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Chiara De Cesari

# World Heritage and the Nation-State: A View from Palestine

The universalizing project of World Heritage aims to transcend the heritage logic of the nation-state, particularly so after its more recent reforms that emphasize the role of the grassroots and of cultural diversity.<sup>1</sup> The objective of this UNESCO program is to identify, help preserve, and promote sites and monuments deemed to be of universal significance – i.e. relevant beyond the borders of the states within which they are located – which are to constitute the elements of a shared memory of humanity able to foster a global sense of human commonality and intellectual solidarity.<sup>2</sup> In opposition to UNESCO's self-image, in this essay I 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 infrastructure, not always but often at the expense of the grassroots. Moreover, I highlight the unsuspected entanglement of World Heritage and national sovereignty, and the paradoxical ways in which the transnational memory articulated by the World Heritage discourse tends to reinscribe sites into a national logic and spatial imagination.

To this end, I explore World Heritage through a double ethnographic and textual lens. I begin discussing 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 discourse. I then proceed to analyze the key policies that regulate UNESCO's heritage work. These include the 1972 World Heritage Convention but also more recent reforms that attempt to address the Eurocentric biases of the chief representational device of World Heritage, the World Heritage List (hereafter, 'the List'). I will argue that World Heritage has

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this essay appeared as "World Heritage and Mosaic Universalism: A View from Palestine," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 10.3 (2010): 299–324, and as blogpost on the *Leiden-Stanford Heritage Network*, 6 December 2011, available at [www.networkedheritage.org/2011/12/06/world-heritage-and-national-sovereignty-on-palestine](http://www.networkedheritage.org/2011/12/06/world-heritage-and-national-sovereignty-on-palestine) (accessed 21 March 2014). I would like to thank the *Journal of Social Archaeology* for granting permission to re-use parts of my old essay.

<sup>2</sup> Disentangling memory and heritage tends to be a fruitless endeavor (Wilson 2009, 378) for much more can be extrapolated from their productive intersections. However, for the sake of clarity, I usually distinguish heritage as a specific, materially-mediated, rather institutionalized and hegemonic form of memory.

been shaped by contemporary political discourses centered on the negotiation and management of cultural diversity, from assimilation to multiculturalism. Building on theories of the politics of recognition, I will examine the ways in which UNESCO's multicultural policies tend to reproduce Eurocentric patterns and hierarchies between reified heritages and cultures. Finally, I 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 prevent broader democratic participation in the heritage process.

## The battle for World Heritage in Palestine

On 31 October 2011, UNESCO's general conference voted to admit Palestine as a member state by a large majority. One hundred and seventy countries voted in favor, 14 voted against (including the US, Israel, Germany, Canada, and Australia) and 52 abstained. Soon afterwards, the US and Israel, who had strongly opposed this move, announced their 'retaliation' against both UNESCO and Palestine. The US immediately halted its UNESCO contributions, throwing the organization into chaos and forcing a revision of its overall budget.<sup>3</sup> Israel, on the other hand, not only withheld its UNESCO contribution but immediately punished the Palestinian Authority (PA), announcing the construction of 2,000 more housing units in its West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements, as well as halting the transfer of the tax revenues it collects (being in control of all West Bank external borders) on behalf of the PA. What was the reason for these ostensibly disproportionate reactions? On paper, the main consequence of UNESCO's recognition of Palestine as a member state consisted in its opening up the possibility for Palestinians to request their most significant heritage sites to be considered for inscription on the World Heritage List. In the following, I argue that the clash over Palestinian UNESCO membership tells us something about the multifaceted relationship between World Heritage and national sovereignty.

