THE ETHICS OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Philosophical Perspectives on Archaeological Practice

EDITED BY

CHRIS SCARRE AND GEOFFREY SCARRE

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CHAPTER 14

The ethics of the World Heritage concept

Atle Omland

> [T]he day may yet come when the United Nations flag will fly over cultural sites and natural areas of the World Heritage, constituting a system of international parks and landmarks transferred to the U.N. by member states.
>
> (Meyer 1976: 63)

When the American lawyer Robert L. Meyer in 1976 presented the UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention, he expressed the hope that objects of world heritage would one day be transferred from the national state to the international community, reflecting the optimism common at the time that globalisation would encourage the progressive unification of human interests. Developments in media and communications promoted the sense of belonging to a *Global Village* (McLuhan 1962) and the ideal of a *One World Man* (Mumford 1961: 573). The recognition of a global shared present influenced current interpretations of the past. It thus became natural to think that archaeological resources should 'serve as symbols not of nations, but of the common human interest' (Lipe 1984: 10), while the study of general scientific laws in archaeology should remove the political constraints of the past and return the discipline to a 'universal humanism' (Ford 1973: 93).

Although peoples of the world indisputably share a common present, globalisation's discontents have increasingly voiced their concerns during the 1990s. Whilst global economic injustice has been especially in the critics' sights (e.g., Stiglitz 2002), there have also been reactions against the global homogenisation of culture that emphasise the value of diversity and the local dimension (Hall 1991: 33). The World Heritage concept, which initially challenged the national view of cultural heritage, has accordingly been challenged in the name of local and indigenous interests, and pressing questions have been raised about its meaning and ethical status.

THE WORLD HERITAGE CONCEPT: BACKGROUND AND SUCCESS

The World Heritage concept rests fundamentally on the idea that cultural heritage can be held in common (e.g. UNESCO 1960; 1970: 48; 1982: 13), although the term *common heritage* is not used in the Convention text, but rather 'world heritage of mankind as a whole' (UNESCO 1972a: Preamble). This idea of a common heritage is founded on the notion of a relationship of belonging between the preserver and the preserved that was formulated and criticised by, among others, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): 'By tending with care that which has existed from of old, he [the antiquarian] wants to preserve for those who shall come into existence after him the conditions under which he himself came into existence – and thus he serves life' (Nietzsche 1997 [1874]: 72–3).

UNESCO expressed a similar relationship between the preserver and the preserved two years before the adoption of the Convention: 'as the duty of conserving common property, mankind recognized its own oneness through time and space, through the centuries and the nations, and proclaims the unity of its destiny' (UNESCO 1970: 48).

The concept of a common heritage has been used in the preservation rhetoric since the eighteenth century. The Swiss jurist Emmerich de Vattel (1714–67) applied the common heritage concept in 1758 to protect cultural heritage in cases of war (Jokilehto 1999: 281–2; Williams 1978: 6), and it was employed under the French Revolution to depoliticize art and prevent iconoclasm (Gamboni 1997: 31–6; Jokilehto 1999: 71–2; Sax 1990). John Ruskin claimed in 1849 that buildings belong to 'all the generations of mankind who are to follow us' (Ruskin 1911: 225). The importance of the common heritage concept increased after the establishment of UNESCO in 1945 and the international action to preserve the Nubian remains threatened by the building of the Aswan Dam in the 1960s, while the adoption of the World Heritage Convention in 1972 represented a global acknowledgement of the concept. The Convention is today a definite success story, ratified by 178 States Parties accepting that 'parts of the cultural or natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole' (UNESCO 1972a: Preamble). These States Parties acknowledge the international interest in sites on the World Heritage List, which comprises after the latest additions by the international World Heritage Committee in July 2005 a total of 812 sites located in 137 States Parties. Of these 628 are considered as cultural sites, 160 as natural sites and twenty-four as mixed cultural and natural sites (UNESCO 2005).

628 Cultural sites
160 natural sites
24 mixed cultural + natural

Conflict with recognizing National Sovereignty & World Sovereignty

Although the World Heritage Convention is globally recognised, the meaning and success of the World Heritage concept are not straightforward to assess. Many archaeologists wrongly view World Heritage designation in terms of a meaningless beauty contest between nations (Cleere 1993a: 123). In contrast, the view to be defended here is that the World Heritage concept is an important one that prompts greater attention to cultural heritage at local, national and international levels. However, the work of UNESCO has in practice clouded the issues by trying to acknowledge at once both the sovereignty of the States Parties that own the sites *and* their status as pieces of World Heritage (cf. UNESCO 1972a: Article 6). Further, the concept has sometimes acquired local and specific resonances that differ from those intended by UNESCO. Consequently the growing literature on the subject embodies a variety of different approaches to the World Heritage concept:

