preserve the border identity . . . Croatia is at the border and the first pillar of its defence . . .[sic]'.(EHD, Military-border drill 'We kept the border on Sava', n.d.-b). Ottoman heritage integration within the European context is excluded, and division is highlighted within an assertive narrative construct. Heritage representation in EHD is bottom-up and community-driven (CoE Conventions, n.d.), supported by local government rather than high politics (Ivetic, 2007). The Cvelferija region was attacked during the Croatian War for Independence (1991-1995) and in 2014 devastated by massive flooding; it is on the border between the EU (Croatia) and non-EU countries (Serbia and Bosnia & Herzegovina) and the site of significant migration to other parts of Croatia and abroad (Floodlist, 2014). Under this context, celebrating the border is not a simple act of excluding the traces of Ottoman heritage but also recreating a past where contemporary citizens are represented as the guardians of an age-old frontier between imagined West and East in an EU context. This narrative can also be depicted by applying Ignatieff's (1994) concept of 'narcissism of minor difference', where ethnic groups have little to distinguish them yet must legitimise their identity by demonising the other.

Fourth is the context of *the Conversation*, presented by Heritage Days in Belgrade (EHD, Belgrade Adventure, n.d.-a) through 'Belgrade Adventure: Education for the 21st Century', focused on art education and storytelling (EHD, Belgrade Adventure, n.d. -a). Guided tours through Belgrade incorporate intangible and tangible cultural heritage and its traces through the city's stories, focusing on *the Conversation*. Participants had the opportunity to explore several sites, four featuring Ottoman Heritage: Belgrade

Fortress, Ottoman and Jewish heritage, Controversial History and Monuments Tour and the Religious route. High-school students conceptualised the narrative and guided participants through the sites. The religious tour embodies the stories of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Belgrade is represented as a city of inclusion and assimilation, yet minority religions are occluded. Christianity is described as Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical. Jewish heritage mainly follows Ashkenazi heritage, yet Sephardim is silenced. Islamic heritage is represented as Sunni Islam, yet minority traditions within Islam associated with the Ottomans, for example, Bektashi, are not present, thereby focusing on the normative, presentist narratives.

Conclusion

The EU and CoE heritage initiatives we study in this article inconsistently situate the Ottoman legacy in their official conceptions of European heritage. They demonstrate that 'multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, and hybridity appear to be anathema to official conceptions of European culture' (Shore, 2006: 19). Our research shows this is partly a result of bureaucratic formulae. Top-down, procedural heritage initiatives, for example, EHL, have largely excluded Ottoman heritage from official narratives. Initiatives that leave more space for heritage actors at the local level, such as CRE and EHD, have included the Ottoman legacy in ambivalent terms. This is partly due to how local heritage actors interpret 'European management practices' (Vos, 2017), strategically censoring Ottoman heritage to meet the expectations of heritage actors at EU and CoE levels. We argue that the problem lies in the bureaucratic mechanisms expressing **'**unresolved European anxiety about its own Ottoman past' (Bryce and Čaušević (2019: 104).

Our results demonstrate that while the Austro-Hungarian and Byzantine Empires, Western Christianity, and Greco-Roman antiquity are presented as evident foundations of European history, Ottoman heritage is only partially, hesitantly included in official EU heritage narratives. These inconsistencies result partly from the bureaucratic preferences and the institutional approach of the EU and CoE and mainly from more deeply embedded civilisational assumptions that predate the advent of both. With sites positioning themselves as 'bridges between East and West' in a constant reiteration of what Bryce and Čaušević (2019) have called a discursive clearing house where the boundaries of what counts as European must be constantly restated.

The Ottoman legacy in Europe reveals a specifically *European* institutional anxiety about cultural boundaries. The source of this anxiety is not in an absolute 'European' rejection of the SE component of the continent but rather in its attempts to account for perceived difference through narratives that do not take complete account of a heritage legacy which could only have developed in Europe, through the convergence of a 'Persianate' Turkic culture (Dale, 2010) with the Byzantine-Greek, Slavic and other Judeo-Christian European cultures which convered under Ottoman rule for five centuries. The region's Ottoman heritage challenges a vision of Europe that seeks to superimpose the historical narrative of the secularised successors of Latin and Protestant Christendom upon the actual historical experience of SE Europe (c.f. Anidjar, 2006). It is intrinsically associated with a contemporary resurgence in long-standing efforts to arrive at a definition of 'Europeanness' that has yet to be realised and perhaps never will until the particularities of this fusion of historical experience is integrated as part of a broader conceptualisation of Europe's past.

The EU seeks to bring together member states as well as candidate and aspirant ones in SE Europe. However, it has not yet fully accommodated a significant period in that region's history into its official heritage narratives. The EU and CoE maintain a hierarchy of heritage where significant parts are rendered perennially alien and, by implication, the historically informed lives of many citizens. As a result, they encounter the following theoretical problem: the rendering of Europe's Ottoman legacy into a clearing house in which the age-old West/East, Europe/Orient, Christendom/Islam dyads are repeatedly reproduced and only ever partially resolved to reinforce the current Western European heritage narrative is an unsustainable endeavour. As far as the constituent components of these dyads are concerned, it is also necessary that the EU and the CoE, with their cultural policies and heritage

initiatives, find a fuller definition of what their policy rhetoric calls 'European heritage' and recognise all the constituent components of these dyads as collaborators in the construction of Europe's past.

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Notes

1. The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 states, most of which are located on the European continent.
2. The Council of Europe is a leading international organisation based in Strasbourg, France, that protects human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. It is not part of the EU institutional set-up.
3. We use both South-East Europe and the Balkans to identify formerly Ottoman regions of Europe. These terms are not interchangeable since Hungary, Romania and Southern Ukraine are not coterminous with the Balkans yet all have the imprint of Ottoman rule.
4. i.e. Croatian, Hungarian, Bosnian, Serbian, Montenegrin, Macedonian, Albanian, Greek, Bulgarian, and Romanian.

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