"The State of Palestine finally exists:" this was the incipit of Lebanon's *Daily Star* editorial the day after the general conference vote, rightly emphasizing the symbolic politics of the Palestinian move (It's about Time 2011). The article was referring to a particular kind of 'existence,' for few believed that the UNESCO mem-

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the US contributed at that time ca. 22% of UNESCO's budget, and that this contribution was supposedly considered a strategic asset in the context of the new multilateral policies of the Obama administration reversing a decades long American hostility toward the UN cultural body.

bership was going to change much in terms of realities on the ground. Indeed, membership itself did not change the essentially patchworked and very limited sovereignty of the PA. This interim governing body was created by the Oslo Accords in the 1990s to administer the areas of the West Bank and Gaza from which Israel had withdrawn. Due to the failure of the so-called peace process, however, the PA never developed into an independent, viable state. In this context, the UNESCO bid was part of a wider Palestinian campaign to obtain full international recognition as a state within the UN system, of which the overwhelming vote of the General Assembly in November 2012 to recognize Palestine within the 1967 borders as a non-member state with observer status probably represents the most significant moment. For Israel, the campaign constitutes a rejection of the path of negotiation. However, for Palestinians, it is precisely a response to the failure of over 20 years of US-brokered negotiations with Israel. This time span has seen the population of the Israeli colonies built inside the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 double (they now number well over 500,000 people), and the settlements, which are illegal under international law and constitute in the eyes of many the main obstacle on the way to achieving a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are greatly expanding.<sup>4</sup> As a response to this Israeli policy of creating facts on the ground, the Palestinian leadership decided to move its battle to the UN, considered to be a more impartial setting, calling for a larger involvement of the international community as a whole. It also decided to move the battle to the symbolic level, by seeking formal, international recognition of sovereignty before effective control of the territories. This is a strategy I have called elsewhere *anticipatory representation*, to refer to the calling into being, through national representation, of national institutions that do not yet fully exist (De Cesari 2012).

Apparently, then, Palestinian UNESCO membership has nothing to do with real sovereignty on the ground. While this opens up accession to a number of other UN bodies, it is fundamentally a symbolic victory – the culmination of a long history of international recognitions of Palestinian national rights grounded in the fundamental commitment of the UN to the right of nations to self-determination. Yet several Palestinian commentators, including Nabil Shaath, a senior Fatah figure long in charge of foreign relations, have emphasized the importance of UNESCO membership because it will “further empower us [Palestinians] to protect our cultural, historical, and religious sites from Israel’s continuous illegal exploitation and attack” (Shaath 2011). Indeed, World Heritage status might give

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<sup>4</sup> For background and statistics related to the settlements, see the website of the Foundation for Middle East Peace at [www.fmep.org/settlement\\_info/settlement-info-and-tables/stats-data/comprehensive-settlement-population-1972-2006](http://www.fmep.org/settlement_info/settlement-info-and-tables/stats-data/comprehensive-settlement-population-1972-2006) (accessed 25 March 2014).

Palestinians more control over parts of their land and a new weapon in their battle against the occupation.

In line with the international image it wants to promote of itself, the Palestinian Authority decided to put forward Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity as the first site to be nominated for the World Heritage List; the Church as "birthplace of Jesus" was then inscribed in 2012. This decision, however, was not at all without opponents within Palestine. Local organizations and NGOs had preferred the early candidacy of other Palestinian heritage sites, which are currently under intense pressure from the occupation and need urgent protection. One such case is the Old City of Hebron, an important historic city partly occupied by Israeli settlers. Yet, the nomination file that caused the most frictions between the PA and local organizations is the proposal to inscribe on the World Heritage List the cultural landscape of Battir near Bethlehem,<sup>5</sup> which, after long delays, the Authority ended up submitting under an emergency procedure only right before the closing annual deadline in January 2014. The PA had stopped Battir's nomination procedure also because of informal agreements with the US and Israel in the attempt to get back to the negotiating table.<sup>6</sup>

Battir is a West Bank village that has remarkably managed to preserve a unique evolving landscape and irrigated farming system dating back to the Roman period. This cultural landscape and the village's inhabitants are threatened by the construction of the so-called separation wall, which Israel is building allegedly to separate Israelis from Palestinians. In reality, however, it runs for the most part deep into the West Bank, and has thus been the object of worldwide criticism as, among other things, a disguised form of territorial annexation.<sup>7</sup> The wall, as it is currently planned, would not only cause grave damage to the heritage of Battir, but also mean the loss of large tracts of land for the Palestinian villagers, who appealed to the Israeli High Court of Justice to stop its construction.<sup>8</sup>

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**5** I have discussed the story of Battir and World Heritage in Palestine during multiple interviews and conversations with UNESCO personnel and local organizations, particularly in January 2012 and November 2013; see also Lazaroff (2014) and Ravid (2014).

