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World Heritage and mosaic universalism

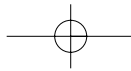
A view from Palestine

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses UNESCO's project of worldwide cultural heritage preservation. It does so through a double lens, an ethnographic and a textual one. I first look at the ways in which World Heritage works in Palestine/Israel. Second, I analyse the discourse of World Heritage, arguing that recent World Heritage reforms, stimulated by critiques of the Eurocentrism of its approaches, adopt the language of liberal multiculturalism. Building on critical accounts of this political discourse, I show how multicultural heritage policies not only risk affirming and solidifying cultural differences, but also the asymmetries between them. Furthermore, I argue that, paradoxically, World Heritage reinforces nation-states, and particularly state apparatuses' reach and control over heritage sites and processes, often at the expense of the grassroots. By analysing a series of workshops in Jerusalem and Ramallah, I detail the ways in which highly innovative local Palestinian practices of heritage conservation tend to be silenced by the World Heritage mechanism, and trace a discursive process of erasure of politics and 'locality' from UNESCO's representation of humanity's heritage. I place this erasure in the context of expert anxieties regarding a *contaminated universalism*.

**KEYWORDS**

cultural difference ● cultural heritage ● expertise ● multiculturalism
● nation-state ● Palestine/Israel ● universalism ● World Heritage

The universalizing project of World Heritage is to transcend the heritage logic of the nation-state. This UNESCO programme aims to identify, help preserve and promote sites and monuments deemed of universal significance – relevant beyond the borders of the states within which they are located – which are to constitute the elements of a shared past of humanity able to foster a global sense of human commonality and intellectual solidarity. In opposition to UNESCO's self-image, it is the main aim of this article to show how World Heritage not only builds upon the tradition of national heritages but in fact reproduces, amplifies and expands this tradition's logic and its infrastructure. This expansion in turn produces a number of tensions within UNESCO's shifting practices of universalism.

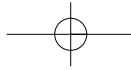
The critical heritage literature has long concerned itself with the intersection of heritage with nationalism, and several scholars have investigated heritage's instrumentality in the materialization of the nation's story, its identity and continuity through time (e.g. Anderson, 1991; Boswell and Evans, 1999; Díaz-Andreu and Champion, 1996; Kohl, 1998; Kohl and Fawcett, 1995; Meskell, 1998; Wright, 1985). A number of anthropologists have provided in-depth ethnographic explorations of how heritage processes work. Some emphasize that in nationalist logic, heritage provides the essence of a nation, that very substance without which a nation ceases to exist (Handler, 1985). Others delve into the specificities of the politics of the past by showing how heritage legitimizes national ideology and cements elites' hegemony (Abu El-Haj, 2001; Maffi, 2009; Peleggi, 1996), and provides a vehicle for the expansion of bureaucratic regulation into people's everyday sociabilities (Herzfeld, 1991, 2006; see also Breglia, 2006). Building on this scholarship, I investigate the globalization of heritage in the form of World Heritage and the entrenched and multifaceted relationship between heritage and the nation-state within this discourse.

With these aims, I explore World Heritage practices through a double ethnographic and textual lens. I begin with two vignettes showing the pragmatics of World Heritage at work in Palestine/Israel, a locale which might seem peculiar but will help illuminate several structural features and gaps of this discursive formation. In the following sections I analyse the key policy documents that set up principles and guidelines for UNESCO's heritage work. First, I discuss the text that marks the official birth of World Heritage, the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and its universalist claims.

Subsequently, I analyse more recent attempts by UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee to accommodate cultural pluralism and a certain cultural relativism concerning heritage values, following the recognition of fundamental Eurocentric biases in the chief representational device of World Heritage, the World Heritage List. This reform project adopts a multicultural framework, whereby a mosaic model of cultural difference guides World Heritage's search for completeness and universality. I will argue that World Heritage has been shaped by contemporary political discourses centred on the negotiation and management of cultural diversity, from assimilation to multiculturalism. Finally, building on critiques of the so-called politics of recognition, I will address the ways in which UNESCO's multicultural policies tend to reproduce Eurocentric patterns and hierarchies between reified heritages and cultures, and will consider how the structural relationship between World Heritage and the nation-state, inscribed as it is in UNESCO's constitution and its documents, can often prevent broader democratic participation in the heritage process.

■ UNESCO'S UNIVERSALISM

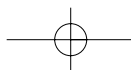
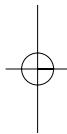
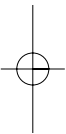
On a hot day in early summer, I travel to Jerusalem to attend a workshop on the conservation of historic cities organized by the Paris-based World Heritage Centre and two important local academic institutions, one Israeli and one Palestinian. This is not a public event, and I have been allowed to participate in my capacity as UNESCO's independent consultant. The location of the workshop is peculiar: the Mormon University on the Mount of Olives, an imposing, neo-Orientalist building overlooking the Old City. This choice is dictated by the need to find a 'neutral ground' to initiate a dialogue between the various Jerusalem institutions committed to urban conservation – as part of a recent move by UNESCO to get more involved in Jerusalem. Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1981, the Old City of Jerusalem has long been out of UNESCO's reach because of politics, particularly its contested status following the 1967 occupation and unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem as the heart of Israel's capital in defiance of international law.¹ While crossing Qalandia, the checkpoint between Ramallah and East Jerusalem, I cannot help but wonder about the politics of 'neutral grounds' in Palestine/Israel, particularly in light of the well-known Christian Zionist beliefs of the Mormon Church. Israel bars the Palestinian office of UNESCO from operating in East Jerusalem, and the new initiatives geared toward the protection of the endangered cultural heritage of the city are all managed from its Paris headquarters, far from Jerusalem's complex realities.² UNESCO wants to finally do something for Jerusalem.