1 *Promotional literature, coffee-table books, glossy magazines, travel literature and newspaper articles* (e.g., Abate 2002; Anker 1997; Cattaneo and Trifoni 2002; Swadling 1992; the periodical *World Heritage Review* published by UNESCO since 1996). These publications provide information that promotes the Convention and often encourages people to visit World Heritage Sites. Designation may seem an innocuous and neutral act, but newspapers can be both proud and critical when they write about sites in their own country.
2 *Literature written independently by people who work in the UNESCO system* (e.g., Cleere 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001; Pressoyre 1996; Prott 1992a, 1992b; Titchen 1995, 1996; cf. Jokilehto 1999: 281–92; Wheatley 1997). This literature critically discusses the Convention and its sustaining ideals, but mainly supports its foundation.
3 *Literature on international cultural heritage law* (e.g., Jote 1994: 245–56; Meyer 1976; Prott and O'Keefe 1989: 31–6; Tanner-Kaplash 1989; Williams 1978: 52–66). Legal consequences of the Convention are discussed, usually highlighting its importance as a successful international conservation tool.
4 *Managers and researchers of World Heritage Sites* often refer to the World Heritage concept. Being proud that 'their' sites are part of a World Heritage, they also discuss local issues and the complex management of the sites (e.g., Woodward 1996). Some get involved in the work of UNESCO or its consultative bodies. An example is the Zimbabwean archaeologist Webber Ndoro who, whilst aware of the problems of the international contra the local interest in World

Heritage Sites (e.g., Ndoro 1994, 2001; Ndoro and Pwiti 2001), still works for improving conservation and the greater representation of Sub-Sahara African cultural heritage on the List.[1]

5 *The independent writer on the World Heritage* (e.g., Ashworth 1998: 117–18; Boniface and Fowler 1993; Carman 2002: 11, 68–70; Dahlström 2003; Eriksen 1996: 81–4, cf. 2001; Fontein 2000; Harrison and Hitchcock 2005; Hewison 1989: 22; Hodder 1999: 162, 202–5; Lowenthal 1998: 239–43; Meskell 2002; Omland 1997, 1998, 1999; Ucko 1990: xviii; cf. Wright 1998). People who are not associated with UNESCO often comment on UNESCO's attempt to create a World Heritage, usually taking a critical stance on the Convention. Scholars doing research on World Heritage sites have also sometimes sounded a cautionary note about international interest in the sites (e.g. Ranger 1999: 287–90; Ucko *et al.* 1991: 255ff).

Since the publications referred to above seldom discuss the ethics of the World Heritage concept in general, it is the various faces of the concept and its ethics that will be scrutinised in the following pages.

THE MANY FACES OF THE WORLD HERITAGE CONCEPT

The view to be defended here is that the World Heritage concept has many different faces, and that what in one context is ethically just may be morally problematic in another. To show this, I will discuss various aspects of the World Heritage concept, interpreting the common World Heritage as a shared heritage (cf. Tanner-Kaplash 1989: 51).

A shared global responsibility

A common World Heritage can be interpreted in terms of a shared global moral obligation to protect the cultural heritage of all peoples of the world. The Convention is from this perspective a global ethical solution to the worldwide destruction of sites, expressed in at least two different ways.

International assistance for protecting World Heritage sites

Establishing an international fund was an important rationale behind the adoption of the Convention (Titchen 1995: 40ff). The World Heritage Fund fulfils the global moral obligation of international protection, while

1 Among other things through the Africa 2009 programme (http://www.iccrom.org/africa2009/home.asp).

participation under the Convention also allows bi- and multilateral contacts between the States Parties to protect the World Heritage.

It is still doubtful if the Fund is an efficient tool for preserving the World Heritage, and States Parties have had a mixed attitude towards contributions. During the final drafting of the Convention several countries did not support compulsory contribution, in contrast to less wealthy countries (UNESCO 1972b: 1110, 1113, 1117–18). The Fund also had a financial crisis in the mid-1980s (UNESCO 1984: §4), and States Parties have probably sometimes given voluntary donations to influence decisions, e.g., before the controversial nomination in 1987 of the new city of Brasilia (UNESCO 1987: §26). Further, sites are not identified according to the need for international assistance and several are located in wealthy countries.

Respect for the cultural heritage of others

A duty of the States Parties to respect and avoid damage to World Heritage sites is a second aspect of the shared global responsibility. The Convention is mainly a tool to protect the cultural heritage in peacetime, but the States Parties are also obliged not to damage World Heritage Sites on the territory of other States Parties (UNESCO 1972a: Article 6).