**6** For background to these informal agreements, see the entries in the previous footnote as well as [www.palestinemonitor.org/details.php?id=hxk79ma4466y6bjq4eqcl](http://www.palestinemonitor.org/details.php?id=hxk79ma4466y6bjq4eqcl) (accessed 11 March 2014).

**7** The fact that the wall is not being built along the Green Line, i.e. the internationally recognized border between Israel and the West Bank, constituted the main reason why it was deemed illegal under international law, according to the advisory opinion given in 2004 by the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the UN, see [www.btselem.org/topic/separation\\_barrier](http://www.btselem.org/topic/separation_barrier) (accessed 11 March 2014).

**8** For a list of background documents related to the High Court's Battir petitions, see the website of the Friends of the Earth Middle East [foeme.org/www/?module=events{&}record\\_id=121](http://foeme.org/www/?module=events{&}record_id=121) (accessed 11 March 2014).

While they had long awaited the PA's decision to submit Battir's nomination, the villagers found a number of unlikely allies in court: not only Israeli environmentalists but even the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority itself.<sup>9</sup> While this book is going into print, both decisions on Battir – by the World Heritage Committee and by the High Court – are still pending. But there is no doubt that the achievement of World Heritage status would have a key impact on the judicial procedure. At that point it will become clear that while World Heritage weaves the story of a heritage site into a transnational memory narrative that ostensibly cuts across and overcomes the borders of the state in which it is located, in fact it is helping to refigure state sovereignty in unexpected ways.

## A World Heritage in the making

Until the 1990s, the occupied status of the Palestinian territories had made the inscription of West Bank and Gaza sites on the World Heritage List technically impossible. Indeed, only officially recognized states parties to UNESCO and the World Heritage Convention can initiate the procedure for sites located in their territories. The Old City of Jerusalem – annexed illegally by Israel post-1967 – was the only one in the area 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 PA, the road to World Heritage status seemed closer, and a UNESCO office opened in Ramallah in 1997. Due to Israel's opposition, and its frequent accusations of "politicization" aimed at UNESCO, the Palestinian UNESCO office's mandate did not include East Jerusalem, where heritage initiatives are limited and usually managed from the organization's Paris headquarters: for Palestinians and other critics this is a clear symptom of the limits of UNESCO's enforcement power and of its ultimate weakness in front of powerful nation-states (see Dumper and Larkin 2012). After the Israeli reoccupation of the major Palestinian cities in 2002 and the ensuing widespread destruction of cultural properties – with snipers targeting Bethlehem's Nativity Church becoming the iconic image of such destruction – UNESCO decided to empower the

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<sup>9</sup> The Israeli High Court case of Battir is peculiar in other ways. Indeed, here petitioners do not "seek to improve the wall along the least invasive path, but, rather, for the first time in this forum, to claim for its impossibility *tout court*;" moreover, "the case is not brought about on behalf of human rights at all (claims on behalf of these rights stopped having any meaning in this area), but rather in the name of the rights of the environment, of nature and of heritage" ([www.forensic-architecture.org/investigations/the-landscape-of-battir-vs-the-state-of-israel-2/](http://www.forensic-architecture.org/investigations/the-landscape-of-battir-vs-the-state-of-israel-2/), accessed 11 March 2014).

cultural desk of its Ramallah office as well as the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (DACH). It therefore made funds available to compile a so-called “tentative list” to pave the way for the protection of selected Palestinian heritage sites. There was controversy over what the Palestinian tentative list was to be called, due to Israel’s sensitivity on the issue (the non-specific phrasing “Inventory of . . . Heritage Sites of Potential Outstanding Universal Value in Palestine” was ultimately decided on instead), and this is itself a barometer of how UN jargon has the potential to invest actors with the mantle of sovereignty. However, despite their tentative list being completed in 2005 (DACH 2005), Palestinians could not submit nominations for years, until they achieved UNESCO membership.