The fostering of dialogue was a prominent workshop objective, as was bringing local and international experts together to discuss best practices in the preservation of the built heritage of historic cities in general, and Jerusalem in particular, threatened as it is by decay, urbanization, and politics. Community participation was the keyword of most contributions detailing worldwide examples of urban conservation. Yet, such exercises in dialogue and reconciliation can produce unintended effects – as is frequently the case in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, the Palestinian side of the roundtable was practically empty; the majority of local experts came from Israeli institutions. The only Palestinian experts to attend were members of the Jerusalem-based organizing institution. Several more had been invited but could not reach the Mormon University because they never received the special Israeli permit now required to cross Qalandia and travel the few kilometres separating West Bank towns from Arab East Jerusalem, progressively severed from its surroundings. Other Palestinian experts had debated the possibility of boycotting such meetings, in the anticipation of what in fact happened: a ‘neutral’, technical roundtable made into an exercise in hegemony, with Palestinians denied – ostensibly because of sloppy bureaucracies – the right to participate in the elaboration of the policies to conserve and manage their symbolic capital and most populous town.

The workshop enacted a double exclusion, a double denial of Palestinian representation, behind the screen of a token presence. This denial concerned not only the absence of Palestinian representatives at the roundtable, but also the way in which urban conservation was represented as an object of expert discourse and expert practices. During a meeting focused on debating new, standard-setting approaches to urban conservation, what was missing was the vast and innovative experience that Palestinian organizations have accumulated in this field, beginning with manifold projects in the Old City of Jerusalem. What was at stake then was also the way in which ‘best practices’ in conservation are represented: as an international rather than a Palestinian domain. This discursive erasure delegitimized the experimental practices of Palestinian heritage practitioners, local committees and NGOs, which have developed an approach to historic conservation as cultural resistance and social development centred on reuse, revitalization and creativity (De Cesari, 2008).³

Such erasure says something about UNESCO’s universalism as well. Apparently slightly off-topic, a discussion about the quality (or rather lack thereof) of English language reporting developed during the academic debate. Some native speakers lamented the poor English of World Heritage reports and proposed options to obviate this ‘problem’, including text editing and language courses for experts. Yet, the problem was not really one of reduced intelligibility of the reports, but a matter of proper representation of World Heritage. At stake was a sense of embarrassment for



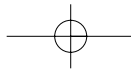
what I would call *contaminated universalism*: a sense that a universal language (English and the global, UNESCO-sanctioned language of heritage) was being corrupted by excessive vernacularization and insufficient knowledge of the master grammar of the science of conservation. Universal languages travel and, in the process, change (see Tsing, 2005).

UNESCO's universalism is necessarily an interactive one, since best practices are produced in transnational dialogues and negotiations, as the cosmopolitanism of the conservation experiences represented at the meeting clearly illustrates. Yet, the erasure of the Palestinian experience shows how this universalism must be discursively produced as a distinctively non-local affair, purged of all vernacular traces. While universal expertise is produced dialogically (if not by symmetrical actors), this interactive quality is often disguised in the process, with significant power effects. Contamination and politics must be concealed.

■ UNESCO'S MULTICULTURALISM

Cultural routes and cultural landscapes represent two new categories of cultural property that entered the World Heritage vocabulary in the 1990s, as part of a broader UNESCO move towards multicultural policies. Criss-crossed by historical, commercial and pilgrim roads, privileged terrain of transnational and multi-religious imaginations such as the 'Holy Land' and the 'crossroads of civilizations', Palestine seems like the right place to look for this kind of property, and other monuments of 'outstanding universal value'.

Until the 1990s, the occupied status of the Palestinian Territories had made the inscription of sites on the World Heritage List technically impossible. Only officially recognized States Parties to the World Heritage Convention can initiate the procedure for sites located in their sovereign territories. As noted above, the Old City of Jerusalem was the only one to have been inscribed on the List, following a contested Jordanian nomination in the 1980s. However, with the Oslo Accords and the establishment of a 'proto-state' in the form of the semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority (PA), the road to World Heritage status seemed closer, and a UNESCO office opened in Ramallah in 1997. After the Israeli reoccupation of the major Palestinian cities in 2002 and the ensuing widespread destruction of cultural properties – with the targeting by snipers of Bethlehem's Nativity Church becoming the iconic image of such destruction – UNESCO decided to empower the cultural desk of its Ramallah office as well as the Palestinian Department of Antiquities (DACH), and made funds available to compile a so-called tentative list to pave the way for the protection of selected Palestinian heritage sites.⁴ An amazing

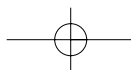
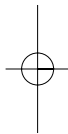
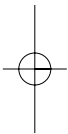


amount of work has been done, and now the tentative list is complete (DACH, 2005), but the proto-state has remained a proto-state, unable to officially submit its nominations, and World Heritage has so far failed to materialize in Palestine.⁵

As multicultural property, testimony to former globalizations and the proper heritage for our interconnected times, cultural routes seemed ideal for Palestine. Not only for being true to the region's rich interconnected past but also, in particular, because this concept promises a heritage of peace, a symbolic overcoming of ethno-national and religious boundaries. In the words of its Palestinian promoters, the concept is an opening of new 'horizons' of interactions and a 'reinforcing [of] mutual cooperation and understanding among regions of the Mediterranean'.⁶ In recent years an interdisciplinary task force has been set up by various PA ministries in cooperation with UNESCO Ramallah to work out a vision and a multi-sited pilot project targeting heritage rehabilitation and tourism development along a route yet to be defined. In spite of the virtual absence of the Palestinian civil society, very active in heritage matters indeed, this was a very promising project. Yet, in an uncanny way, cultural routes have run into borders, checkpoints and walls, as well as the problem of state sovereignty.

Two contested matters dominated the cultural routes task force meetings I attended during 2005–6 in my role as UNESCO consultant. The first object of contention concerned the focus of the project, that is, whether to make religion, and especially Christianity, the main theme of Palestinian cultural routes. This struggle was reflected in the difficulty of choosing the project title, for which the options oscillated between 'Jesus Christ Itineraries' and 'Cultural Routes in the Footsteps of the Prophets', with the latter finally being agreed upon. The heightened 'Christianization' of the Holy Land heritage is a phenomenon that, ironically, concerns not only Jordan (Maffi, 2009) but Israel too, and that can be partly explained by escalating commodification and the key role played by Christian pilgrims in the local economies (see Scham, 2009). Yet, it is also one of the legacies of a deeply rooted history of colonial heritage privileging biblical and Christian sites as well as pre-Islamic archaeology. This legacy also shaped the Palestinian tentative list.⁷ For example, the Nativity Church in Bethlehem and pre-historic Jericho, respectively site number 1 and number 2 on the list, are without a doubt monuments of incommensurable value for many people in the world – millions in the first case – but of little relevance for the majority of Palestinians, except in terms of future tourism revenues.

