

UNESCO and New World Orders

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UNESCO and Cultural Heritage

It is remarkable how thoroughly an organization once set up to propagate the *new* – “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed,” as the most quoted sentence from its constitution has it – is now publicly associated with conserving the *old*. In the most broadly defined portfolio of any UN body, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with its headquarters in Paris has increasingly shifted from E to C. Education continues to be the primary commitment and to drive its programmatic vision, however, globally UNESCO has come to stand for heritage, and it is the heritage programs that attract the largest part of the extra-budgetary resources on which the cash-strapped organization so heavily depends. That heritage is so tightly linked with UNESCO and that long sections of recent scholarly overviews of the field (Harrison 2012; Smith 2006; Tauschek 2013) are dedicated to the UNESCO conventions is significant, given the small operating budgets of the UNESCO programs (Meskell 2013a). Clearly, UNESCO’s symbolic weight is considerable and can be converted into power and material gains in many domains.

The rise of heritage within UNESCO is indicative of a changed orientation towards human diversity within the organization. UNESCO’s early initiatives, such as its statements on race, highlighted human unity, enlisting the services of prominent anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss. The organization strove to disseminate literacy, Western agricultural models, and birth control – a unitary package of modernity – to the states of the Global South that have always been a key concern. For a progress so conceptualized, cultural diversity was an obstacle, not a virtue. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, the optimistic belief in economic development faded, and, instead, the 1972 World Heritage Convention and other activities began to highlight the outstanding achievements of particular cultures in order to make them world property, attempting to wrest them away from the national frameworks of cultural and natural conservation. A further shift has occurred in the 1990s and 2000s where the common heritage of humanity worthy of preservation expanded,

from the wonders of nature and material culture to customary practices and even cultural diversity as such (Stoczkowski 2009). In UNESCO pronouncements, economic development and globalization are now a threat rather than a promise, bound to dissolve ethnic, national, and religious identities; against this specter, the celebration of cultural diversity and the variety of human accomplishments is expected to promote the mutual respect and understanding that ensures world peace and human advancement. Targeting “the right kind of culture” (Nielsen 2011) for UNESCO entails customs and practices that respect basic human rights and are tolerant of their contenders. How much of this is wishful thinking in a world divided by cultural values and alignments should be obvious. But for an organization working to be inclusive of its members – the world’s national governments – such aspirational formulations sidestep uncomfortable pronouncements about desirable and undesirable values and practices.

Given these constraints, edifying and aesthetically pleasing places and practices are easier to agree upon than some cultural norms of proper female comportment, for example, and this has certainly contributed to bringing heritage as (ideally) harmless culture to center stage within UNESCO contexts. Fitting for an organization so much premised on the aftermath of war, the first step in 1954 was the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (to which a Second Protocol was added in 1999), and the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property too especially applies to conflict and post-conflict societies. Yet with the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the focus shifted to all kinds of heritage sites, also those not immediately endangered by destructive or criminal human action. Some thirty years on, the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage was of a more specialized nature but the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2005 Convention on the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions decidedly widened the scope established by the World Heritage Convention. The 2003 Convention in particular enjoys comparable attention because of its analogous lists of global fame with all their celebratory potential. Even so, the World Heritage Convention continues to play in a league of its own, starting with the fact that intangible heritage “cultural expressions” are often (and mistakenly) referred to as “World Heritage” whereas the reverse does not usually occur. In this chapter we concentrate on World Heritage and the 1972 UNESCO Convention that aspired to create and conserve it.

The History and Institutional Framework of World Heritage

Many modern precepts of heritage crystallized in Europe in synchrony with the origins of the nation-state. Intimately connected to the Enlightenment project, the formation of national identity relied on a coherent national heritage that could be marshaled to fend off the counter-claims of other groups and nations. In the post-Westphalian world, “sovereign nation-states no longer exclusively define the field of global political relations or monopolize many of the powers organizing that field, yet states remain significant actors as well as symbols of national identification” (Brown 2010: 24). As in many other globalizing arenas, the creation of UNESCO and the shift to global heritage ended up reinforcing the interests of the state since it is so strongly pegged to national identification, prestige, and the recognition of a particular

modernity. In fact, the state continues to be a particularly intransigent force in all of UNESCO's operations by the very structure of the organization that has states as its members. Within the UN family, nation-states are impossible to bypass or dislodge whether one is talking about human rights or heritage rights and, in cases of doubt, political sovereignty often takes precedence over the protection of people or things. Underwriting all practices of protection is the tension of balancing preservation with the material needs of living communities. Indeed much recent work underscores that conservation, like corporatization, has effectively displaced both human histories and local presence (Breen 2007; Brockington and Igoe 2006; West, Igoe, and Brockington 2006).