States Parties do not always acknowledge this obligation, and the US in 1972 expressed the view that the Convention should not attempt to 'impose or govern obligations in cases of armed conflict' (UNESCO 1972b: 1124). World Heritage Sites have also been difficult to protect in cases of war, especially during internal conflicts when, ironically, designation can mark them out for destruction (e.g., Cleere 1992; Chapman 1994; Coningham and Lewer 1999; Gamboni 2001; Meskell 2002; Pressouyre 1996: 10–11; Prott 1992b; Prott, de la Torre and Levin 2001; Šulc 2001).

Another contradiction is that many States Parties have not yet signed up to the 1954 Hague Convention, that aims at protecting the cultural heritage in cases of war, or the 1970 UNESCO Convention on Illicit Export, Import and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. Although unwilling to implement the restrictions of the 1954 and 1970 conventions, these States Parties gladly participate in the World Heritage Convention that gives them prestige and a presence in the global ecumene.

Shared cultural resources

The shared global responsibility has another facet: it reveals itself as an interest (in some cases as a right) of the world community to claim access

to shared cultural resources. Some scholars use this internationalist view to defend the international trade in cultural property (e.g., Merryman 1983, 1985, 1996). On the other hand, the illicit trade in cultural property is also viewed as a stealing of the world's cultural resources, which ignores the importance of *in situ* preservation and violates other people's access to the shared resources. The importance of access was a particularly prominent theme during the preliminary work on the Convention in the US in 1965, when it was suggested that 'certain natural, scenic, and historic resources are unique and irreplaceable and *should be shared by all peoples* of the world'. An international fund should then 'help the *host* countries to preserve and maintain these resources for the benefit of present and future generations of all mankind' (Gardner 1966: 142, my emphasis). UNESCO also stressed this interest in an early listing of World Heritage Sites, stating that 'their value cannot be confined to one nation or to one people, but is there to be shared by every man, woman and child of the globe' (UNESCO 1982: 13). This idea of a common World Heritage denoting a shared cultural resource is further explored in what follows.

A means of democratising the World Heritage

The World Heritage is on the one hand being democratised when all the people of the world receive a stake in it, and it is perhaps morally right that sites constructed for elites should become a common heritage and made accessible for tourists and 'common' people. The tourist industry plays in this regard a powerful role, and promotions of the Convention and the List acts can function as a form of marketing for the States Parties. The World Heritage concept has therefore been criticised for symbolising commercial values (Hewison 1989: 22).

Although tourism is a double-edged sword on account of the wear and tear it causes – destruction that challenges the Convention as a tool for global conservation – visitors protect the World Heritage when they spend money at the site, while travels enhance cultural understanding. Inscribing the World Heritage Sites in the personal memories of the visitors further enforces the idea that the sites belong to them, and ICOMOS advises members to write a World Heritage visit report on preservation and accessibility after making private visits.[2] Whilst international standards of conservation and authenticity are scrutinised in the World Heritage work (e.g., Larsen 1995), the international community

2 http://www.international.icomos.org/world_heritage/visit.htm.

represented by the Committee can also actively press for the preservation of heritage. The Committee monitors preservation and wields the threat of delisting a site or inscribing it on the List of World Heritage in Danger (on which thirty-three sites have been inscribed by 2005). The desire to avoid such an embarrassment can be a strong stimulus to national authorities to follow the international guidance on preservation.

A mean of obtaining the cultural heritage of others

The inherent danger of the democratisation of the World Heritage is that groups with a special interest in the sites feel alienated and detached from their heritage. Indigenous peoples therefore often criticise the concept of a common heritage as representing potentially a new colonisation (Magga 1990: 120) or an assertion of white rights (Langford 1983: 4) or a device for excluding people with particular interests in the cultural heritage (Bowdler 1988: 521). This critique is not usually directed specifically at the Convention itself, and in fact it can be easily refuted by investigating how the concept functions in other contexts. However, it is important to be aware that the Convention does not tie protection of the cultural heritage to human rights (Schmidt 1996: 20), and sites are only designated if they are of interest to governing elites (Fontein 2000: 57) and the world community (Prott and O'Keefe 1984: 29; cf. O'Keefe 2000). Nevertheless, the cultural heritage of minority groups is represented on the List, but designation has not always recognised their interests. This is because the Convention involves primarily state-to-state cooperation, and the Committee mainly relies on the accounts given by the national delegations and the advisory bodies (that is, IUCN on natural sites, ICCROM and ICOMOS on cultural sites).