The second matter of contention among the members of the cultural routes task force was the clash of a fluid vs walled geography, in other words, idealism vs realpolitik. This clash culminated in another contested choice regarding the location of the route and the sites involved. How can tourists explore a landscape criss-crossed by an eight-metre-high concrete wall and



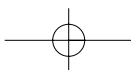
multiple other kinds of visible and invisible barriers? Realism and feasibility were the keywords of UNESCO's position. The organization favoured a no-nonsense, pragmatic strategy aimed at 'getting things done', and centred on two ideas, feasibility and involving the private sector (representatives of which, incidentally, almost never attended the meetings, thus showing their limited hopes for tourism development). Feasibility meant working on accessible and effectively PA-controlled segments of the original trajectory between the northern West Bank and Gaza, the Israeli part being clearly unfeasible from the start.

Concretely, feasibility meant Bethlehem and Jericho. Without forgetting feasibility, the PA antiquity department's position emphasized the principled territorial integrity of the West Bank and the refusal to 'work according to the occupation' and let it determine cultural routes' trajectories, especially in a future-oriented perspective. Between UNESCO's realpolitik and the PA's acting *as if* it were a sovereign state, fragmentation soon emerged as the main feature of Palestinian cultural routes, with a northern segment around several biblical archaeological sites and a central one around Bethlehem and Jericho, but without the 'unfeasible' East Jerusalem. On the project map of the Jericho-Bethlehem trail Jerusalem had been simply cut out, reduced to an empty spot: cultural routes certainly do not cross checkpoints. Eventually, the project sank in the wake of the Western embargo that paralysed the PA after Hamas' electoral victory in 2006.

Cultural routes are a great idea, yet this heritage category is rarely used. Why? What is the problem with UNESCO's multicultural policies? The Palestinian episodes present a set of possible answers to these questions. There is no World Heritage without nation-state sovereignty, and it is nation-states (and experts) that are constituted as the proper actors on the World Heritage stage. This is also why Israeli authorities are sensitive in this regard, and technical reports' titles are important. Constitutionally transnational, cultural routes defy this logic.

■ THE IDEA OF WORLD HERITAGE

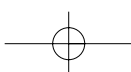
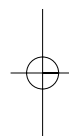
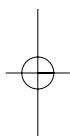
I would now like to consider UNESCO's rich textual production, which constitutes the vocabulary and the grammar of the global heritage language. Heritage is a product of modernity. At the intersection of nationalism and colonialism, a concept of heritage developed between the 19th and the 20th century as the shared past of the nation-state, along with the infrastructure required to manage it (see e.g. Lowenthal, 1985). As part of the development of international institutions for the maintenance of peace, the idea of humanity's heritage began to take shape in the interwar period, and was only to emerge fully after the Second World War (Labadi, 2007b: 26ff.).



Shaped by increasing concerns for the disruptive effects of modernization, world heritage then signified international intellectual cooperation, the worldwide diffusion of knowledge and culture (as 'high culture'), and education of the masses – all integral aspects of UNESCO's efforts in the cultivation of the 'intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind' as the key to building peace 'in the minds of men', as stated in UNESCO's Constitution (UNESCO, 1945).

Prefigured in the 1954 Hague Convention (the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict) and first realized in a series of international monument rescue initiatives led by UNESCO in the 1960s, World Heritage was officially born with the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1972 (UNESCO, 1972). The World Heritage Convention (WHC) states that some cultural and natural heritage of 'outstanding universal value' represents a 'unique and irreplaceable property' which, 'whilst fully respecting the sovereignty of the States on whose territory [the property] . . . is situated', is to be considered 'part of the world heritage of mankind' and 'for whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to co-operate' (Introduction and Article 6.1). The convention is the main legally binding instrument for the conservation of world heritage for the sake of future generations. It fundamentally defines what constitutes heritage of outstanding universal value, the principles according to which the latter is to be conserved, and who is authorized to engage in this process. Furthermore, the Convention established the infrastructure necessary for its own implementation, including the constitution of the intergovernmental World Heritage Committee, in charge of producing and keeping up to date the World Heritage List. Nominations for inscription on the List can be made only by States Parties to the Convention. The Convention's bylaws, the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage List*, have been periodically revised since then.

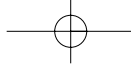
Several scholars, including UNESCO experts, have produced critical accounts of the Convention, in particular its Eurocentric approach to heritage conservation, which produced a List, a representation of humanity's heritage, dominated by European monumental properties (e.g. Byrne, 1991; Cleere, 2001; Labadi, 2007a; Meskell, 2002; WCCD, 1995: 176). Critical heritage scholars denounced World Heritage as a 'case of Western imperialism' (Byrne, 1991: 272) because Western languages, values and practices of the past, genealogically related to the nationalist and capitalist projects (Gamboni, 2001), are subtly imposed at a global level as best standard practices. World Heritage is rooted in the European heritage discourse and the science of conservation which, since the 19th century, has understood heritage as a fetishized object of knowledge and aesthetic pleasure, endowed



with historic, artistic as well as economic values at the expense of others (Choay, 2001: 82ff; see also Article 1 of the Convention). Specifically, traditional understandings of the historic monument and cultural property frame heritage as a thing to be conserved 'as found', and respecting authenticity of fabric rather than, for instance, use (Smith, 2006). Such framing of heritage values and the selection criteria deriving from it produces an emphasis on certain kinds of heritage and therefore their concentration in specific areas of the world.