Since the early 2000s, UNESCO has been very active in Palestine – mostly in the West Bank, since Gaza and Jerusalem are rather out of reach – with the express objective of helping to save a transnational heritage of tremendous relevance. While conducting fieldwork in the West Bank to study the politics of Palestinian heritage and memory, I have followed the work of UNESCO from the mid-2000s onwards. One of the agency’s projects that I have monitored quite consistently across the years is the so-called “cultural routes project,” which I will offer here as an example of World Heritage in the making. Cultural routes and cultural landscapes represent two relatively new categories of cultural property that entered the World Heritage vocabulary in the 1990s, as part of a broader UNESCO move towards multicultural policies. 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 rich interconnected past of a region known as the crossroads of civilisations 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.”<sup>10</sup> An interdisciplinary task force had 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. This was a very promising project in spite of the virtual absence of Palestinian civil society, which is usually very active in heritage matters (De Cesari 2010). Yet, uncannily, cultural routes have run into borders, checkpoints and walls, as well as the problem of state sovereignty.

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<sup>10</sup> My notes from the introduction to the cultural routes task force meeting, Ramallah, 2 March 2006.

Two contested matters dominated the cultural routes task force meetings I attended in the period 2005–2006. The first subject of contention concerned the focus of the project, that is, whether to make religion, and especially Christianity, the main theme of Palestinian cultural routes. The heightened christianization of the Holy Land heritage is a phenomenon that 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 regional 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, in addition to the influential cultural role played by Palestinian Christians, shaped the Palestinian tentative list and the PA heritage politics.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Bethlehem was the first site to be nominated to the World Heritage List, against the will of multiple interest groups in Palestine. Having sites on the List constitutes an important trapping and symbol of nation-statehood, and guarantees a place within global taxonomies of cultural value (see Herzfeld 2004, 2005). These sites articulate a particular idea, very condensed, of the state they represent, and function as a nation-branding device. As Lynn Meskell has argued (2014), World Heritage comes with a highly prized “sign value” (237) attached to it, also because sites on the List “operate as transactional devices whereby cultural, and thus political, recognition both masks and enables a multifarious network of economic values” (224). It is in this highly politicized ‘statist’ global context that the representational politics of the PA has to be understood.

The second matter of contention among the members of the task force was the question whether or not to accept the realities of the ‘walled’ geography of Palestine. This clash culminated in another contested choice regarding the location of the route and the sites involved, namely, the exclusion of Jerusalem. How can tourists explore a landscape criss-crossed by an eight-meter high concrete wall and multiple other kinds of visible and invisible barriers? Realism and feasibility were the keywords of UNESCO’s position. The organization favored a no-nonsense, pragmatic strategy aimed at “getting things done,” and centered on two ideas: feasibility and the involvement of the private sector (the representatives of which, incidentally, almost never attended the meetings, thus showing their then limited hopes for the development of tourism). Attending to feasibility meant working on accessible and effectively PA-controlled segments of the

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**11** Among the first ten properties listed in the Palestinian tentative list, eight have a biblical connection and five of those have a strongly Christian significance, while the other two figure prominently in the history of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology, see DACH (2005).



original trajectory between the northern West Bank and Gaza, the Israeli part being clearly unfeasible from the start. Concretely, prioritizing feasibility meant focusing only on Bethlehem and Jericho. The PA Antiquity Department's position, however, emphasized the principled territorial integrity of the West Bank, and their refusal to "work according to the occupation" by letting it determine the trajectories of cultural routes, especially in a future-oriented perspective. Between UNESCO's *Realpolitik* and the PA's acting *as if* Palestine 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 including "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 paralyzed the PA after Hamas' electoral victory in 2006.