The role of minority groups and local people is now on the agenda of the Committee, but was little considered during the early work in the 1970s and 1980s. Only in 1993 did the Committee emphasise the importance of the shared responsibility between local people and the States Parties for protecting sites, though it added that the former 'should not prejudice future decision-making by the Committee' (UNESCO 1993: XIV.2). The Committee later withdrew this statement and stressed from 1995 the important role of local people both in the nomination process and in the maintenance of sites (UNESCO 1995: XVII.1).

Not surprisingly, then, constraints favouring national, local or indigenous people's interests are frequently called for in various parts of the world (cf. UNESCO 2003a: 3–4; Veerkamp 1998). Thus in 2000 a forum of

indigenous peoples recommended the creation of a World Heritage Indigenous Peoples Council of Experts (WHIPCOE) to complement the work of the other advisory bodies (Titchen 2001). According to the forum, indigenous peoples are the owners and guardians of 'all their ancestral lands especially those within or comprising sites now designated as World Heritage Areas' (UNESCO 2000: Annex 5). Although the Committee rejected this proposal (UNESCO 2001: xv), there is an emerging understanding of the desirability of restricting outsiders' interests in some World Heritage Sites in order to ensure local control. Whilst I agree that such restrictions can be needed, this view again brings into question the sense and the validity of the World Heritage concept; I shall return to this at the end of the chapter.

A shared world history

A third interpretation of the World Heritage concept construes it as being, first and foremost, not about global obligations to preserve or rights of access but about our shared world history. The World Heritage is taken to consist of memorials to historical periods and events that connect the people of the earth, past and present. This idea can be unpacked in a number of different ways.

Recognising the political, social and cultural evolution of humanity

The evolutionary perspective that lays emphasis on cultural, social and political development represents one possibility for a World Heritage. Criterion (iv) for inscribing cultural sites on the List refers to heritage that illustrates significant stages in human history (UNESCO 2005b: §77). This evolutionary approach gives prehistoric archaeological sites a special role under the Convention: prehistory is a uniting force and the only history that can be common to all civilisations, explored through the medium of archaeology (e.g., Clark 1961, see also 1968 [1939]: 263; 1970: 51; cf. Cleere 1996: 228; Preucel and Hodder 1996: 521).

Despite the potential universality of the sites, only a few World Heritage Sites are of early prehistoric date. Furthermore, prevalent ideas of civilisation and of human progress are contestable on ethical grounds, first because the evolutionary models usually fasten on the progress of Western culture, and represent Western culture as the end of the civilisation process, and second because they tend to be used to legitimise the study of the past in other parts of the world according to Western models.

cf. truth & 'inclusion
Cooper

WORLD HERITAGE LIST = wonders of the world from Hellenistic times

Recognising contacts in the past between cultures and peoples

World Heritage designation can alternatively use world-system models to highlight past contacts between cultures and peoples (e.g. Wallerstein 1974; Wolf 1982). Thus UNESCO declared in 1966 that 'in the reciprocal influences they [cultures] exert on one another, all cultures form part of the common heritage belonging to all mankind' (UNESCO 1966: Article 1); it further suggested, in 1984, that cultural interaction was a factor that should be considered before designation of sites (Linstrum 1984). Some World Heritage Sites patently have a global significance, for example by virtue of their influence on architecture and building styles elsewhere; hence the Acropolis at Athens has been described as 'symbolizing the idea of world heritage' (UNESCO 2005a). Still, the criteria for identifying sites do not emphasise global contacts. Criterion (ii) cites contact between cultures and proposes that listed heritage sites should 'exhibit an important interchange of human values' but does not insist on these relationships being on a global scale; it is enough if interchanges be 'over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world'. And while Criterion (vi) refers to intangibles such as beliefs, traditions and ideas that may be deemed to be of outstanding universal significance, this criterion is employed only exceptionally (UNESCO 2005: §77).

Creating a meta-heritage that represents human cultures

The UNESCO focus on humanity can also be interpreted as an extension of Hellenistic cosmopolitanism (cf. Kristeva 1991: 56; 1993: 20), or the Renaissance and Enlightenment project of thinking and writing history in terms of humankind (Harbsmeier 1989: 94; cf. Randall 1976 [1926]: 370–2). The World Heritage List from this perspective parallels the ancient wonders of the world or the Renaissance cabinets of curiosity that were meant to 'establish the position of mankind in the grand scheme of things' (Impey and McGregor 1985: 2). Accordingly, the List should be recognised as documenting human historical identity (Michell 1988: 26), a meta-heritage that represents human cultures.