UNESCO's commitment to peace, humanitarianism, and intercultural understanding developed out of the universalist aspirations for global governance envisaged by the League of Nations (Singh 2011; Valderrama 1995). While upholding modernist principles of progress and development, it simultaneously subscribes to the liberal principles of diplomacy, tolerance, and development. It should be noted that UNESCO's mission stemmed from a specifically European organization called the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation (ICIC) which operated between 1936 and 1946 (Droit 2005; Hoggart 2011), rather than being a direct offshoot from the United Nations. Founded by prominent intellectuals such as Henri Bergson, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, and Thomas Mann, the ICIC was established to create a "state of mind conducive to the peaceful settlement of international problems within the framework of the League of Nations" (Valderrama 1995: 3). Not surprisingly, its activities were focused on education, universities and libraries, and internationalism. Given this history of emphasizing recognition and reconciliation, the long-standing ethos of cultural diversity, and the protection of minority lifeways, it is not surprising that UNESCO has emerged as the most prominent structural avenue to the global governance and promotion of cultural heritage. Within the United Nations, UNESCO may not be as powerful as high-profile international peacekeeping, environmental initiatives, or development programs. Rather, it is perceived as the cultural arm, the visionary agency, and the "ideas factory" for the larger organization (Pavone 2008).

The principle that natural and cultural heritage situated across the globe requires an international mandate and authority for its management, preservation, and protection stretches back a century. From the League of Nations in 1919, to the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) and its International Museums Office in 1926, to the Athens Conference of 1931 on the protection and conservation of monuments of art and history, there has been a growing international movement. In 1945, UNESCO was created with a constitution mandating "the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science." With modernist construction and development projects and unseen ecological damages heightening a sense of urgency, this commitment transformed into proactive international assistance: the first in a series of safeguarding missions coordinated by UNESCO was launched in 1959 for the Nubian monuments of Egypt, threatened by the construction of the Aswan Dam but then transplanted to a site out of reach of the rising waters (Allais 2013; Hassan 2007). International expert meetings such as that held in Venice in 1964 were responsible for drafting the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (the Venice Charter) and for the founding of ICOMOS (see below). During the 1965 US White House Conference, the idea of a World Heritage Trust was proposed and the term "world heritage" was coined (Allais 2013: 7;

Bandarin 2007). In what outside a North American context was an innovative move, the initiative came to incorporate both cultural and natural heritage, and after some negotiation (Stott 2011), it was decided to house it at UNESCO, whose General Conference adopted The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972. The Convention created a set of obligations to protect the past for future generations, an aspiration for a shared sense of belonging, and an ideal of global solidarity (Choay 2001: 140). More recently, other heritage bodies have either replicated or been influenced by this international vision of support, whether the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) (Bouasria 2001) or the World Monuments Fund and Global Heritage Fund based in the United States (see also Winter 2011). The Convention was part of a larger trend in international law to superimpose a “common heritage of mankind” onto the interaction between nation states that is the standard subject matter of international law (Wolfrum 2009). Other such treaties, however, concerned spaces outside state jurisdiction – Antarctica, the high seas, outer space – whereas in World Heritage, national and supranational competencies were imagined to henceforth overlap.

The 1972 Convention was adopted as a new provision for the international and collective protection of heritage with “Outstanding Universal Value” (Jokilehto and Cameron 2008; Labadi 2013; Titchen 1996).¹ The World Heritage Center (WHC) was established in 1992 to act as the secretariat and coordinator within UNESCO for all matters related to the Convention. The Center organizes the annual sessions of the World Heritage Committee and provides advice to States Parties, or signatories to the Convention, in the preparation of site nominations. The World Heritage Center along with the Advisory Bodies also administers international assistance from the World Heritage Fund and coordinates both the reporting on the condition of sites and the emergency action undertaken when a site is threatened. As the number of World Heritage sites exceeds 1,000, requests to these bodies for international assistance and field missions mount, commitments to sustainable development and enhanced capacity-building increase, and heritage conflict in countries like Mali or Syria intensifies.

The Advisory Bodies are international organizations whose experts are relied upon for monitoring missions and evaluations: the International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in Rome, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) headquartered in Paris, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) headquartered in Gland, near Geneva. ICCROM was set up in 1959 as an intergovernmental organization and is only involved in “state of conservation” reporting and some monitoring missions in a limited manner, focusing on training and capacity-building instead. ICOMOS was founded in 1965 and is a non-governmental membership organization; IUCN was established in 1948 and is an “organization of organizations” with both governmental and non-governmental members. Both ICOMOS and IUCN provide technical evaluations of nominations and monitor inscribed sites; ICOMOS for the cultural sites including cultural landscapes, IUCN for the natural sites, and both for the mixed sites. ICOMOS and IUCN communicate their findings in lengthy reports and presentations at the World Heritage Committee meetings, although their technical approaches and priorities are being increasingly challenged.

In an intergovernmental agency which is part of the UN family, the States Parties are in fact the most powerful decision makers (Askew 2010), particularly those that currently have representation on the World Heritage Committee. The Committee is made up of twenty-one States Parties, elected at the biannual General Assembly, that

serve a four-year term. Formally, the Committee is independent from the general UNESCO governing bodies. The Committee makes the final decisions about nominations to the List, measures for already listed sites, budget allocation, and general policies, and does so with a firm sense of independence from the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Center. Once a site has been inscribed, the World Heritage Committee has both the right and the duty to monitor its state of conservation, relying again on the expert services of ICOMOS, IUCN, ICCROM, and the Center. The Committee has the final say on whether a property is inscribed on the World Heritage List or on the List of World Heritage in Danger.² By signing the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only World Heritage properties situated on its territory but also its broader national heritage. The Convention enjoys almost universal membership with 191 signatories. States Parties with World Heritage sites garner international and national prestige, have access to the World Heritage Fund for monetary assistance, and can tap the potential benefits of heightened public awareness, tourism, and economic development.