Even though cultural routes represent a highly promising concept, particularly for imagining transnational memories, this heritage category is not used as much as it could and should be in our globalized world. What is the problem with UNESCO's multicultural policies? The Palestinian stories I have just discussed present a set of possible answers to this question. World Heritage is deeply tied to nation-state sovereignty, and it is nation-states (and nation-state authorized 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 the titles given to technical reports 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 provides the vocabulary and grammar of the transnational heritage language. This language has deep roots in nationalist thought and practices (Abu El-Haj 2001; Handler 1985; Herzfeld 1991; Meskell 1998). At the intersection of nationalism and colonialism, a concept of heritage as the shared past of the nation-state developed in the course of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, along with the infrastructure required to manage it (see e.g. Choay 2001); and ever since it has had an important nation-building function (Anderson 1991). 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, but was only to emerge fully after WWII (Labadi 2007b, esp. 26). Shaped by increasing concerns for the

disruptive effects of modernization, world heritage signified at that time international intellectual cooperation, the worldwide diffusion of knowledge and ('high') culture, and the 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" – this is a key concept – 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, which principles should be applied in its conservation, 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 inter-governmental World Heritage Committee, in charge of producing and keeping up to date the World Heritage List. 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 of its Eurocentric approach to heritage conservation which produced a List, a representation of humanity's heritage, that is dominated by European monumental properties (e.g. Byrne 1991; Cleere 2001; Meskell 2002; Labadi 2007a). Critical heritage scholars have denounced World Heritage as a "case of Western imperialism" (Byrne 1991, 272) because Western languages, values, and practices of the past, genealogically related to nationalist and capitalist projects (Gamboni 2001), are subtly imposed at a global level as standard practices. World Heritage is rooted in the European heritage discourse and the science of conservation, which, since the nineteenth century, has understood heritage as a fetishized object of knowledge and aesthetic pleasure, endowed with historic, artistic, and economic value at the expense of other values. Traditional understandings of what constitutes a historic monument and cultural property frame

heritage as a thing to be conserved “as found,” and value authenticity of fabric (however this is defined) over, for instance, use and social significance (Smith 2006; Byrne 2009). Such a 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.

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 also key to Palestinian heritage organizations – are antithetical to a central idea of the European science of conservation, which focuses on physical authenticity. While the UNESCO notion of authenticity has been updated (UNESCO 1994b), conservation still privileges physical authenticity. In this way, it wrenches heritage objects from the everyday and the habitual to recontextualize them ‘under the glass case;’ structurally, the preferred function of significant sites is tourist display (Kirschblatt-Gimblett 1998; 2006), rather than preservation for local communities. Therefore, and in spite of mounting calls to open up heritage to community participation, the world-heritagization of sites tends to hinder use, and in fact produces heightened surveillance, if not the outright freezing of habitual activities – as well as, often, gentrification (see e.g. Bissel 2005; Collins 2008). Often too, world-heritagization involves the bureaucratization and heavy regulation of life around the sites in question. These adverse effects of heritagization thus complicate the laudable mission that World Heritage tries to live up to.

The ‘cultural property’ language produces heritage not simply as a thing, but as a thing to be owned by specific actors, individuals or collectives like nations (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” (210). Property, in Western legal discourse, refers to “the (exclusive) right to the possession, use, or disposal of a thing,”<sup>12</sup> and implies the right to exclude others from the same. Heritagization crucially defines the legitimate stakeholders. Laurajane Smith has argued that the “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (2006), as she calls it, 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. I argue more specifically 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

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<sup>12</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “property” 4, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com) (accessed 25 March 2014).