The national dimension of the World Heritage concept is from this perspective ambiguous. The cultural heritage notion represents both a cosmopolitan attitude and a rootedness in the local, a dualism that can be traced back to early Romantic ideas and the fathers of nationalism who also regarded 'the whole of mankind as a greater and higher fatherland' (Kohn 1971: 121–2). This cosmopolitan and national aspect of the List is frequently mentioned in World Heritage work, as when a Tunisian

minister argued that World Heritage protection is important to sustain the national identity, but 'within a worldwide context' (UNESCO 1991: §5). Education about World Heritage is often taken to have the dual roles of reinforcing cultural identities and imparting knowledge about other cultures (Khawajike 1990: 15). From this dual perspective the nation continues to be important, and designations often reinforce national and local identities (Hodder 1999: 162, 202; cf. Ashworth 1998: 117–18; Fontein 2000: 28–31); indeed, the simultaneous processes of globalisation and localisation have been termed *glocalisation* (Robertson 1995). Newly independent states are therefore quick to sign the Convention in order to be part of a common World Heritage, and the construction of national cultures continues within the global ecumene (cf. Foster 1991). However, cultural heritage is to be, as far as possible, depoliticised so that it cannot be used to bolster the more unfortunate features of nationalism. To this end, the Committee laid down in 1979 that sites connected with historical events or famous people should be given particular attention, since their selection could be 'strongly influenced by nationalism or other particularisms in contradiction with the objectives of the World Heritage Convention' (UNESCO 1979: §35).

Constructing this meta-narrative of the unity of human culture is a tremendous task in a postmodern era of fragmentation and reluctance to produce grand narratives (cf. Lyotard 1984). The problem of creating a common World Heritage is especially present in the effort of creating a World Heritage that *represents* human culture. The overrepresentation of European and monumental architecture that constitutes the World Heritage is much criticised (e.g., de Cuéllar 1996: 178) as revealing a Eurocentrism also present in the writing of world prehistory (Kohl 1989; Preucel and Hodder 1996: 521) and history (Burke 1989). The issue of representation has been on the Committee's agenda since the first inscriptions on the List in 1978 and high on it since the 1990s, culminating in the 1994 launch of a Global Strategy that would set aside a rigid and restricted List and:

> instead take into account all the possibilities for extending and enriching it by means of new types of property whose value might become apparent as knowledge and ideas developed. The List should be receptive to the many and varied cultural manifestations of outstanding universal value through which cultures expressed themselves. (UNESCO 1994: 3)

The issue of representation has become increasingly important in World Heritage work following publication of the Global Strategy. In order to achieve a more representative List there has been a move away

 Is this a kind of oxymoron?

from universal standards for evaluating cultural heritage towards the use of more particular and culture-specific ones. Regional World Heritage centres are supported, studies of various types of heritage, regions and heritage themes emphasised (ICOMOS 2004), and regional Global Strategy meetings organised (e.g., Munjeri *et al.* 1995). New kinds of sites are identified, including those exhibiting living cultures and cultural landscapes (e.g., Cleere 1995; Droste *et al.* 1995; Fowler 2003; Titchen 1995, 1996; UNESCO 2003b), although the overall composition of the List has not much changed. Seemingly the postmodern interest in alternative histories is not matched by an equally keen interest in alternative heritages (cf. Byrne 1991).

Creating a common World Heritage for the higher means of peace in the future

The project of creating a World Heritage also aims at a higher end: peace, in accordance with the ultimate purpose of UNESCO. Whereas cultural heritage seen from a national viewpoint tended to divide people, from an international one it is a force for uniting them (Tanner-Kaplash 1989: 201–2), or a new myth that stresses the unity of peoples (cf. Eriksen 1996: 81). In 1972 the Director-General of UNESCO, in launching the international campaign for saving Carthage and speaking about the new World Heritage Convention, argued that the expression 'Carthage must be destroyed' represents hate, while 'Carthage must be saved' represents concord (UNESCO 1972c: 4). At the twentieth anniversary of the Convention it was declared that World Heritage sites should: 'serve to remind humanity of its unity in diversity and thereby contribute powerfully to one of UNESCO's essential goals – the promotion of mutual understanding and solidarity among peoples' (UNESCO 1992: INF 2/4).

This peacemaking objective faces its problems. Too often the World Heritage List represents a cultural prestige contest played out on a global stage, and several European countries seem to compete with each other in order to dominate the List. Nevertheless, some sites are specifically inscribed with a peacekeeping purpose in mind, such as Robin Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned (South Africa), the slave Island of Gorée (Senegal), the concentration camp of Auschwitz (Poland) and the nuclear site of Hiroshima (Japan) (UNESCO 2005a). These sites represent *world memories* of colonialism and World War II, although they remind us more about historic cleavages than unity (cf. Smith 1990: 180). Thus both the USA and China objected in 1996 against the designation of Hiroshima (UNESCO 1996: Annex v). The USA was at first positive, but

the political climate in the country had changed by the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II (as was apparent in the fierce debate concerning the public exhibition of *Enola Gay*, the aircraft that dropped the nuclear bomb) (Wallace 1995, 1996). So the memorial that should symbolise peace became again a political battleground as various groups ascribed various values to the site.

