Book review of: Bonacchi, C. (2022). Heritage and nationalism: understanding populism through big data. London: UCL Press. 978-1-78735-803-4

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Over the last few decades archaeologists and heritage professionals have tried to construct a more open dialogue with the public by giving room to a wider range of voices. Although their 'expert authority' has always been questioned by the public, archaeologists and heritage professionals have come under more scrutiny. Some people even believe that this 'emancipation' process has started to turn against them, noting that a "post-expert" position in heritage research has undermined valuable knowledge and that it implicitly promotes populist uses of the past (GONZÀLEZ-RUIBAL, GONZÀLEZ & CRIADO-BOADO, 2018). In her book, *Heritage and Nationalism*, Bonacchi makes an excellent case against this critique, by showing that public archaeologists can in fact "expose appropriations of the past […] so that citizens are aware of them to make fully informed decisions" (BONACCHI, 2022, p. 5). She does so by drawing on big data approaches to examine how the past is mobilized in populist and nationalist discourse on social media. Such a big data approach is imperative. Due to the rapid increase in which political discourse is produced and disseminated by social media we should try to understand the historical and civic consciousness of the public, as well as promote critical thinking. Within the context of this endeavour, Bonacchi coins the term "social heritage", to articulate the ways to understand "the processes and results of people's use of the past to interpret the reality in which they live" (p. 8). The book presents three case studies in which the author tries to understand these processes.

More specifically, she investigates how Classical Antiquity has become a rhetorical tool in populist politics during the 2018 Italian General Election (chapter 4), the Brexit Referendum (chapter 5), and around the discourse on "Trump's wall" (chapter 6). The corpus which Bonacchi constructs is enormous. The many posts and comments on Facebook and Twitter that are gathered to analyse this quickly runs into the millions. Indeed, some of these tweets and Facebook posts contain references to Classical Antiquity. For example, some posts and comments published on the social media pages of Italian politicians stressed 'corruption' as the primary cause for the fall of the Roman Empire, and made constructed a parallel with the present state of politics, hav-ing given the "border patrol to the barbarians" (p. 153). To stress the need to curtail immigration, the British National Party wrote: "the hordes of immigrants from Africa […] is going to shape the future of all Western nations … the greatest civilization ever created […] will suffer the same fate as the Roman Empire" (p. 88). Of the many tweets investigated surrounding the discourse of 'Trumps wall', some were referencing Hadrian's Wall (p. 127).

Within the limited space of this review, I would like to point out two interesting theoretical frameworks that Bonacchi operates with. The first theoretical avenue that I would like to highlight is the conceptualization of Jörn Rüsen's historical consciousness, which contains four (potentially overlapping) modes: tradition (uses of the past by means of identification), exemplary (uses of the past by means of generalization), critical (the past as negation), and genetic (the historicised past which is not present-centred) (p. 140). The great majority of the cases in which classical antiquity has been evoked by populists online align with an exemplary kind of historical consciousness, where it has been leveraged through analogies between the past and the present. It seems to be an echo of Gibbon's famous 'decline and fall' thesis. By using Rüsen's framework, the author is able to pinpoint what kind of critical toolkits is necessary to engage the wider public in modes of critical thinking. It is at this part of her argumentation where I was most drawn to the book, since it entails the planning of our political and educational future. Bonacchi points out: "Some myths have penetrated deeply into the habitus of societies, to the extent that they have become almost immutable. Such myths may be activated and de-activated" (p. 173).

This is closely linked to the second theoretical concept that I would like to highlight from Bonacchi's work, which is less developed in the book but speaks to the imagination of the reader nonetheless. As established, the past is often invoked by those seeking to define boundaries that maintain the status quo of a given imagined community. Building on Zygmunt Bauman's notion of 'retrotopia', Bonacchi argues that this is done because the past is a "stable, predictable and therefore secure space; it provides a retrotopia which, in fluid and fast-moving times, holds much greater appeal than any future and risky utopia" (p. 35). A state of fluidity and insecurity is characteristic of modernity, in which globalization and neoliberalism have eroded social security. "The re-affirmation of imagined borders that define the 'self'" are put in opposition to antagonise the "multiple 'others'", Bonacchi argues (p. 121).

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Which historical past is invoked is of course also historically changing. As noted, the book departs from the hypothesis that Classical Antiquity might be one of these national narratives, but if we talk about these historical myths in terms of 'activated' or 'de-activated', antiquity is surely a de-activated myth. This comes especially to the surface in the analysis of 12 million tweets on the US Immigration of Travel Ban. From this entire dataset, only three tweets discuss Hadrian's Wall. I wholeheartedly agree with the author that even 'de-activated' historical narratives are important to analyse, but it means that the research, which started off as a quantitative, quickly became a qualitative analysis in which some computational methods were used to find the needle in a social-media haystack. Case studies which concentrate on different historical imaginations are therefore welcome to investigate the still 'activated' myths. Given the strong theoretical framework of the monograph, I am certain that Bonacchi's notion of 'social heritage' provides fertile ground for future research.

R e f e r e n c e s

Bonacchi, C. (2022). *Heritage and Nationalism: Understanding populism through big data.* London: UCL Press.

González-Ruibal, A., González, P. A., & Criado-Boado, F. (2018). Against reactionary populism: towards a new public archaeology. *Antiquity, 92*(362), 507-515.

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