The World Heritage approach has changed since the Convention, as I will illustrate below. Yet, there are a number of structural features that remain operational despite the 1990s reforms: the language of property, the 'freezing' effect of conservation, and the absolute pre-eminence of states and experts as the only legitimate actors in the heritage arena. Denis Byrne and Laurajane Smith, in particular, have developed pointed critiques of World Heritage as a hegemonic Western discourse distinguished by a conspicuous 'thingification' of heritage (Byrne, 2009: 229) that strips it of its intangible dimensions (for a critique of the reifying tendencies of conservation, see also Handler, 1985, 2003). Use, re-use and the preservation of the living significance of a place – principles of other, less materialistic modes of conservation (Byrne, 1995) which are crucial, for example, to Palestinian heritage organizations too – are antithetical to a central idea of the European science of conservation, physical authenticity. Conservation that privileges physical authenticity disembods heritage objects from the everyday and the habitual to recontextualize them 'under the glass case' and give them new meanings and values in the process: structurally, the preferred function of significant sites is tourist display (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, 2006). Therefore, and in spite of mounting calls to open up heritage to community participation, the world-heritagization of sites most often hinders use, and in fact produces heightened surveillance, if not the outright freezing of habitual activities (as well as gentrification, for example, as in the case of Zanzibar and Salvador de Bahia discussed by Bissel, 2005, and Collins, 2008). Often, world-heritagization involves the bureaucratization and sterilization of life around the sites in question.

The cultural property language produces heritage not simply as a thing, but as a thing to be owned by specific actors, individuals or collective individuals (see also Carman, 2005; Rowlands, 2002). According to Richard Handler (1985), it is nationalism (aided by anthropological knowledge) that discursively frames heritage and culture as properties, as that which a nation must *possess* in order to exist as such, because 'we are a nation because we have a culture' (p. 210). Property, in Western legal discourse, refers to 'the (exclusive) right to the possession, use, or disposal of a thing',⁸ and implies the right to exclude others from the same. Hence, by fetishizing into properties what are nodes, bundles of relationships between people, and

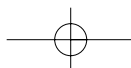
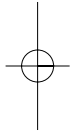
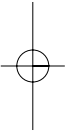


between people and their pasts, this kind of heritagization not only occludes the social life of heritage but also crucially defines who the legitimate stakeholders are.

According to Laurajane Smith, what she terms the 'Western Authorized Heritage Discourse' (2006: 29, 95) embodied by World Heritage strictly circumscribes not only what heritage is and how to deal with it, but also who can execute it, namely, experts. She goes on to contend that this discourse reinforces national narratives and national identities. More specifically, I argue that by establishing the nation-state as the main heritage stakeholder, the 1972 Convention in fact authorizes not only experts but also the nation-state and its representatives as the proper subjects of World Heritage. Other interested parties are not only excluded by default, but silenced in the process. The UNESCO-sponsored Palestinian cultural routes task force I discussed above is a good example of the alliance between UNESCO and state apparatuses at the disadvantage of, for instance, the local civil society. While Palestinian local committees and NGOs today play a key role in the preservation of the Palestinian past, they were left out of the meetings.

The reasons for the pre-eminence of the nation-state in the mechanism of World Heritage are manifold and complex, and go beyond this institution's historical role in the heritage process. On the one hand, this pre-eminence is the product of the very structure of UNESCO as an intergovernmental agency. UNESCO has a specific mandate to work with governmental bodies, particularly in an institution-building function in those contexts where state infrastructures are very weak. There is no effective heritage protection without working national frameworks and policies, nor can NGOs and grassroots organizations be substitutes for a state because their action is limited temporally and spatially: this was the gist of UNESCO's argument against Palestinian NGOs' critiques. Indeed, without effective state infrastructures, the World Heritage mechanism simply does not work, as emphasized by the Palestinian case of impossible nominations.

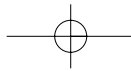
The universalism of World Heritage as formulated in the Convention thus concerns three different levels. World Heritage is universal because it is of interest to humanity as a whole, because it embodies universal values, and because it is subject to universal practices. The key objective of the Convention is to establish, at a global level, an 'effective system of collective protection . . . organized on a permanent basis and in accordance with modern scientific methods' (UNESCO, 1972: Introduction). Universal protection is implemented through the development of best standard practices to be applied globally. The heritagization process travels through meetings and workshops, expert networks and the international interchange of ideas, methods and techniques. It proliferates with the creation of institutions and the development of local policies for heritage protection; it also hybridizes with rooted practices of engagement with the past.



The diffusion of heritage and the standardization of heritage practices that ensues present a conundrum. On the one hand, it tends to produce a similarity of heritages around the world by relying on a specific mode of conservation. More than just 'Western' per se (I consider the 'West' to be a discursive construction, and one with consistent power effects; see Shohat and Stam, 1994: 13), this mode is distinctively shaped by a capitalist and nationalist worldview, and bears the marks of a history of entanglements with the making of both colonial and bourgeois hegemony: heritage is a matter of civilization and distinction. This mode entails a modernist conceptualization of the past as a reified category – as a dead thing separated from us by the break of modernity (Lowenthal, 1985), as a commodity with owners and therefore non-owners, as the object and exclusive purview of a specialized scientific discipline and, finally, as a domain monopolized by the state.

■ FROM THE MELTING POT TO MULTICULTURALISM

The early discourse of World Heritage voices the post-Second World War hopes for solidarity and peace based on a new sense of human commonality and universal values. Yet, what kind of universalism was enshrined in the 1972 Convention? Is UNESCO's universalism the expression of a particularity? There is a parallelism between the early discourse of World Heritage and a political discourse, one which developed at the turn of the century but was still salient in the 1960s and 1970s: the melting pot. As a model of integration within the nation-state, the popular image of the melting pot, associated with the once hegemonic sociological theory of assimilation, was predicated upon the ideal of a merging, a blending of the diverse groups and communities living within the state's territory into a new but homogeneous societal entity (see Hirschman, 1983). In a popular textbook written by Robert Park, the founder of the modern sociology of race and ethnicity, assimilation is defined as 'a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life' (Park and Burgess, 1969: 360, quoted in Hirschman, 1983: 400). Developing solidarity and a common cultural life by sharing experience and history is also the cornerstone of UNESCO's project of building a common heritage of humanity. Yet, in both cases, the egalitarian imaginary of the crucible and the blend masked what was actually a process of dominant conformity or cultural absorption of weaker groups by dominant ones (see Gordon, 1964). As discussed in the previous section, a form of what sociologists called 'Anglo-conformity' and cultural assimilation can be detected in the ways in



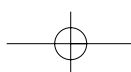
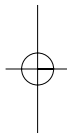
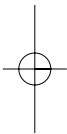
which the global language of heritage adopted a Eurocentric approach to the past, silencing 'other' heritages.