However, this Fund has increasingly limited means to support nominations and conservation measures. The underlying assumption and precondition for listing is that the nominating nation itself is capable of conserving the site, and, with the prestige of a World Heritage title, it is indeed often much easier to attract investors and donors. Moreover, there are real constraints within the UNESCO World Heritage arena that are often overlooked, also by scholars of heritage. For instance, there is little that the World Heritage Committee can impose upon a recalcitrant nation state, even when government promises made before inscription are not honored afterwards. While sites can be deleted from the World Heritage List, this has happened only twice in forty years.

The World Heritage List is often criticized for its Eurocentrism (Labadi 2005, 2007). Yet it is noteworthy that the first inscriptions included quite a few African sites³ and that, until 1990, India was the overall leader in the number of World Heritage properties.⁴ European and in particular Western European states, however, have been particularly conscious of the benefits of World Heritage listing and can marshal the resources for state-of-the-art nominations. Coupled with an implicit initial conceptualization of World Heritage around the typical built heritage of this part of the world (and certainly also influenced by the tendency for ICOMOS and IUCN personnel to be educated and based there), European sites have accounted for almost half the listings until the present, with China only beginning to challenge the numerical pole position of Italy and Spain in recent years. The balanced representation of natural and cultural sites that was initially envisaged has not materialized either: today some 75 percent of the List is cultural.

Attempts to impose nomination quotas or even moratoriums on nations with large numbers of sites have had only limited success. This certainly contributed to efforts to reform the World Heritage system in the 1990s that greatly expanded the conceptual boundaries. The category of Cultural Landscapes was introduced in 1992 to celebrate outstanding examples of human interaction with nature (Rössler 2003). The Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List, launched in 1994 (Labadi 2013), prioritized living heritage and everyday culture “in their broad anthropological context.”⁵ The notion of authenticity was broadened in the Nara Document on Authenticity of the same year, in a manner belying the widespread assumption that heritage designation invariably has a “freezing” effect’ (cf. Brumann 2014a). Much of the impetus for these reforms came from the regional and professional “semiperipheries” of the world system

(cf. Wallerstein 1974) of heritage – Canadians, Japanese, Australians, and Norwegians, not French or Italians; anthropologists, geographers, or industrial archaeologists, rather than art historians (Gfeller 2013, personal communication). Other UNESCO programs in the 2000s, including the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003) and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO 2005), have also emphasized geographical balance and cultural diversity.

Studying the World Heritage Arena

UNESCO's World Heritage program has recently attracted heightened attention from ethnographers, archaeologists, economists, political scientists, and legal scholars writing on a wide range of topics, including governance and bureaucracy (Bertacchini, Saccone, and Santagata 2011; Logan 2012b; Schmitt 2009, 2012), list credibility (Askew 2010; Zacharias 2010), global strategy and representation (Labadi 2005, 2007; Schmitt 2008; Willems and Comer 2011), the politics of culture and rights (Berliner 2012; De Cesari 2010a; Eriksen 2009; Logan 2012a), and cultural economics (Bertacchini, Saccone, and Santagata 2011; Frey, Pamini, and Steiner 2011; Frey and Steiner 2011; van Blarcoma and Kayahana 2011). Socio-cultural anthropologists have focused much of their attention on the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage because it is here where they, not art historians or others, are generally ascribed special expertise (e.g., Arantes 2007; Bortolotto 2007, 2010, 2011; Brown 2004; Eriksen 2001; Hafstein 2009; Kuutma 2007).

Studies based on the analysis of documents come from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives including economics (specifically cultural economics), legal studies, and international relations, as well as a vast outpouring of work that comes under the banner of heritage studies. Many of the political, legal, and economic analyses are based on UNESCO-produced documentation and reveal a good working knowledge of the institution, whereas many heritage studies that deal in some way with UNESCO or more specifically the World Heritage Center tend to be anecdotal and rhetorical, sometimes lacking a full understanding of the actual players, processes, and politics that currently shape the organization, for instance by routinely ascribing agency to UNESCO in its undifferentiated entirety (e.g., Di Giovine 2009). Part of this occlusion is due to the way in which documents are produced, especially at annual Committee sessions, and then “neutrally” reproduced for online consumption. Overall, the degree to which these documents are the results of endless revisions and compromises, at the cost of coherence and consistency, seems to be underestimated by many observers.

UNESCO has, of late, become a particular interest to European cultural economists, particularly those based at UNESCO's Category II Center at the University of Turin, Italy. These scholars have been working on addressing the imbalances of the World Heritage List, crafting policy mechanisms for global governance (Bertacchini, Saccone, and Santagata 2011), and examining the political economy of heritage globally (Bertacchini and Saccone 2012). One proposal is to create a World Heritage tax (Bertacchini, Saccone, and Santagata 2009; Bertacchini, Saccone, and Walter 2010) to generate new economic resources from cultural tourism and to redistribute them on a regional scale. Other scholars suggest novel schemes to effectively preserve World Heritage with a system of certificates. The international community

would then decide on the level of contribution, assign certificates, and be able to trade them internationally (Frey and Pamini 2009). How to put these schemes into practice against the resistance of cost-conscious nation-states, however, is an altogether different question.