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 to the disadvantage of, for instance, the local civil society. Although Palestinian local committees and NGOs 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 go beyond the nationalizing legacy of the heritage discourse. This pre-eminence is chiefly the product of the very structure of UNESCO as an intergovernmental agency. UNESCO has a specific mandate to work with governmental bodies, also because it believes it is right to promote institution-building in those contexts where state infrastructures are very weak. The idea grounding these policies is that there is no effective heritage protection without working national frameworks and policies, and that NGOs and grassroots organizations cannot be substitutes for a state because their action is limited temporally and spatially: this was the gist of UNESCO’s defensive argument against Palestinian NGOs’ critiques of their alliance with the PA ‘state’ agency.

## **Imagining transnational memories: from ‘mankind’ to multiculturalism**

What imaginaries of the world are articulated in the different manifestations of the List? I argue that we can trace a shift in the ways in which World Heritage has represented transnational memory and the world through it. The early discourse of World Heritage voices the post-WWII hopes for solidarity and peace based on a new sense of human commonality and universal values. There is a parallelism between the early discourse of World Heritage and a political discourse 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 blending of the diverse groups and communities living on 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 sol-

identity 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 cultural absorption on the part of dominant groups vis-à-vis weaker ones (see Gordon 1964). A form of what sociologists called "Anglo-conformity" and cultural assimilation can be detected in the ways in which the transnational language of heritage adopted a Eurocentric approach to the past, silencing 'other' heritages, as has been discussed in the previous section.

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 decades that cultural matters have been couched in the specific language of multiculturalism, linking cultures 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 Mino Moallem and Iain 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, 244–245). 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, which range from the women's movement to minority struggles and indigenous peoples' movements. Emphasizing cultural domination and social misrecognition as forms of oppression, what characterizes these movements is that they foreground claims for the recognition of cultural difference and group identity over claims for socio-economic redistribution: here culture is explicitly politicized (e.g. Taylor 1994; Kymlicka 1995; Fraser 1997; 2000). At the level of popular imaginaries, the language of recognition evokes an image of cultural difference 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 and Canada, institutional 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 potential dangers of this change in the political master grammar, in that it not only risks concealing social politics and the key question

of growing economic inequalities, but also 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)

Multiculturalism is neither a unified ideology nor a highly homogeneous discourse (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010), and several scholars understand it 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) that seeks to displace Eurocentrism. The main differences between the two interpretations of multiculturalism revolve around the critical nodes identified by Fraser: the eclipse of social politics and reification of culture. Polycentric multiculturalism, indeed, “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 and 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).

Post-9/11 and particularly in recent years, multiculturalism has come under intense criticism, most prominently on the part of the British, German, and French political leaders in 2010–2011, as an allegedly ‘failed’ and divisive experiment and as a threat to national cohesion which must be replaced by a return to the integration model (see Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). Multiculturalism’s death has been proclaimed from many sides. Supporters have thus come to its defense. For some, it is questionable whether multicultural policies have ever “amounted to more than piecemeal affairs” (Lentin and Titley 2011; see also Valenta 2011) while other people see “descriptive multiculturalism,” as David Theo Goldberg (2004)

calls it, or the reality of multicultural (Gilroy 2004), as a fact of our globalized lives that policy makers cannot but recognize. Most forcefully – and crucially for my own argument – Tariq Modood has argued that multiculturalism is itself a mode of integration within the nation-state, an argument for pluralizing national identities, and thus not at all incompatible with or antithetical to the national principle (Modood 2012; 2013).

UNESCO is a crucial site for the production of the discourse of multiculturalism, owing to its prioritization of the promotion of cultural pluralism as leading to tolerance, dialogue, and creativity. UNESCO's multicultural turn was grounded in a revision of its notion of culture, which took place in the context of shifting, more culturalist development discourses, and 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 as universal knowledge to be spread throughout the world, culture is understood in this newer vision 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. UNESCO's discourse of culture is not homogeneous and monologic, of course, but it is nonetheless indebted to old essentialized anthropological concepts that leave 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 the quote from Marshall Sahlins that opens the report, WCCD 1995, 21). Culture is difference, and cultural difference is visualized as a mosaic (e.g. 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 the 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.