The 1990s marked a shift in UNESCO's discursive framing of culture. Although a concern for cultural diversity was already a fundamental part of its Constitution, it is only in the last two decades that cultural matters have been couched in the specific language of multiculturalism, linking culture in the plural with community development and democracy (for a discussion of the historical changes in UNESCO's approach to cultural diversity, see Stenou, 2003, 2007). Epitomized by the report *Our Creative Diversity* (WCCD, 1995), which laid the foundations for the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001), this discursive move was arguably nourished by a broader political development: the shift from a politics of redistribution to a politics of recognition.

According to Minoo Moallem and Ian Boal, multiculturalism represents a 'corrective' discourse to the crisis of liberal institutions, 'an attempt by the liberal ideological apparatus to overcome the inadequacy of its existing institutions for the protection of freedom and cultural difference' (1999: 244–5). In other words, critics of liberalism view (mainstream) multiculturalism as the institutional response, articulated in a set of policies, to the growing visibility and political significance of a diverse array of social movements mobilized under identity banners such as gender, sexuality, 'race' and ethnicity, ranging from the women's movement to minority struggles and the Indigenous peoples' movement. Emphasizing cultural domination and social misrecognition as forms of oppression, what characterizes these movements is the foregrounding of claims for the recognition of cultural difference and group identity over claims for socio-economic redistribution (e.g. Fraser, 1997, 2000; Taylor, 1994).

This politicization of culture is accompanied by the emergence of a new generation of cultural rights (Cowan et al., 2001; Prott, 1998), namely, the rights to preserve, exercise or have access to a culture, to protect Indigenous and minority groups (see also Kymlicka, 1995). At the level of the popular political imaginary, the language of recognition embodies an image that is the opposite of the melting pot: the mosaic. As a model, both of and for society, with a long history in the USA, multiculturalism is predicated upon a mosaic of different cultures and ethnicities cohabiting the same space but retaining their distinctiveness.

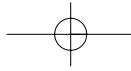
Inhabiting a critical position from within, political philosopher Nancy Fraser has alerted us to the danger that this change in the political master grammar not only risks concealing social politics and key questions of growing economic inequalities under globalization but also risks producing essentialized, fixed and monologic cultures and identities (see also Benhabib, 2002; Povinelli, 2002). She identifies two fundamental problems in the politics of recognition:



We are facing, then, a new constellation in the grammar of political claims-making – and one that is disturbing on two counts. First, this move from redistribution to recognition is occurring despite – or because of – an acceleration of economic globalization, at a time when an aggressively expanding capitalism is radically exacerbating economic inequality. In this context, questions of recognition are serving less to supplement, complicate and enrich redistributive struggles than to marginalize, eclipse and displace them. I shall call this *the problem of displacement*. Second, today's recognition struggles are occurring at a moment of hugely increasing transcultural interaction and communication, when accelerated migration and global media flows are hybridizing and pluralizing cultural forms. Yet the routes such struggles take often serve not to promote respectful interaction within increasingly multicultural contexts, but to drastically simplify and reify group identities. They tend, rather, to encourage separatism, intolerance and chauvinism, patriarchalism and authoritarianism. I shall call this *the problem of reification*. (Fraser, 2000: 108, emphasis in original)

Other scholars understand multiculturalism as being open to multiple significations and as a terrain of struggle, a battlefield. They distinguish between a cooptive liberal or mainstream multiculturalism and a more radical, engaged and relational 'polycentric multiculturalism' (Shohat and Stam, 1994: 13ff.) that seeks to displace Eurocentrism. The main differences between the two interpretations of multiculturalism revolve around the critical nodes identified by Fraser: eclipse of social politics and reification of culture. Polycentric multiculturalism, indeed, not only 'demands change not just in images but in power relations' (Shohat and Stam, 1994: 48) but also envisions culture and identity as products of relational, dialogic practice. In other words, while radical multiculturalism is transformative, generative from the margins, mainstream multiculturalism is affirmative, if not cosmetic, in that it does not disturb the underlying framework that generates inequalities and misrecognitions (see also Fraser, 1997). We shall see that the problems with mainstream multiculturalism persist in its World Heritage version, and in fact profoundly hinder its stated goals.

UNESCO is a crucial site for the production of the discourse of multiculturalism owing to its new prioritization of the promotion of cultural pluralism as leading to tolerance, dialogue and creativity. The multicultural shift was grounded in a revised notion of culture, tied to shifting, more culturalist development discourses, and to a new sense of the entanglement of culture and democracy, as embodied by subaltern and minority struggles for cultural self-determination (see Stenou, 2007). No longer chiefly understood as 'high culture' and universal knowledge to be spread throughout the world, culture is now understood in an anthropological, holistic sense as the totality of the cultural practices of a people; and a people is no longer the equivalent of a nation. Yet, in spite of the emancipatory potential of this approach, the problem of reification continues to haunt it. Of course,



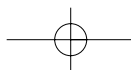
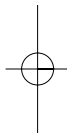
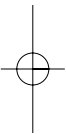
UNESCO's discourse of culture is not homogeneous and monologic, but it is nonetheless heavily indebted to old essentialized anthropological concepts, leaving only marginal space for contestations, hybridities and change (Eriksen, 2001).

The report *Our Creative Diversity* (WCCD, 1995) is a case in point. Sometimes equated to biodiversity, here culture encompasses the entire range of spiritual, material and intellectual values that typify a particular group or society (see Marshall Sahlins' quote that opens the report – WCCD, 1995: 21). Culture is difference, and cultural difference is visualized as a mosaic (e.g. p. 7). In this vision, culture is close to the idea of tradition, unique to and distinctive of a group, continuous through time and bound in space. It is represented as a treasure, homogeneously shared by the people to whom it *belongs* while also in danger of getting lost, as if it were the solid ground of identity that must be 'strengthened'. The end effect is a certain 'heritagization' of culture that is evident, for instance, in the first article of the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001), which defines cultural diversity as the common heritage of humanity.