Economic research has focused on the historic imbalances of the World Heritage List, specifically the assessment of the 1994 Global Strategy (see also Labadi 2007; UNESCO 2011). Steiner and Frey (2012) argue that, in fact, the skewed distribution of sites has not decreased, but rather increased over time. Listing success is found to be correlated with a number of factors such as historical GDP and population, membership in the UN Security Council, size of the tourist sector, and composition of the World Heritage Committee: these are economic and political factors unrelated to heritage, including rent-seeking by politicians (Bertacchini and Saccone 2012; Frey, Pamini, and Steiner 2011). Cultural geographer Schmitt (2009) also confirms that GDP and the number of World Heritage sites are strongly correlated across the treaty states. Similarly, Labadi's analysis from 1994 to 2004 supports the idea that while there was a widespread need to rectify thematic, geographical, and chronological discrepancies, these have not yet been alleviated (2005). She points to the lack of local and indigenous community involvement in the nomination, conservation, and management of sites (see also Logan 2013; Meskell 2013b).

Frey and Steiner (2011) have questioned the validity of the World Heritage List yet argue that it can make sense when national authorities do not prioritize these sites, or financial resources are inadequate for conservation. However, reliance on the market and strong national conservation is even more beneficial when the sites are already popular and listing does not contribute to detrimental tourist impact. Much of this work traverses economic and political fields and has implications for UNESCO's policy and governance. For instance, Saccone and Bertacchini (2011) have examined the relationship between heritage preservation and the economic, social, and institutional factors that characterize a nation's level of development. While heritage is increasingly seen as a driver for development and poverty reduction, they argue that there is little evidence for understanding which conditions trigger the valorization of cultural resources. They suggest that poor countries are trapped, since a lack of development restricts cultural promotion, leading to an inability to promote national heritage that in turn restricts the advancement of culture-based development strategies.

From a legal perspective, scholars are concerned with the effects of economic globalization of World Heritage properties, given the significant amount of private investment being poured into preserving and presenting sites to the public worldwide (Vadi 2013). Since direct foreign investment can have such force, with the capacity to change landscapes and erase certain pasts, is there adequate legislation to protect the wealth of nations? Vadi suggests that, while international investment law has not developed a mechanism to protect World Heritage through investment dispute resolution, a jurisprudential trend has emerged that at least considers cultural heritage.

Another legal issue, explored primarily on documentary materials, is the intersection of human rights implementation and World Heritage designation and site management. Some scholars have attempted to find a rights-based approach within the existing documents (Jokilehto 2012) whereas others have argued that greater linkages need to be made explicit within the heritage sphere (Ekern et al. 2012; Logan 2009, 2012a; Meskell 2010). For more than a decade, this has been a concern of the World Heritage Center as well as numerous indigenous groups worldwide.

However, to date this has not been reflected in the Operational Guidelines – the “code of law” – of the Convention. Disko (2010) argues that with the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) there already exists a framework to change the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, allowing the inclusion of indigenous understandings and values into site management. One way to ensure indigenous participation would be to insist on the free, prior informed consent stipulated in UNDRIP, starting from the nomination process (Hales et al. 2012). Various case studies of such efforts have been made in Australia (Carter 2010; Logan 2012a, 2013), New Zealand (Kawharu 2009), Canada (Lemelin and Bennett 2010), and Norway (Ween 2012). In the early 2000s, the World Heritage Indigenous Peoples Council of Experts (WHIPCOE) was proposed to ensure greater indigenous participation and control over World Heritage properties. The Committee did not install it, however, due to harsh criticism from nations like France and the United States (Meskell 2013b), but, in recent sessions, pressure by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) has kept the issue on the agenda.

Much has been written about the key concepts of authenticity, integrity, and Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) within the World Heritage sphere. Stovel (2007) suggests that these central tenets are distinct in terms of conservation strategies and subsequently require restructuring. Others have examined these criteria (Jokilehto 2006) and concluded that it is not easy to define what is eligible for inclusion on the List and what should remain national patrimony. Critical analyses of UNESCO’s concept of OUV have been conducted and criticized by a number of authors (Alberts and Hazen 2010; Pendlebury, Short, and While 2009; Titchen 1996), most recently Labadi (2013) in a book-length treatment. Brumann (2013) shows how the new authenticity conceptions of the 1990s are part of a wider trend to prioritize immaterial aspects of heritage not just in the 2003 Convention, but also within the World Heritage system. As he points out and Rudolff (2010) also observes, there is much conceptual traffic between the two conventions, even when the experts associating themselves with each may sometimes be in conflict. These exchanges concern not only ideas but also procedural details and the piecemeal diffusion of informal session behavior, argumentation styles, and strategies.