The idea of the world as a mosaic of different cultures – at least partly coinciding with nations – has shaped World Heritage practices since the 1990s, particularly new attempts by UNESCO to achieve its goal of universality without imposing uniformity. (Indeed, in manifold contexts well beyond UNESCO, postcolonial her-

itage has been increasingly couched in recent decades in the language of recognition and multiculturalism (Rowlands 2002; Weiss 2007), and claimed as part of human rights.) The growing concerns, inside and outside UNESCO, about the evident imbalances of the List in terms of regions, types of properties, and periods represented, and about its focus on ‘great’ European monuments and ‘great’ civilizations have 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, including of course ‘living’ cultures;” 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 (Ensuring a Representative List 1994, 4–5). The Global Strategy implies a shift in focus from ‘uniqueness’ and aesthetic and historic value, to representativeness and anthropological value or social significance: it discovers the intangible qualities of heritage (UNESCO 1994a). Since the inauguration of the Strategy, 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 and cultural routes) with revised, less materialist notions of authenticity (UNESCO 1994b), in an attempt to fill in the gaps in the representativeness of the list and to redress its imbalances. Furthermore, under the Strategy, UNESCO encourages underrepresented and non-represented countries to become members and submit nominations, while states parties which are already well-represented on the List are encouraged to slow down the frequency of new nominations (see UNESCO 2008).

Almost fifteen years after the launch of the Global Strategy, a report analyzing the implementation of the World Heritage Convention (Labadi 2007b; see also Labadi 2007a) found out that its objectives had not been met, and over half of the properties on the List were still located in Europe and North America in spite of near universal membership. 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 tendency to reproduce hierarchies between cultures. Minoos 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). 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 state parties. The values mentioned most often in the



dossiers are the ones associated with Eurocentric heritage approaches: historical, aesthetic, and architectural significance, together with a site's connection to men from the middle and upper classes (Labadi 2007a, 158). Women, the lower socioeconomic 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 not representative of single nations.

To explain the ineffectiveness of the Global Strategy, 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 the active involvement of states parties in the work of the World Heritage Committee and of the grassroots in the World Heritage process (Labadi 2007a, 159–60). Following mounting criticism, the revised *Operational Guidelines* (UNESCO 2008, 7) have also included among five strategic objectives the enhancement of the role of local communities in the implementation of the Convention. Yet this objective is hard to achieve because of the way the system works. Pushing Labadi's reasoning a bit further, I would argue that the lack of participatory democracy in World Heritage is structural. It is tied, on the one hand, to the powerful alliance between World Heritage as an intergovernmental project and the institutions of the nation-state, and on the other, to the "rule of experts" (Mitchell 2002; Smith 2006) produced by the World Heritage process.

My analysis is shaped by the ways in which World Heritage operates in Palestine, which, some could argue, is not a suitable yardstick of general trends because of its exceptional political situation. On the contrary, I think there are some important global lessons to learn from the ethnographic material I have presented precisely because of Palestine's paradoxical 'quasi-state' status. 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 transnational heritage language, while consultation of the grassroots can be easily ignored (see also Askew 2010; Meskell 2013).<sup>13</sup> World Heritage cannot as yet function without working state infrastructures. Therefore, when those are

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**13** Here my analysis is indebted to Foucauldian critiques of development, a discursive formation that is intertwined with and replicated by heritage. In particular, I have been inspired by Jim Ferguson's (1994) analysis of development as producing the expansion of bureaucratic state power and the depoliticization of poverty through the use of a technocratic language.

absent or weak a whole arsenal of personnel, training workshops, and capacity-building initiatives must be set in place to obviate the problem. Underrepresentation, as in the case of the Arab states (Labadi 2007b, 149), is often a problem of the lack of 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 lack the financial resources and institutional capacity to produce tentative lists and nomination dossiers, not to mention to conserve their heritage, and 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 that of establishing 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 development of the Palestinian Authority’s Department of Antiquities and for the preparation of the tentative list. 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 could only receive a limited blessing from civil society organizations, for it tends to exclude them, while effecting 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.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, UNESCO is mandated to work with state institutions, which, while obviously beneficial to institutional development and capacity building at the national level, creates fric-