It is sad to note that World Heritage Sites that should symbolise solidarity often signify, to quote the philosopher Hannah Arendt's words from the Cold War era, a '*negative solidarity*, based on the fear of global destruction' (Arendt 1957: 541, my emphasis). In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 the archaeologist Lynn Meskell speaks of *negative heritage*, defined as 'a conflictual site that becomes the repository of negative memory in the collective imaginary' (Meskell 2002: 558). Referring to two examples of a negative heritage – Ground Zero (although not on the World Heritage List) and the Buddhas of Bamiyan (Afghanistan) – Meskell highlights the problem of protecting sites that are ascribed different values:

> For the Taliban, the Buddhist statues represented a site of negative memory, one that necessitated jettisoning from the nation's construction of contemporary identity, and the act of erasure was a political statement about religious difference and international exclusion. For many others today that site of erasure in turn represents negative heritage, a permanent scar that reminds certain constituencies of intolerance, symbolic violence, loss and the 'barbarity' of the Taliban regime. (Meskell 2002: 561)

Hence, the destructive 'culture' of the Taliban has also become a part of the World Heritage after the designation of Bamiyan in 2003. The World Heritage List has indeed, to paraphrase a Global Strategy statement (UNESCO 1994: 3), become receptive to the many and varied cultural manifestations through which cultures express themselves!

IS THE GLOBAL STRATEGY A MORAL OBLIGATION OR AN ETHICAL PROBLEM?

The foregoing overview of the ethics of the World Heritage concept has aimed at clarifying its various interpretations. The concept has undergone several changes since the adoption of the Convention in 1972. Formulated in terms of a moral obligation to protect the cultural heritage of other countries, the concept is at the same time ethically problematic owing to its underpinning by Western values. UNESCO promulgates the Global Strategy as a solution, but this solution also presents new moral challenges, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter.

How to assess the ethic contribution to WORLD rather than local or regional heritage

Is a fragmentation of the universality of the World Heritage ethically right?

Fragmentation is one of the buzzwords of postmodernism, present in the World Heritage work when the problem of the universality of the cultural heritage is discussed in relation to the Global Strategy, but it is seldom pointed out that fragmentation can also be ethically troublesome. The problem of universality is increasingly an issue when non-Western and non-monumental heritage is discussed, but much less so when European monumental architecture is nominated to the World Heritage List. This may be due to the fact, as Cleere points out, that European cathedrals are easily accepted because they are assessed according to certain aesthetic and art historical standards, while the inscription of less immediately appealing sites are deferred for comparative studies (Cleere 1993b: 11). Other explanations why European cultural heritage easily achieves designation are also plausible. Lowenthal points out that the globalisation of heritage is rooted in chauvinism and imperial self-regard and that: 'These ideas stem above all from Europeans who rate their own national heritage as so superior it *ought* to be global' (Lowenthal 1998: 239, emphasis in original).

Whilst European cultural heritage is regarded as global and universal, other kinds of heritages are seen as being, at best, of regional importance, or as having an exceptional status only in the eyes of the local cultural group. But if Western countries view their own cultural heritage as universal and global, it ought to be legitimate to assess other kinds of heritages from similar points of view, although I still often find the possibility of a cultural heritage embodying universal values problematic.

Implementing the Global Strategy: for whom is living culture preserved?

The Global Strategy, with its identification of new types of heritages, raises the problem of how this heritage can be shared with other people in such a way that its authenticity is preserved. This is particularly pertinent when cultural landscapes, living cultures and sites with spiritual significance are nominated for the List, creating a challenge well known within World Heritage work.[3] Designation can be fraught with problems for indigenous peoples, although, on the plus side, they may see it as

3 E.g. discussed at the ICCROM Forum in October 2003 *Conserving the sacred* (http://www.iccrom.org/eng/news/iccrom/2003/10forum.htm).

implying external recognition of the value of their beliefs and practices (e.g. Red Shirt 2002). The case of the Matopos Hills in Zimbabwe, designated in 2003, is an example of the problems that can arise before the designation of a landscape with multiple cultural significances, although in this instance African perception of the landscape was finally prioritised (see Ranger 1989, 1996, 1999; Omland 1998: 58–88; 1999: 91–2; Fontein 2000: 72–84).