Following the pioneering work by Turtinen (2000, 2006) and just like Brumann (2011, 2012, 2014b) and Meskell (2011, 2012, 2013a, 2014), Schmitt (2009) has used official observer status at the World Heritage Committee sessions to examine the role of the Advisory Bodies. He argues that there are markedly different understandings of concepts like OUV as well as the instruments such as the List of World Heritage in Danger, yet such pluralism need not be detrimental to global governance. Decision making within the Committee, however, has become fraught and, as Logan (2012b) details for many Asian nations, there is palpable frustration that the inspirational rhetoric of the organization does not always match with the aspirations of nation-states. He notes rising criticism of governance arrangements and limitations. As Director of the World Heritage Center, Kishore Rao (2010) contends that current developments run counter to the intent of the Convention and its emphasis on international cooperation and mutual understanding. He proposes a new paradigm to overcome present limitations, by instituting a progressive inscription process with an enhanced and proactive role for the World Heritage Committee to prioritize at an early stage those sites that merit inclusion on the List. This, he believes, would have a beneficial impact on the issue of global balance and

representativity. Skepticism is allowed for, however, since whether Committee member states with all their vested interests would accept anything that impeded their desire for inscription is another matter.

In the past few decades, increasing attention has been directed towards issues of stakeholder collaboration around World Heritage properties (Aas, Ladkin, and Fletcher 2005), the inclusion of local voices and values, and more recently the connection between site designation and local development strategies (Araoz 2011; Isar 2011), the most pressing of which is poverty reduction. The world over, managing such sites has come under scrutiny (Brattli 2009; Landorf 2009; Leask and Fyall 2006; Winter 2007). Much of the fieldwork conducted by archaeologists has focused on the political dimension of UNESCO designation and its subsequent afterlife. In the Palestinian context, De Cesari (2010b) describes how UNESCO's own shift towards liberal multiculturalism might end up reinforcing cultural differences and asymmetries. Through examining UNESCO workshops in Jerusalem and Ramallah, she argues that innovative Palestinian practices of heritage conservation and the specifics of locality are effectively elided by overlaying the template of World Heritage. Despite Israeli measures, Assi (2012) argues that the Palestinian management program has been a positive step and, while this is one of the most complex settings for UNESCO, researchers on the ground argue that even during armed conflict cultural heritage remains key to identity (Scham and Yahya 2003). In the same way, Tibetan World Heritage sites have been discussed in the context of human rights and Chinese hegemony and the lasting impacts of local culture, particularly with the opening up for international tourism (Shepherd 2006; Sinding-Larsen 2012). These frictions between the universal and the local are clearly evidenced in the World Heritage arena.

The role of international expertise and its translation into local cultural practice has become increasingly visible in recent heritage ethnographies. In her study of post-tsunami Indonesia, Rico (2008, 2011) examines the intersection of cultural traditions in Banda Aceh and the vernacularization of international preservation imperatives through the global construct of "heritage at risk." The Acehnese developed distinct ways to represent history, identity, and the culture of disaster into a coherent program that does not sit easily with Western preservation philosophies. Such heritage does not wait to be legitimized by global heritage experts but has already effectively responded to local democratic structures. By assessing the successes of grounded local measures and the perceived failures of established global preservation rhetoric, she calls into question the entire notion of a risk-centered framework, as promulgated by agencies like ICOMOS and UNESCO. Similarly, Lafrenz Samuels (2009) traces the expansion of this expertise across the Middle East and North Africa region, where material heritage is mobilized by international agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank to reduce poverty. At sites like the medina of Fez, the economic value of heritage is at the forefront, yet international expertise often results in the marginalization, exclusion, and even removal of local inhabitants.

Anthropologists doing fieldwork in World Heritage sites have usually concentrated on the experience of local populations, particularly those affected by the consequences of list inscription, surging tourism, tightened conservation regulations, and so on. Memory and nostalgia are the driving force behind heritage-making according to Berliner (2010, 2012) but the question of whose nostalgia is being protected remains. From his extensive work in Luang Prabang, Laos, he suggests that there are multiple attachments rooted in personal experience but also inflected with issues of history, expertise, development, and culture. He distinguishes the

“endo-nostalgia” of those who have actually grown up in the place and whose memories of the good old days are based, however selectively, on actual experience from the “exo-nostalgia” of many tourists and technical experts for a colonial Indochina they have never seen themselves or which never existed to begin with. Just as nostalgia is performative, so too is the creation and transformation of heritage spaces by UNESCO experts and national civil servants.

Probst (2004, 2011) has been following the transformation of the sacred grove of Osun in Osogbo, Nigeria, for more than a decade. This tract of primary forest is no longer just a cult place for the protector goddess of the surrounding city of Osogbo. It became also the site of a major artistic revival where, in the post-independence period of the 1960s and 1970s, European expatriates and young local artists created a new and distinctive style of sculpture and painting. Today, the annual Osun festival continues to be a major rallying point for the transatlantic African diaspora. This site was successfully promoted to World Heritage status in 2005, as a cornerstone in President Obasanjo’s cultural policies, and it provides a vivid illustration of how short the time horizons of heritage have become: what was a stronghold of African modernity and innovation just a moment ago is now under a conservation regime. The Osun grove also demonstrates that when religious, political, commercial, and curatorial demands collide, this can increase local authorities’ maneuvering space: the traditional king (*oba*) can now point to the site’s heritage status when promoting the festival, thus fending off any allegations of supporting what Christian and Muslim constituencies might consider pagan practices.