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<sup>14</sup> My notes from the third day of the Conference on Cultural Heritage in Palestine, Jericho, 22 February 2006.

tion 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 institutional 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 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 favor of representativity (Aikawa-Faure 2009; for a general interdisciplinary discussion of the newer 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, and between a heritage of universal significance and a heritage that is safeguarded 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 'contemporary' 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.<sup>15</sup> Neither universal nor truly 'of the present,' certain forms of cultural production are relegated to an uncertain limbo thanks to the denial of their coeval-

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<sup>15</sup> For another critique of the ways in which the introduction of intangible heritage did and did not change World Heritage, see Schmitt (2008); Harrison (2013).

ness (see Fabian 2007, 106) – itself a form of misrecognition – operationalized by the postcolonial taxonomy of UNESCO’s cultural conventions.

## Conclusions

In this essay, I have moved from telling the story of World Heritage in Palestine/Israel to an analysis of the transnational heritage discourse. I have argued that the project to reform World Heritage, stimulated by critiques of the Eurocentrism of the List, has adopted a multicultural frame, inspired in particular by what scholars call mosaic or liberal multiculturalism. According to critics, this way of seeing and managing cultural difference tends to effect a reification of dynamic cultural processes; it recreates borders in unlikely places. Moreover, instead of transforming dominant structures and practices from the margins, this multiculturalism not only risks solidifying differences, but also the asymmetries between them. Clearly, the case of UNESCO shows the predicaments of “a comprehensive universalism that contains challenges to its validity by becoming more internally diverse” (MacKenzie 2009, 348 discussing Butler 1995). Yet, these critiques should not be taken as a repudiation of multiculturalism, which has indeed further expanded and diversified World Heritage. As Judith Butler (1996) has argued, the quality of being “that which is yet to be achieved” (52) might well be a key feature of the universal itself for “the universal begins to become articulated precisely through challenges to its existing formulations” (48). Furthermore, “the contingent and cultural character of existing conventions governing the scope of universality does not deny the usefulness or importance of the ... *universal*. It simply means that the claim of universality has not been fully or finally made” (46, original emphasis). Critiques and contestations, tensions and contradictions are crucial to the very making of the universal as an ongoing process.

Like the unresolved tension between a strong commitment to universalism and inclusiveness and the persistence of Eurocentric and imperial legacies, the friction between transnational and national rationalities has also marked the discourse and work of World Heritage since the beginning. Undeniably, a host of UNESCO’s practices simultaneously inscribe heritage sites into a double logic and spatial horizon. While promoting a transnational memory, the World Heritage List, the main product of UNESCO’s heritage activities, is still subdivided into separate national listings. A national logic is inscribed into UNESCO’s very constitution since this organization, like the UN, is an intergovernmental body made up of, rather than transcending, nation-states; ultimately, it is “pacting” among powerful states the force that propels its decision-making process (see Meskell 2014). Be-

cause of UNESCO's specific mandate to work with national institutions, all World Heritage activities necessarily pass through the agencies of member states, which are thus empowered (and sometimes even created anew) in the process. Thus, World Heritage paradoxically furthers the reach and scope of the nation-state.

The case of Palestine that I have discussed shows the multilayered articulations of such a troubled relationship. The exceptional character of Palestine, an occupied nation endowed with symbolic (through the UNESCO and UN decisions), as opposed to real sovereignty, made it possible for Palestinians to navigate this paradox to support their national rights and gain a little more control over their heritage. At the same time UNESCO is still prey to the will of powerful states, such as the US, particularly through the withdrawal or release of key funding for the agency. Finally, the ways in which the heritage of humanity reinforces the nation-state and provides it with symbolic paraphernalia often comes at the expense of the grassroots.

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