The Matopos obtained World Heritage designation after twenty years of national and local discussions stimulated by differing European and African perceptions of the landscape. Parts of the Matopos were designated a national park during the colonial period, when they were cleared of their inhabitants in order to create a wilderness and preserve the geology, ecology and archaeology of the hills. While visitors enjoyed the park, the local people lost ownership over the natural resources and rock-art sites used for rainmaking. The natural values and the 'dead' archaeological landscape were given importance in an early draft nomination of park, while the value of the living culture was first stressed after the launch of Global Strategy. The sacred mountain of Njelele was then identified as an important example of African heritage.

Although the African cultural values of the Matopos were recognised, local concerns were raised about outsiders' interest in the area prior to the designation (Omland 1998: 58–88; 1999: 91–2). The problems were partly due to (1) UNESCO's criterion of securing adequate (which in this case meant traditional) protection of World Heritage Sites and (2) the fact that the sites were expected to keep their distinctive character. The first criterion proved problematic because of an internal conflict about who was the true priest of Njelele. The national authorities represented by the museum had to identify and confirm the rightful custodian before they could transfer decision-making powers. The second problem arose because, while traditional values had to be preserved, traditional values are constantly changing. The local debate focused on the question of the voice of the god Mwari that had in former times been heard from the rocks. When the voice had disappeared from Njelele was disputed, but there was strong local belief that it would be heard again when the right custodian was chosen and the mountain cleansed of colonial and Western remnants.

The project of cleansing the shrine stands in opposition to a process of modernising the uses of the site following World Heritage designation – an issue which has been keenly debated at government level. On one view, people with all kinds of problems were welcome to come to Njelele. This

was the position taken by the former vice-president of Zimbabwe, Joshua Nkomo (1917–99), who during the struggle for Zimbabwe's liberation used Njelele for religious and political purposes. In the 1980s and 1990s he supported one of the candidate-priests for the role of custodian and wanted to make Njelele more easily accessible (Ranger 1999: 253–62, 275–9). Some local people and priests also supported this view, stressing that Njelele was important for the whole world, and prepared to welcome visitors on condition they respected local rules.

However, other local inhabitants objected to allowing greater access to the site, urging that visitors should be restricted and the shrine used mainly for rainmaking. On their view, the rival priests were undermining the sacred values of Njelele by accepting visitors. The government's new interest in the shrine was also viewed with suspicion in case it should, from commercial motives, let in a flood of visitors, thereby further threatening the area's sacred significance.

Although the views about access to Njelele remain locally disputed, the World Heritage designation makes it necessary to place constraints on other people's interests in the site, as in the case of sites elsewhere that are sacred to indigenous peoples. However, such restriction of other people's access violates the interpretation of the World Heritage concept as demarcating an essentially shared cultural heritage: what is this 'World Heritage' if other people are not given access to it? Or if the World Heritage concept signals a moral obligation of international protection, is it right to render this protection when it causes local uproar about custodianship and stressful controversy about the distinctive character of the site? Who are then the intended beneficiaries of World Heritage designation and preservation: the site, local people or the conservationists? The asset of being represented on the World Heritage List seems to be an end in its own right after the launch of the Global Strategy, raising the next issue: what is 'culture' that shall be represented?

Placing Zimbabwe Sacred Landscape on list

Cultures, strangers and the World Heritage

The international World Heritage debate has from the mid-1990s increasingly focused on the importance of restrictions of external interests in the cultural heritage. Visitors can enjoy the cultural heritage, but not always participate in the ambient 'culture', by, for example, taking part in sacred and secret rituals. This raises questions about the understanding of the concept of 'culture' in World Heritage work and consequently about the obligations to represent cultures on the List. It also poses a further

problem about the right to have a cultural identity versus the right to choose *not* to have a cultural identity and not belong to any place.

The complex concept of 'culture' enjoyed a renaissance after the 1995 UNESCO report *Our Creative Diversity* (de Cuéllar 1996; cf. UNESCO 2002). It has been frequently employed in World Heritage work after the Global Strategy, although the concept has come under critical scrutiny by anthropologists (e.g. Dahlström 2003: 12–15; Eriksen 2001; Wright 1998). Two problems of the concept pertinent to the *Our Creative Diversity* report (Eriksen 2001: 130–2) are also relevant within World Heritage work:

1 'Culture' refers broadly to artistic work and ways of life, and the World Heritage List is from this perspective a catalogue of human activities. But critics complain that the 'culture' of the daily life is typically not included, but only the exotic or the older heritage that points to the roots of the people (Eriksen 2001: 131). However, such exclusion is not intended by the Convention. Whilst it certainly aimed to preserve old cultural heritage, there is nothing to stop newer sites, representing contemporary ways of life, from also being considered for designation.
2 A more serious problem concerns UNESCO's definition of 'culture'. The organisation is criticised for conceiving culture as 'something that can easily be pluralized, which belongs to a particular group of people, associated with their heritage, or "roots"' (Eriksen 2001: 131). On this critique, 'UNESCO, in its vision of a new ethical world order, maps out a world made of "cultures" as discrete entities' (Wright 1998: 12). The practical problem of protection is seen as involving sharp definition of the geographical bounds of cultures, as when the Laponian Area (Sweden) was designated in 1996 on account of the Sámi reindeer herders:

> The World Heritage appointment has meant, in theory, that within the Laponian borders, reindeer herding should be preserved, but outside of these borders there is no such defined goal . . . It is as though it would be possible to point to a certain spot on the culture map and say 'Here this culture begins' and then move the finger to another spot and claim, 'and here it ends', as though we are talking about a tangible, physical reality, that is possible to observe. (Dahlström 2003: 269)

More importantly, the perception of a mosaic of cultures represents an ethical challenge because it is connected to essentialism and the notion of the rootedness of diverse cultures in particular places. Since the Global Strategy, this rootedness is thought of in terms more of groups than of

GROUPS = CULTURES

cf. James Young Cultures & The ownership of

nations, thus helping to counter the national approach to heritage that the World Heritage concept, from its inception, has challenged. This echoes the idea, currently strong in archaeology, that national uses of the past are dangerous, while groups – e.g., indigenous peoples – using the cultural heritage to recover and maintain their identities constitute a superior alternative. Although I concede that indigenous affiliation to and rights over the cultural heritage are often important, I agree with Tarlow that there is a danger in so formulating such general ownership rights to the cultural heritage in that it can sometimes be used to support far right and neo-Nazi claims (Tarlow 2001a: 256).

In so far as the World Heritage concept is formulated, as it increasingly is, in ways that buttress various cultures' sense of their roots and group identities, this risks blurring the sense of the concept. What now happens to individuals who wish *not* to have such a cultural group identity (cf. Eriksen 2001: 135)? I have discussed above how one could approach the World Heritage from a cosmopolitan stance which presupposed a rootedness to one's 'own' past. But there is another form of cosmopolitanism that excludes this kind of affiliation and which does not seem to be present in the World Heritage work: the standpoint of the *stranger* who does not belong to any place. Julia Kristeva refers to this version of cosmopolitanism, quoting Meleager of Gadara writing in the first century BC: 'The only homeland, foreigner, is the world we live in' (Kristeva 1991: 56; 1993: 20).

The idea of the stranger has increasing relevance today with the growing number of refugees, stateless people, immigrants – but also residents in a state or members of a group – who do not consider themselves to be part of the 'culture' of the nation or the group. The World Heritage could be the stranger's heritage, but for the moment it remains national and local, while the diversity of heritages recognised demands restriction of outsiders' interests. The World Heritage continues to prioritise nations and groups, and it is not yet based in the idea of the global ecumene, contrary to some of the hopes entertained in the 1960s and 1970s when the World Heritage concept was formulated (e.g. by Meyer 1976: 63).

CONCLUSIONS: SUPPORTING THE WORLD HERITAGE CONCEPT

This exploration of the World Heritage concept has revealed ambiguities and raised ethical concerns, but I still favour the concept. I support the

principles that heritage should be preserved across the territories of the States Parties, that some States Parties need international pressure to preserve the heritage on their territories, and that visitors should be able to explore the World Heritage. However, I acknowledge that international interests in cultural heritage must sometimes be restricted, though I regret that outsiders may thereby be prevented from participating in a 'culture'.

Moreover, the ambiguities we have noted in the concept of a common World Heritage are by no means entirely a negative thing. It can be dangerous to tie a concept down too narrowly, particularly when it grounds a set of specific ethical prescriptions that are liable to be challenged in other contexts. For instance, had archaeologists around 1900 established a code of ethics, it would indubitably have included the principle that cultural heritage belongs to the nation state. As we have seen, the World Heritage concept is also ethically problematic in some contexts, and too strict an interpretation could foreclose or impede discussion on important issues. Whereas, the ambiguous and undefined World Heritage concept has a fruitful role to play in the rhetoric of international cultural heritage protection, as it can be supported, challenged and resisted at local levels all over the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The basic research for this chapter was carried out in the years 1997–98 during stays in Oslo, Cambridge, Harare, Bulawayo, Uppsala and Paris. I am especially grateful to Øivind Lunde, John Carman, Ian Hodder, Sarah M. Titchen and Webber Ndoro for sharing thoughts with me, and to Geoffrey Scarre for considerable improvements to the text.