Prior to the current civil war, Salamandra (2004) investigated the rediscovery of the courtyard houses in the old city of Damascus which is a World Heritage property, albeit one in danger. Old families, often from the former professional and entrepreneurial elite, who previously had left for the suburbs and rented out the subdivided houses to rural migrants, were now reclaiming their homes and converting them to new purposes such as shops, galleries, and restaurants. Salamandra interprets this as an assertion of symbolic dominance over the new political leadership that lacks a long-standing connection to the city. She describes a largely private and uncoordinated movement of heritage reappropriation in which the World Heritage institutions play only a small role. Such movements may be more typical for urban than rural heritage (Brumann 2009), and parallel phenomena have been observed elsewhere in the Arab world, for instance in the medina of Fez (Istasse 2011) where the residents’ very personal relationships to the houses are much more decisive for the way these are maintained than the often autocratic rulings of heritage authorities.

Exploring the conditions of urban World Heritage further, a research group led by Brumann at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany, currently compares the local appropriation of the global title in Istanbul (Marquart 2014); Melaka in Malaysia (being studied by Pierpaolo De Giosa); and Xi’an in China (being studied by Leah Cheung Ah Li), whose Silk Road-related monuments, following up on the grave of the first Qin emperor with the Terracotta Army near the city, were added to the List in 2014. All three places are former hubs of empire and major destinations of cultural tourism and, in all of them, heritage recognition ranges all the way from palaces to humble town houses. Yet while specific buildings and archaeological remains are instrumental to contemporary nation-building, transmitting the greatness of past civilizations (Istanbul and Xi’an) and multicultural co-existence (Melaka), conservation often has to stand back when contemporary building projects transform urban space. Reference to the past is often required also in new developments, however, be it the wooden facades of Istanbul

residential developments that gentrify run-down inner-city areas, historical-looking malls in luxury condominiums in Melaka, or the theme-park style approach of the Quijiang Corporation that is in charge of real-estate development around famous historic sites in Xi'an. This set of studies encourages us to take the commercial aspects of World Heritage seriously: increasingly, heritage is expected to pay its way, particularly in the up-and-coming states of the Global South. This presupposes the spread of lifestyle and leisure preferences in these countries to which a touch of history adds significant value.

While in Osogbo, Damascus, or Melaka, a substantial number of people are (or were) content with the economic and other opportunities afforded by World Heritage status, other anthropologists have shown how listing often goes hand in hand with the dispossession of local populations. In an edited volume, Hauser-Schäublin and colleagues (2011) have traced this in detail for Angkor in Cambodia. This vast and impressive site has been a prime beneficiary of multinational development cooperation and support, up to the level of an intergovernmental body (the International Coordinating Committee for the Safeguarding and Development of the Historic Site of Angkor, or ICC-Angkor), and archaeologists and heritage managers from across the Global North have descended upon the site to coordinate research and restoration measures. Tourism, particularly from Asian countries, has exploded in recent years and, as a symbol of reconciliation and nation-building in a post-genocidal society, Angkor is much relied upon. Yet most profits from tourism bypass the local communities, and their use of the vast expanses for raising fish, cultivating rice, or collecting forest products is now as suspect as their continued worship at, and active maintenance of, temples that are now subject to conservation regimes.

For Chichén Itzá, Breglia (2005; see also Hannigan 2006) has likewise documented how heritage-related benefits largely bypass the local Maya population. There is nonetheless widespread pride in the global fame of the site, and the descendants of those Maya who once excavated it still hang on to moderate privileges as state-employed guards and shopkeepers. They no longer live on site as they used to and their football matches in the shadow of the Great Pyramid are a remote memory now. One local family of mestizo land-owners and tourism entrepreneurs, however, retains ownership of the land on which the monuments stand. Although private ownership was previously known, it only became a point of contention when Chichén Itzá was promoted as a candidate for the New Seven Wonders of the World internet contest. In response to the outcry over private possession, a parastatal subsidiary of the federal state bought up central portions, making it communal land as befits a World Heritage site (Breglia forthcoming).

Joy (2011a, 2011b) describes the challenges that the World Heritage inscription of the picturesque mud architecture of the city of Djenné, Mali, brings to its residents. Prior to the current conflict, French colonial romanticism and a national government intent on gaining a place on the global cultural map imposed a conservation regime that, together with the weekly market and an annual music festival, help to attract foreign tourists as one of the few sources of income. Yet many citizens feel a heavy burden when the regular re-mudding of houses consumes more resources than the less "authentic" tiling of façades, especially considering that basic amenities such as a sewage system are still lacking in this poverty-stricken environment. Bruner (1996) has shown how publicly recognized and supposedly communal heritage can remain very significant in highly individual searches for roots and one's own personal heritage. He follows African American tourists through the World Heritage site of Elmina Castle in Ghana, the main entrepôt for the North American slave trade. The tourists'

joint walk through the dungeons and the infamous Door of No Return is often an overwhelming emotional experience, yet all the more disconcerting are encounters with the Ghanaians outside the castle who lack a personal history of slavery. For them, the guests are *obruni* (whitemen) by virtue of their wealth, rather than long-lost brothers and sisters returning “home.”