Through such discursive practices, the complex, the contested and the relational are displaced by hegemonic images of cultures as separate entities, as cultural property that can be itemized on a list. Yet a reified conceptualization of culture leads to a static, ill-conceived and Manichean framing of the tension between universalism and cultural relativism (see Merry, 2001, 2006), which has fundamentally marked UNESCO's project since its beginning (Cleere, 2001; Eriksen, 2001). The logical consequence of the emphasis on solid difference, rather than *différance* – relational, shifting, never always already (Hall, 2003) – is a strict dichotomy of universalism vs cultural relativism, whereby universalism cannot but be an imposition.

The idea of the world as a mosaic of different cultures has shaped World Heritage practices since the 1990s, particularly new attempts by UNESCO to achieve its goal of a universality without imposing uniformity. (Indeed, in manifold contexts well beyond UNESCO, progressive and postcolonial heritage is increasingly couched in the language of recognition and multiculturalism (see Rowlands, 2002; Weiss, 2007), and claimed as part of human rights.) The growing concerns, inside and outside UNESCO, for the evident imbalances of the List in terms of regions, types of properties and periods represented, and for its focus on 'great' European monuments and 'great' civilizations, has provoked a rethinking of approaches to accommodate cultural diversity and less Eurocentric understandings of heritage values (Cleere, 2001). This rethinking materialized in the so-called Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List launched in 1994 and revised in the years that followed (UNESCO, 1994a; see also Labadi, 2005).

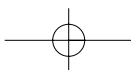
The goal was that the List 'should present an overview of the great diversity of the different cultures which make up mankind [sic], including



of course “living” cultures’ (*World Heritage Newsletter* 6/1994: 3). In order to provide a ‘truly global and complete vision of [the] world’, the answer to the concerns about the List’s Eurocentrism was to ‘include ... other cultures’ within the new multicultural vision of World Heritage as a mosaic with several missing pieces (*World Heritage Newsletter* 6/1994: 3). The Global Strategy implies a shift in focus from ‘uniqueness’ and aesthetic and historic value, to representativeness and anthropological value or social significance. It explicitly targets underrepresented and non-represented countries and types of properties. Within this framework, underrepresented and non-represented countries are encouraged to become members and submit nominations, while States Parties which are already well-represented on the List are encouraged to at least slow down the frequency of new nominations (see UNESCO, 2008). Furthermore, the criteria for inclusion on the List have been modified to make space for new themes and new types of property (such as cultural landscapes) with revised, less materialist notions of authenticity (UNESCO, 1994b), in an attempt to fill in the gaps in the representativity of the List and to redress its imbalances. The overall approach is described as a ‘move away from a purely architectural view of the cultural heritage of humanity towards one which was much more anthropological, multi-functional and universal’ (UNESCO, 1994a).

Almost 15 years after the launch of the Global Strategy, its objectives have not been met, and over half of the properties on the List are located in Europe and North America in spite of near universal membership to the WHC (Labadi, 2007a; for a report analyzing the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, see Labadi, 2007b). Like the politics of recognition, new multicultural heritage policies suffer from both the problem of reification and the problem of displacement described above, as well as from the additional tendency to reproduce hierarchies between cultures. Mino Moallem and Iain Boal have noted that liberal multiculturalism often conforms to ‘a politics of inclusion based on the model of a solid core surrounded by a periphery of the marginalized and the minorities’ (1999: 253).⁹

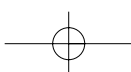
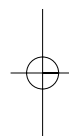
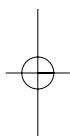
The crucial problem with the Global Strategy is that it adopts an additive approach that not only leaves the World Heritage ‘core’ intact, but also leaves its built-in, exclusionary structures of representation and selection mechanisms in place. The addition of ‘other’ cultures and ‘other’ values, subtly equated with under- and non-represented nation-states through the nomination mechanism (remember, only States Parties can make nominations), helps symbolically purge the World Heritage discourse of its Eurocentrism while reproducing it. As shown by the persisting ‘imbalances’ of the List, the overall message is still the celebration of ‘great’ monuments and civilizations reinforced by a token representation of reified living cultures and social and spiritual values.



A study of nomination dossiers between 1977 and 2002 indicates that, in spite of the Global Strategy, there has been no substantial change in the kinds of values given prominence by States Parties for WH selection. The values mentioned most often in the dossiers are the ones associated with Eurocentric heritage approaches such as historical, aesthetic and architectural significance, together with references to men from the middle and upper classes (Labadi, 2007a: 158). Women, the lower socio-economic classes and Indigenous people together with local communities are still being marginalized by the World Heritage process. Tentative lists and nominations tend to conform to hegemonic national (or colonial) representations that acquire transnational qualities by being very similar across the world: linear, homogeneous and heroic narratives of grandeur engraved in stone (Labadi, 2007a: esp.161). In other words, World Heritage has so far produced a 'vision of world cultures' that, far from being 'truly global and complete', is not only biased in terms of represented regions but also non-representative of single nations (see Van der Aa, 2001).

To explain the ineffectiveness of the Global Strategy, WH expert Sophia Labadi, the author of the nomination dossiers study, points the finger at States Parties' lack of knowledge of the system and, more incisively in my opinion, at a crucial lack of democratic participation in terms of both States Parties being actively involved in the work of the World Heritage Committee and of the grassroots taking part in the World Heritage process (Labadi, 2007a: 159–60). Following mounting critiques, the latest *Operational Guidelines* (UNESCO, 2008: 7) include among five strategic objectives also the enhancement of local communities' role in the implementation of the Convention. Yet this objective is hard to achieve – because of the way the system works. Pushing Labadi's line of reasoning a bit further, I would argue that the lack of participatory democracy in World Heritage is structural, and is on the one hand tied to the powerful alliance between World Heritage as an intergovernmental project and the institution of the nation-state, and on the other, to the 'rule of experts' (Mitchell, 2002; Smith, 2006) that the World Heritage process brings about.