Case Studies: World Heritage Committee Mechanics

Recent work on UNESCO’s World Heritage program has focused on the new geopolitical alliances and power bases that have only emerged in the past few years, in an effort to challenge the perceived hegemony of European nations within the organization. Ethnographic observation, particularly at World Heritage Committee meetings, demonstrates how alliances can be shifting and mutable and might at any one time be based on religious, regional, political, or economic linkages. Some of these short-lived coalitions revolve around specific nodal sites and issues, such as the 2012 nomination of Palestine’s first site, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.⁶ Given the regional and political position of Palestine and the well-rehearsed standoffs between Israel and the Arab states in the World Heritage Committee, one might have expected support to come mainly from other Middle Eastern delegations, yet it was largely Christian countries like France, Russia, and South Africa that provided the strongest backing. Obviously, the site was mainly perceived in its religious dimension, not in its geographic and political ones. Expedient alliances, fluctuations in political alignments, and entrenched long-term coalitions all influence the operations of the World Heritage Committee today.

It is instructive to see which are the most active nations by the number of World Heritage nominations put forward from 2002 to 2013: China (17), Iran (14), India and Italy (12), Germany (11), Mexico and the Russian Federation (10), and France and Israel (9). While European countries remain active, the geographical axis has shifted, with specific Asian and African countries now well represented. This challenges the older critique that World Heritage is tacitly Eurocentric, and while the List is a historical product indeed filled with French, Italian, Spanish, and German sites, the geopolitical coordinates have changed significantly.

One grouping that has received a great deal of scholarly attention is BRICS, the politico-economic alliance formed between Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (Claudi 2011; Ferdinand 2012; Meskell 2011, 2013a). The acronym was coined at Goldman Sachs (O’Neill 2001) for this group of (sub-)continental leaders at a similar stage of economic development in order to highlight the shift in global economic power away from the developed G7 countries towards these ambitious nations seeking a more significant role in a multilateral world and global decision making (Ferdinand 2012). For the past six years there has been an annual BRICS summit and during the 2014 meeting the BRICS Development Bank was formalized as an alternative to the World Bank and IMF. Over the past years, all five BRICS nations have served on the World Heritage Committee and often expressed dissatisfaction with the recommendations of the Advisory Bodies (Claudi 2011: 53). BRICS presence and mutual support greatly benefitted both South Africa and Russia during discussion of their national parks potentially endangered by mining concessions within or adjacent to their borders (Esterhuysen 2009; Jørgensen and Hønneland 2006). These rising powers tend to pact in the World Heritage arena, whether in support of inscribing their own candidates and avoiding painful decisions, or assisting

“client” nations with controversial nominations or conservation issues such as the recent cases of Palestine and Panama (Meskell 2013a, 2014). An overall uniformity of BRICS voting has been observed across the United Nations General Assembly, although there is notable divergence in their positions on human rights and nuclear disarmament (Ferdinand 2012).

Formalized BRICS multilateralism can be seen in the 2011 Sanya Declaration⁷ whereby all five nations pledged support for “boosting global economic growth, enhancing multilateralism and promoting greater democracy in international relations.” Specifically, the Declaration calls for “multilateral diplomacy with the United Nations” as well as “comprehensive reform of the UN” system. They propose to establish a BRICS-UNESCO Group at UNESCO, “aiming at developing common strategies within the mandate of the Organization.” World Heritage negotiations can thus be seen as an exercise in soft power (Luke and Kersel 2012), while harnessing and building upon more expansive politico-economic forces that have greater repercussions elsewhere (Meskell 2013a, 2014). Claudi’s ethnographic work traces mutual support between Brazil, Russia, India, and China within the World Heritage Committee in their efforts to have their sites inscribed on the List. BRICS members have strategic, explicitly stated objectives within the Committee, which include challenging the decisions of Advisory Bodies whom they see as biased toward “the West” and whose legitimacy and credibility they consider inherently compromised. Other stated objectives for these nations included enhanced visibility and greater diplomatic ties, since all their delegations have strict instructions from their respective governments (Claudi 2011: 45–46).

In collaboration with cultural economists Bertacchini and Saccone (Bertacchini and Saccone 2012; Bertacchini, Saccone, and Santagata 2011), archaeologists Meskell and Liuzza have examined the effects of decision making and political pacting between BRICS nations in the World Heritage Committee in the last decade (Meskell et al. 2014). From 2002 to 2012, BRICS nations nominated 45 (or 15 percent) of the 295 sites put forward for inscription. Given that BRICS represents only five nations, from 190 signatory State Parties (or 2 percent) participating in the Convention, this combined activity is noteworthy. Moreover, properties proposed by BRICS members benefitted from having the decisions of the Advisory Bodies overturned more frequently in their favor. For example, Advisory Body recommendations for Non-Inscription of sites were predominantly turned into Referrals (66.7 percent); recommendations for Deferral were pushed up to either Referral (26.7 percent) or Inscription (53.3 percent); and those recommended for Referral were consistently moved to Inscription (100 percent). (In the context of the World Heritage Committee, a “Referral” decision amounts to asking for minor amendments whereas a “Deferral” decision implies a substantial revision of the nomination, usually requiring a new inspection mission by the Advisory Bodies.) In comparison, non-BRICS nations had lower instances of these favorable changes, suggesting that their political influence may not be so robust. Advisory Body recommendation for Non-Inscription led to Deferral (42.9 percent) as often as to Referral (42.9 percent), and recommendations of Deferral (40.9 percent) or Referral (77.8 percent) were pushed up to Inscription more rarely too. Comparison of discussion time is also informative. The time taken in reaching a decision in the Committee, often entailing the overturning of ICOMOS and IUCN recommendations, was in almost every case shorter for nominations by BRICS nations than those of non-BRICS countries, suggesting a more powerful, strategic, and concerted effort by the alliance to assert their political will.

While Brumann (2014b) acknowledges the importance of BRICS, he also emphasizes the role of other world regional leaders such as Mexico and Egypt in what he sees as the emergence of a new mode of operation in the World Heritage Committee. The above-mentioned phase of conceptual reform in the 1990s was largely expert-driven, somewhat against the conservationists' ingrained habitus, since their everyday practice is heavily steeped in national traditions and legal frameworks. The procedural refinement or, depending on the viewpoint, procedural hypertrophy of the 2000s occurred when the career diplomats sent by member states to UNESCO took precedence. This too reflects the growing importance of World Heritage. While the experts remain, these diplomats now lead most of the delegations and determine the strategies. One might posit that they are more cosmopolitan than the heritage experts, but their career prospects are much more closely tied to their national responsibilities. Since the 2010 session in Brasilia, the general respect previously accorded to the Advisory Bodies and their recommendations has declined (Meskell 2013a), and the frustration and impatience among BRICS states and other regional leaders of the Global South was decisive. Incoming Committee members from the "old guard" such as Germany or Japan, however, have swiftly adapted since they are equally intent on seeing their sites achieve World Heritage status. Even when diplomats are not under orders from their home ministries, they often prioritize smooth international relations and a sense of global equity and fairness over the conservation of specific sites. As Meskell (2014) has detailed for Panamá Viejo, the historical quarter of Panama City, lobbying states and the corporations that drive them secure Committee support well before the meetings, and obviously counterfactual claims and violations of given promises may go unsanctioned. There is opposition to the new trend, with Sweden, Switzerland, and Estonia being outspoken critics in recent sessions. Yet, given that in terms of World Heritage properties per population, they lead their Committee peers by far, they may be under a correspondingly weaker domestic pressure to attain further listings at all costs, such that they can afford to refrain from the exchange of favors that is believed to expedite this objective (Brumann 2011: 37, 2014b).

In this regard, it will be interesting to see how full press access and the web-streaming of World Heritage Committee sessions begun at the 2012 session in St. Petersburg will influence their future evolution. This innovation was decided upon one year earlier by clearly inattentive delegates and surprised many when it was announced. Reformists had hoped that this change in procedure would have a positive, tempering influence on diplomatic negotiations during the sessions. Yet, while some delegations were now rumored to receive text messages from home ministries detailing and prescribing their every move (Brumann 2014b), no immediate effect on session behavior was initially apparent. A year later, however, Britta Rudolff (personal communication) saw some delegates as moving to yet another new mode of operation: conscious of increased global visibility, much of their remarks were no longer just instrumentally directed to their Committee colleagues but also intended as statements of cultural diplomacy, targeting the online observers whose number is sure to increase over the coming years. World Heritage Committee sessions therefore are also a laboratory for observing the effects of procedural changes in a prominent intergovernmental setting, and to follow these will be one of the research tasks for the future.

Along with other anthropologists researching UN organizations (Bendix 2013; Müller 2013; Wright 1998) and the complex political negotiations therein, our work traces how UNESCO processes have global impacts, albeit in often unexpected and

unpredictable ways that are not always revealed in official agendas. Following Müller (2013: 10), international bureaucracies help nation states to perform their “transparency” – a word used more and more in World Heritage Committee meetings – that typically hides as much as it reveals. She asserts that when anthropologists study the actions of individuals and states within international agencies, these bodies appear at the same time more active, contradictory, and perhaps even less “rational.” Yet, as we argue, if researchers rely solely on the documents, substantive political issues are often masked as technical ones. Documentary data only gain depth and salience if researchers have the necessary insights into the processes that produced them, according to Bendix (2013: 25). One has to consider the relationships and the hierarchies among those who produced the texts and the difference between fully capturing the discussions in the room and what was formalized into a record for posterity. We suggest that “being there” is essential to track the global machinations playing out today in the new world heritage order.

NOTES

- 1 UNESCO defines Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as cultural and/or natural significance that is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. Statements of Outstanding Universal Value are made up of several elements: a brief description of the property, a Statement of Significance, a Statement of Authenticity, a Statement of Integrity, and a section describing how the World Heritage site is protected and managed.
- 2 UNESCO, *World Heritage List*. Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>. Accessed December 1, 2014.
- 3 UNESCO, *World Heritage List Statistics*. Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat>. Accessed December 1, 2014.
- 4 UNESCO, *World Heritage List*. Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>. Accessed December 1, 2014.
- 5 See World Heritage Committee Eighteenth session, Phuket, Thailand, 12-17 November 1994, Expert meeting on the “Global Strategy” and thematic studies for a representative World Heritage List. Available at: whc.unesco.org/archive/global94.htm#debut. Accessed December 1, 2014.
- 6 UNESCO, *World Heritage List*. Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem. Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1433>. Accessed December 1, 2014.
- 7 University of Toronto, BRICS Information Centre, Sanya Declaration, April 14, 2011. Available at: <http://www.hcindia-au.org/pdf/Sanya%20Declaration.pdf>. Accessed December 3, 2014.

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