Through the World Heritage process, what are in fact dense, lively cultural spaces are *tombados*, 'patrimonialized' but also 'frozen' – as the inhabitants of Bahia's Pelurinho so poignantly put it (Collins, 2008: 296) – transformed into high-surveillance enclaves under the strict purview of experts and state bureaucracies, circumscribed objects of expertise and state intervention. The end-effect is not only an extension of the reach of the state but also the production and authorization of expertise with its own field of application, walled-up, tangible heritage sites.¹⁰ States and experts are the two subjects of the World Heritage discourse because there is no nomination or site management without state supervision and expert knowledge of the global heritage language, while consultation of the grassroots can be easily ignored. This power effect, however, takes place in a



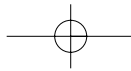
globalized context marked by the transnationalization and decentralization of politics (see e.g. Ferguson, 2004), whereby heritage increasingly slips away from the grasp of the nation-state. With the expansion of the role of civil society and the growth of minority and Indigenous struggles, heritage is more and more championed by multiple, often highly visible, sub- and transnational stakeholders in the name of the politics of recognition (De Cesari, 2008; Lowenthal, 1996).

My analysis is shaped by the ways in which World Heritage operates in Palestine, a stateless territory under occupation, which, some could argue, is not a suitable yardstick of general trends. On the contrary, I think there are some important global lessons to learn from the ethnographic material I have presented. World Heritage does not function without working state infrastructures. Therefore, when the latter is absent or weak a whole arsenal of personnel, training workshops and capacity-building initiatives must be set in place to obviate the problem. Under-representation, as in the case of the Arab states (Labadi, 2007b: 149), is often a problem of lacking state infrastructures, capable, for instance, of producing and maintaining a national inventory of heritage sites that can provide the basis for a tentative list: in other words, a problem arises when so-called weak states do not 'know' (Scott, 1998) and thus do not control their territory.

Under- and non-represented states that lack the financial resources and very institutional capacity to produce tentative lists and nomination dossiers, not to mention conserve their heritage, frequently cannot ask for UNESCO international assistance because of their arrears to the World Heritage Fund. This also shows how the institutional discourse of multiculturalism in heritage and the language of recognition mask or, in Fraser's terminology, *displace* underlying radical socio-economic inequalities that prevent the realization of multiculturalism's stated democratic and pluralistic goals, in particular a well-balanced List.

In the Palestinian case, uproar over the destruction of world-famous monuments in 2002 forced the World Heritage Committee to intervene and disburse funds for the institutional build-up of the Palestinian Authority's (PA) Department of Antiquities and the preparation of a tentative list. While there have been no nominations so far because the PA is not an internationally recognized state, UNESCO's intervention has definitively empowered the 'state' heritage department and broadened its reach throughout the Territories. Palestinian civil society heritage practitioners who, as I mentioned earlier, are at the forefront of a movement to protect the local vernacular heritage, use a kinship metaphor to describe this alliance between UNESCO and the PA.

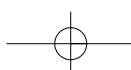
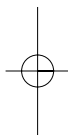
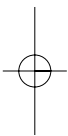
During a conference on heritage conservation in Palestine that brought together many of the actors involved in the field, the Department of Antiquities, heritage NGOs, UNESCO and several key donors, this alliance was jokingly referred to as a 'marriage' that receives only a limited blessing

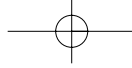


from civil society organizations, for it tends to exclude them, and to effect stricter regulation of their activities. UNESCO's reply to the marriage joke was always the same: 'My hands are tied . . . UNESCO is an intergovernmental organization. I cannot marry you [civil society heritage organizations], even though I would prefer to marry you rather than the Department of Antiquities.'¹¹ In other words, UNESCO is mandated to work with state institutions. While obviously beneficial to institutional build-up at the national level, this mandate creates friction with grassroots organizations and often hinders community participation beyond a token acknowledgement of its importance.

Nancy Fraser and Ella Shohat, as I discussed above, have shown that mainstream multiculturalism tends to affirm rather than transform underlying, inequality-producing structures, particularly through a mechanism of displacement. Similarly, UNESCO's multiculturalism has neutralized pushes for more democratic and inclusive World Heritage practices by *displacing* the problem of participation onto a new list. Instead of changing the World Heritage system, UNESCO's recognition of the significance of heritage's intangible dimension and the crucial role of civil society in heritage management has led to the development and adoption of a new legal instrument, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003), with its attendant 'Representative List'. While the model is still the WHC, crucial differences between the preservation of tangible cultural heritage and the safeguarding of the intangible heritage concern on the one hand the new role of local communities and tradition-bearers and, on the other, the rejection of the criterion of 'outstanding universal value' in favour of representativity (Aikawa-Faure, 2009; for a general interdisciplinary discussion of the new convention see Smith and Akagawa, 2009).

Meanwhile, the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO, 2005) is the latest among UNESCO's standard-setting instruments. Unlike the two heritage conventions, this one primarily protects the products of individual or collective creativity as 'published or conveyed by modern carriers of culture' (Stenou, 2007: 134). Displaced onto multiple lists, institutional multiculturalism tends to produce a structural hierarchy between different but equally essentialized cultural forms (see also Herzfeld, 2005) and between a heritage of universal significance and a heritage that is safeguarded (just) for the 'fear of losing diversity' (Aikawa-Faure, 2009: 40). The addition of the new convention for the protection of 'modern' cultural expression further conveys a Manichean representation of world cultures as substantially divided between dead heritage (in its twin aspects of universal civilizational monuments and dying marginalized traditions) and living creativity. In this cosmology, intangible heritage, rather than being an aspect of all kinds of heritages and cultures, is reified into another itemized list and





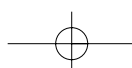
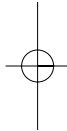
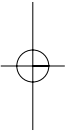
devalued in relation to more 'universal', timeless and/or modern cultural forms. Neither universal nor truly 'of the present', certain forms of cultural production are relegated to an uncertain limbo thanks to the denial of their coevalness (see Fabian, 2007: 106) – itself a form of misrecognition – operationalized by the postcolonial taxonomy of UNESCO's cultural conventions.

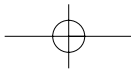
■ CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have moved from telling two stories of World Heritage in action in Israel/Palestine to an analysis of the global heritage language. I have argued that recent World Heritage reforms stimulated by critiques of the Eurocentrism of the List adopted a multicultural frame, inspired in particular by what political philosophers and cultural critics call mosaic or liberal multiculturalism. According to critics, however, this way of seeing and managing cultural difference tends to effect a reification of dynamic cultural processes. Moreover, instead of transforming from the margins dominant structures and practices, this multiculturalism not only risks affirming and solidifying differences, but also the asymmetries between them.

The anxieties and fears of a 'contaminated universalism' that the first vignette highlighted reflect an unresolved tension between a commitment to universalism and the inclusion of cultural difference that has constituted UNESCO's discourse since the beginning. Most recently, instead of changing the way World Heritage works, this tension has been temporarily resolved by an act of displacement, with the bifurcation of UNESCO's listing practice: one list for tangible and universal heritage and a second list for intangible heritage that is representative of cultural diversity. While different heritages certainly require different, specialized policies, I contend that binary thinking and a typological approach do not represent the best solution for resolving the conundrum of the universal in heritage. Moreover, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has suggested (2006: 167, 170), why is a metacultural product, a list (actually, four lists), the most tangible outcome of decades of UNESCO's heritage policies rather than concrete actions?

Anthropology and cultural studies rely today on strongly relational models of cultural difference as *différance*, and have begun to conceptualize universals as dialogic, interactive forms of knowledge. According to Anna Tsing, for example, universals, or 'knowledge that moves – mobile and mobilizing – across localities and cultures' (2005: 7), are produced within cultural dialogues and are always already engaged in cross-cultural encounters dominated by 'awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative' frictions





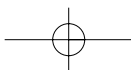
(p. 4). This does not mean, however, that practices of universalism, while interactive, cannot be exclusionary or asymmetric. As the exclusion of Palestinian organizations detailed in the initial vignettes has shown, local heritage practices are often downplayed, depoliticized, or perceived as a form of excessive vernacularization (as 'too political') by UNESCO experts. I have tried to illustrate that the erasure of politics and 'locality' from UNESCO's representation of itself – a silencing of the necessarily dialogic nature of its universalism and rootedness in a multiplicity of different contexts and histories – helps to reproduce the rule of international experts and *authorize* global heritage. Furthermore, I hope to have demonstrated that World Heritage also facilitates and in fact sponsors the extension of the reach and control of the state over heritage, often at the expense of the grass-roots. Paradoxically, the heritage of humanity reinforces the nation-state.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- 1 For the status of East Jerusalem see, e.g., http://www.btselem.org/english/Jerusalem/Legal_Status.asp (accessed October 2009).
- 2 For a discussion of the recent UNESCO Action Plan for the safeguarding of the cultural heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem, see Larkin and Dumper (2009).
- 3 A good example of Palestinian heritage practices is the Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program, an NGO which has worked since 1995 'to protect the cultural heritage and the community in the Old City of Jerusalem' (<http://www.welfareassociation.org/link3/link3.html>, last accessed 30 September 2007). The program is part of the Welfare Association, a private,



non-profit foundation established in the 1980s in Geneva that supports culture and sustainable development in Palestine with most of its funding coming from Palestinians of the diaspora. As in the case of many other Palestinian heritage organizations, the Welfare Association restores historic buildings of the Mamluk and Ottoman period to be reused especially for community and cultural purposes, within an approach that emphasizes the relationship between 'heritage and life' (Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program, 2004). Beyond the restoration of historic neighbourhoods, this NGO has developed a diversified approach which includes housing and service provision catering to the local impoverished population, training programs, awareness campaigns, social initiatives, architectural and social studies and surveys, and the preparation of a conservation master plan for the Old City. Here, heritage conservation works as a form of creative cultural resistance, or rather architectural resistance, to the occupation because it provides a means to sustain the presence of the Palestinian community in the Old City, endangered by the enforcement of various restrictive measures toward the Arab population, if not threatened with evictions (see B'Tselem, 2006). The primary difference between Jerusalem's and other similar West Bank organizations' is that until very recently the program, owing to technicalities contained in the Oslo Agreements, was not funded by Western donors but solely by substantive Arab donations.

- 4 The official title of the Palestinian list actually did not mention the usual UNESCO technical wording for such documents, which is tentative list, but an alternative carefully chosen by the legal experts of the World Heritage Centre to avoid a negative Israeli reaction (see DACH, 2005).
- 5 At the time of my fieldwork in 2005–6, options being discussed as a way to obviate statelessness and nominate Palestinian properties included a nomination through ALECSO, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization.
- 6 My notes from the introduction to the task force meeting, Ramallah, 2 March 2006.
- 7 Among the first ten properties listed, eight have a biblical connection and five have a strongly Christian significance, while two figure prominently in the history of Ancient Near Eastern archaeology (see DACH, 2005).
- 8 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'property' 4, <http://www.oed.com> (accessed October 2009).
- 9 For a similar argument about the contradictory effects of the use of new, more inclusive historiographical approaches in museums, see Gable et al. (1992).
- 10 Here my analysis is obviously indebted to the work of two Foucauldian critics of development, a discursive formation that is intertwined with and replicated by heritage. The first is Jim Ferguson's (1994) analysis of development as producing the expansion of bureaucratic state power and the depoliticization of poverty through the use of technocratic languages. Furthermore, I draw on Timothy Mitchell's crucial insight that 'the discourse of international development constitutes itself in this way [by setting up its object as out there, external to itself] as an *expertise and intelligence that stands completely apart from the country and the people it describes*' (Mitchell, 2002: 210, emphasis in original).

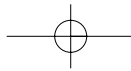


- 11 My notes from the third day of the Conference on Cultural Heritage in Palestine, Jericho, 22 February 2006.

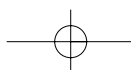
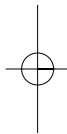
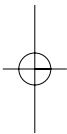
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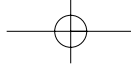
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